

**FORMER SOVIET JEWS IN TORONTO:  
POST-COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION**

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in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Former Soviet Jews in Toronto: Post-Collapse of the Soviet Union**

**Thelma Davidson**

Using qualitative research with personal interviews, and acknowledging the diverse diaspora experiences (post-1930) of Canadian Jewry and former Soviet Jewry, this thesis asks: (a) Is aid received from the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service, Toronto, and other Jewish social services, in conjunction with aid from the City of Toronto, Province of Ontario, and Federal government adequately helping the former Soviet Jews to successfully rebuild their lives in Canada? (b) Is there a difference in the assimilation and integration processes of Soviet Jews, who immigrated to Canada directly from the former Soviet Union (FSU), and Soviet Jews who reimmigrated to Canada via Israel? (c) Canada's Multicultural Act recognizes community uniqueness and extols the *Canadian Mosaic*. Has this policy reinforced the "ghettoization" of former Soviet Jews in Toronto? (d) Is there a schism between Toronto's established Jewish community and "the Russians?" If so, why?

The research indicates that, yes, the social aid rendered is adequate for the rebuilding of lives in Toronto, with the possible exception of Russian-Jewish young adults, whose integration and assimilation problems have been largely overlooked. Yes, there are some differences in the assimilation and integration of Russian Jews arriving directly from the FSU, and those arriving via Israel, but they also share common problems. Yes, Canada's Multicultural Act has reinforced their Russian culture and language, resulting in a tightly-knit community. Yes, there is a schism between the two communities. The research points to a need for more flexible outreach strategies to bridge this schism.

*For my supportive children Miriam, Marlowe, Toby-Anne, Michael and Dimitra; for Charlotte and other best friends; for my excellent professors at York and Trent Universities; and the volunteer interviewees, who made it all possible.*

# **C o n t e n t s**

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- CHAPTER 1: Introduction 1**  
Institutional Structure of Toronto's Jewish Community 15  
Canadian Multiculturalism 21
- CHAPTER 2: Methodology 26**
- CHAPTER 3: Jewish Identity in the Former Soviet Union 39**
- CHAPTER 4: Canadian Jewry in the Diaspora 47**
- CHAPTER 5: Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union and Reemigration from Israel 62**  
The Law of Return 62  
Aliyah From the FSU 1989-1999, Table of Statistics 63  
Next Year in Jerusalem 69  
To Canada Directly from the USSR/CIS 77
- CHAPTER 6: Organizational Support Systems for Former Soviet Jewry in Toronto 81**  
Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada 83  
Language Training Programme for Former Soviet Jews: English as a Second Language 87  
Integration/Support Group Program 89  
Jewish Vocational Services of Greater Toronto 89  
Jewish Family and Child Service 91  
Jews for Judaism 94  
Aish HaTorah 97  
Jewish Russian Community Centre of Toronto 99
- CHAPTER 7: The Canadian Interviews 104**  
Ben Prossin, Jewish National Fund 104  
Sandra Atlin, Jewish Immigrant Aid Service, Toronto 107  
Perry Romberg, UJA Federation 110  
Debra Feldman, Sophie Fischhoff, Ivetta Isakovan; Jewish Family and Child Service 115  
Rabbi Michael Skobac, Jews for Judaism 119  
Rabbi Levi Jacobson, Centre for Judaic Studies; Russian Jewish Community Centre 121  
Dr. Albert deGoias, Life Management Counsellor 122

Russell Myers, Aish HaTorah Russian Program 125  
Myrna Bornstein, ESL Teacher, LINC Program 127  
Tamara Novik, Employment Counsellor, Jewish Vocational  
Services 131

**CHAPTER EIGHT: The Russian Interviews 138**

Employment Histories: Immigrants via Israel 140  
Employment Histories: Immigrants from FSU 141  
Reasons for Leaving the FSU 142  
Reasons for Leaving Israel 143  
What was your Worst Surprise in Israel? 143  
What was your Worst Surprise in Toronto? 144  
What was your Happiest Surprise in Israel? 144  
What was your Happiest Surprise in Toronto 145  
Some Personal Comments About My Immigration  
Experience in Toronto 145  
Immigrants' Social Patterns 147

**CHAPTER NINE: Conclusion 151**

**APPENDIX I: Transcripts of Canadian Interviews**

**APPENDIX II: Transcripts of Russian Interviews**

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BBYO</b>	<b>B'nai B'rith Youth Organization</b>
<b>CCF</b>	<b>Co-operative Commonwealth Federation</b>
<b>CIC</b>	<b>Citizenship Immigration Canada</b>
<b>CIP</b>	<b>Community Integration Program</b>
<b>CIS</b>	<b>Commonwealth of Independent States</b>
<b>CJC</b>	<b>Canadian Jewish Congress</b>
<b>CJF</b>	<b>Council of Jewish Federations</b>
<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language</b>
<b>FSU</b>	<b>Former Soviet Union</b>
<b>GTA</b>	<b>Greater Toronto Area</b>
<b>HIAS</b>	<b>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (United States)</b>
<b>JAFI</b>	<b>Jewish Agency for Israel</b>
<b>JF&amp;CS</b>	<b>Jewish Family and Child Service</b>
<b>JIAS</b>	<b>Jewish Immigrant Aid Service</b>
<b>JNF</b>	<b>Jewish National Fund of Canada</b>
<b>JRCC</b>	<b>Jewish Russian Community Centre</b>
<b>JVS</b>	<b>Jewish Vocational Service of Metropolitan Toronto</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-governmental organization</b>
<b>NFJA</b>	<b>New Fraternal Jewish Association</b>
<b>NYBE</b>	<b>North York Board of Education</b>
<b>TDSB</b>	<b>Toronto District School Board</b>
<b>TLC</b>	<b>Telephone Language Companion</b>
<b>UCSJ</b>	<b>Union of Councils for Soviet Jews</b>
<b>UIA</b>	<b>United Israel Appeal</b>
<b>UJC</b>	<b>United Jewish Communities (formerly CJF)</b>
<b>UJPO</b>	<b>United Jewish Peoples Order</b>
<b>USSR</b>	<b>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</b>

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Formal dissolution of the USSR took place on December 25, 1991, with the resignation of President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. All the Soviet Union republics declared their independence, although most of them indicated their willingness to form an undefined loose association which came to be known as the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS), the heir to the former Soviet Union (FSU). Boris Yeltsin stood out as the central figure in this new and highly unsettled situation.<sup>1</sup> These events impacted dramatically on Russia's Jews and Jews living in the successor republics, because many were active in the reform movements and struggling with the difficult task of restructuring their economies.

President Boris Yeltsin resigned on December 31, 1999, naming Vladimir Putin as his successor and Acting President. According to Micah H. Naftalin, National Director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews:

As the new year begins [2000] Russia's Jews remain in danger. Putin's ride from obscurity to popularity on the back of a xenophobic and widely popular war is but the most obvious case for concern. The economy is weak, there has been a dramatic increase in antisemitism and neo-fascism over the last year, especially in the increasingly independent provinces, the country's law enforcement system is corrupt from top to bottom and is engaged in a campaign against human rights NGOs [non-governmental organizations], environmentalist and religious minorities, and finally the war in Chechnya has focused the country's worst impulses on some of Russia's most hated ethnic minorities, Muslims from the Caucasus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky. A History of Russia. 5th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1993: 608.

<sup>2</sup> Micah H. Nafalin. "UCSJ Leadership Challenges New Russian President to Prosecute Antisemites, Defend Religious Minorities; Threat to Jews Not Changed by Parliamentary Elections or Yeltsin Resignation." Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, Press Release, 3 Jan. 2000

Although since the late 1980s there has been a renaissance of Jewish life in Russia, such an atmosphere was not reassuring to Jews who have learned that even if they are not the immediate target of persecution, they are likely to be high on the list. Nor should the atmosphere have been reassuring to the mainstream Russian populace and reform-minded leaders. An unstable economy is not the only piece of unfinished business Yeltsin left behind. There are the problems of crime and corruption; Russia's ongoing costly war with Chechnya; and the erosion of the relationship between Russia and the United States. Current (1998-1999) Jewish out-migration from this vast land to Israel, as well as a number of other accepting countries, including Canada, undoubtedly has been evolving in tandem with these recent developments.

In 1992, the journal of the National Geographic Society in Washington D.C. featured an article on Soviet Jewry which informed that, since 1989, free-to-emigrate Soviet Jews had been arriving at the Israeli Consulate General in Moscow seeking Entry Visas to Israel.<sup>3</sup> Although a small number were still being drawn to Israel by the old Zionist dream of building a national homeland for the Jews, for the most part, political instability, economic disintegration and fear of anti-Semitism were driving many from the former Soviet Union. By the end of 1992, half a million new Russian immigrants had entered Israel boosting that small country's population by more than ten percent. Despite Israel's

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Wash. DC

<sup>3</sup> Tad Szulc. "The Great Soviet Exodus." National Geographic vol. 181 no. 2 (1992): 40-65.

ongoing trials and tribulations, Soviet Jews wanted in. As one Russian immigrant stated "The mess in Russia is much bigger than the mess in Israel."<sup>4</sup>

A particularly moving photograph in the National Geographic article showed an elderly and very obese Soviet-Jewish woman standing, apparently alone, amid the harsh Judean desert landscape. A tourist, travelling on a newly-available (July 1991) Soviet passport, she was pondering her next step -- to immigrate to Israel or not. In this hot and arid environment, she seemed to be considering a move to another planet. She knew that she could only leave Russia with the equivalent of one hundred dollars and her personal luggage. At the time, I wondered what forces were pushing this woman out of her homeland.

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During the summer of 1996, I first became aware of clusters of elderly Russian men and women socializing in front of several north Bathurst Street high-rise apartment buildings; and sitting at picnic tables in a neighbourhood parkette on Bathurst Street, south of Steeles Avenue. The women strongly resembled the previously-described Russian woman standing in the Judean desert of Israel. They were heavy-set and wearing colourful, loose-fitting summer dresses and flat sturdy shoes. The Russian men were without ties, but their long-sleeved white shirts, dark trousers and heavy shoes looked odd for summertime Toronto. These immigrant Seniors appeared very relaxed and were engaged in animated conversations in Russian.

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<sup>4</sup> Tad Szulc 43.

That summer, I also observed, especially on week-ends, Russian-speaking families enjoying Earl Bales Park, a large conservation area greening and softening the Bathurst and Sheppard vicinity of the former City of North York. In the daytime, immigrant families strolled, played ball, and picnicked, and in the evening, many families enjoyed the free outdoor concerts and theatricals presented in the park.

Throughout the rest of 1996 and into 1998, I investigated north Bathurst Street's Russian-operated retail businesses and professional services. These were located with the help of bilingual English/Russian [Cyrillic alphabet] street signs, window signs, and posters. I visited Russian bakeries, Russian specialty food shops, Russian dance clubs, Russian restaurants, and Russian beauty shops, where one could acquire elegant false nails as well as enjoy a session of relaxing message therapy. A popular community video store at Steeles and Bathurst Streets offered a large variety of Russian-language films, Russian-dubbed American films, plus a selection of Russian-language newspapers. At the invitation of a Lubavitch rabbi, I attended Sabbath services at a small synagogue that was located within the Jewish Russian Community Centre, at 18 Rockford Road, in the former City of North York.<sup>5</sup>

As my thesis idea developed, I began to study patterns of Soviet-Jewish emigration (1956-1989). I learned the difference between Soviet Jewish *refuseniks* and the Soviet

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Levi Jacobson. Telephone conversation. 24 November 1998. This 25-year-old rabbi, studied under head of Lubavitch movement (the late) Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson in New York. He is the first director of the Centre for Judaic Studies at Toronto's Jewish Russian Community Centre.

*dissidents* of the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> It was the Jewish refuseniks who became known as “Prisoners of Conscience” or “Prisoners of Zion” (terms from the past that I vaguely remembered but had not bothered to attempt to understand). An excellent resource was Wendy Eisen’s full accounting of Canadian Jewry’s campaign of fund raising, activism and political lobbying on behalf of Soviet Jews.<sup>7</sup> Her book was described as “...a tribute to every Canadian who signed a petition, wrote a letter, sent a cable, made a telephone call, painted a sign, marched, or stood at a demonstration in support of Soviet Jewry.”<sup>8</sup>

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This research led to a backward look at the history of Jewish immigration to Canada post-World-War One, when anti-immigrant sentiment was growing and *restriction* became the agenda of Canada’s Immigration Department. By the mid-twenties, Canadian immigration laws had tightened and existing bars on Asian immigration were made more stringent. Except for immediate families of those already in Canada, admission of Eastern Europeans was curtailed, and Canada’s immigration door was closed to Southern Europeans and all Jews, except those from Britain or the United States. Following the international economic collapse of 1929, Canadian immigration intake ground to a halt. The Depression gave way to war warnings and still Canada’s door remained firmly closed, particularly to the desperate Jews attempting to flee Nazi Germany in the mid-to-late 1930s.

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<sup>6</sup> *Refuseniks* were Russian Jews who had been refused permission to immigrate to Israel, whereas *dissidents* (Jews and non-Jews) wished to democratize the Soviet system.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Eisen. Count Us In: The Struggle to Free Soviet Jews - A Canadian Perspective. Toronto: Burgher Books, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Eisen. Forward. Professor Irving Abella.

World War Two was a turning point for Canada. An economically-depressed nation upon entering the War, it was a major urban industrial power by War's end. Anticipation of further economic growth and social change was almost palpable. Immigration policies were very much a part of this change. The strong post-war economy resulted in labour shortages. To meet the country's demand for labour, Ottawa set aside immigration restrictions enforced since the 1920s. In short order, tens of thousands of Displaced Persons and other Eastern and Southern European immigrants, previously regarded as undesirables, were recruited for waiting jobs in urban, industrial Canada. Among these new immigrants were European Jews; many were Holocaust survivors for whom issues of Jewish renewal and Jewish continuity held special meaning.<sup>9</sup>

When a refugee crisis resulted from the aftermath of the Hungarian revolt in the autumn of 1956, Canada opened her doors and organized a special airlift for transporting refugees out to Canada. By mid-1957 approximately 36,000 Hungarian refugees had been admitted -- the largest figure for any receiving country.<sup>10</sup> One is tempted to contrast this generous welcome with Canada's abysmal record of rescue of Jews pre-World-War Two. Christian, white-skinned, anti-Communist refugees better suited the Cold War political agenda of the Canadian government, and did not cause the nation's racists undue stress.

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<sup>9</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. "Canadian Jews and Canadian Multiculturalism." Multiculturalism, Jews and Identities in Canada. eds. Howard Adelman and John H. Simpson Jerusalem: Hebrew U, 1996: 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Edgar McInnis. Canada: A Political and Social History. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982: 593.

The expectation among Canadian activist Jews was that the Soviet Jews for whom they were lobbying would have strong Zionist commitments, and would be anxious to settle in Israel. This was the case during the early 1971- 1973 period, when the numbers of Soviet *dropouts* (emigrants who chose not to settle in Israel) were insignificant. However, after 1974 an increasing proportion of Jews leaving the Soviet Union opted to migrate directly to North America, and an indeterminate number left Israel to resettle in the United States and Canada. When many Soviet-Jews unexpectedly chose Canada (1974-1983), and landed on the doorsteps of Jewish social services and Jewish businesses in need of assistance and seeking employment, the community was unprepared.

In the 1970s and 1980s, given the reality of an aging, shrinking, assimilating Jewish population in Canada, one would think that it was in the interest of the Canadian Jewish leadership to attach a very high priority to Jewish immigration. Immigration, however, had remained relatively low on their agenda. This may have been due to shortsightedness, preoccupation with other issues, or a lack of faith in the ability of immigration to counter assimilation. Robert J. Brym (1989) stated flatly that the Jewish community's panacea would not be found among the Russian, Israeli, and American Jews, who have come to Canada in recent years, since many of these immigrants are highly assimilated and have little interest in organized Jewish life.<sup>11</sup>

In Toronto, with the exception of people directly involved with Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS), it seemed that few thought of Soviet Jews as a strengthening adjunct to the

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<sup>11</sup> Robert J. Brym. "The Rise and Decline of Canadian Jewry. A Socio-Demographic Profile." Canadian Jewry Today: Who's Who in Canadian Jewry. Downsview: JESL Publications, 1989: 16.

Jewish community. Those few who did had to justify themselves, or bury their interest under layers of Soviet Jewry rescue rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> It had been easier to concentrate community energy on something exotic and romantic -- something far away from home. To choose to be active on behalf of refusenik, Ida Nudel, in Siberian exile, “a tiny woman in snowbound desert, a pail of water in her frozen hand,” was a far cry from facing Mrs. Romanov on your doorstep in Toronto, speaking broken English and in need of your second-hand furniture and a job. There seemed to be a willingness to commit to concepts of human rights and freedom of choice as abstractions, but a hesitancy to actualize them in real terms by welcoming to Canada those persons rescued.<sup>13</sup>

The Toronto Jewish community influenced both by years of Cold War propaganda and by folk memories of Jews, often family members, fleeing persecution in Czarist Russia, did not have a high opinion of the Russian or Soviet heritage the immigrants brought with them. Most disdained it, or worse, linked it to the Soviet record of human-rights violations, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. For them, Jewish acceptance of Soviet culture was perceived as self-hatred. These views led many in the Jewish community to assume that the Soviet Jews who came to Canada would be eager to jettison things Russian and embrace North American Jewish culture and values.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mindy B. Avrich-Skapinker. Canadian Jewish Involvement with Soviet Jewry, 1970-1990: The Toronto Case Study. diss., U. of Toronto, 1993: 313-314.

<sup>13</sup> Avrich-Skapinker 315.

<sup>14</sup> Avrich-Skapinker 194.

The 1974-1983 wave of Soviet immigrants, who came to Toronto, expected to improve their own career prospects and the future prospects of their children, to attain economic well being, and satisfy their particular cultural needs. They arrived with the expectation that western Jews would be fully supportive of their personal plight, welcome them warmly, and be willing to render assistance and well-deserved special treatment. The immigrants asked for special considerations and services; specifically, special efforts and programmes for locating employment; retraining and professional licensing; financial support for dependent elderly relatives; and exemption from membership fees in Jewish organizations and Jewish programmes, such as, the Bathurst Jewish Centre, camps run by the Jewish Camp Council, and Jewish parochial day schools.

The Jewish community was willing to satisfy certain of these demands: especially those that served to make immigrants economically self-sufficient, and enhanced their identification with the Jewish community. Fees were waived for limited periods and scholarships were given to attract Soviet immigrant children to Jewish parochial schools and summer camps, and adults to recreational programmes. Special efforts were made on the employment issue, although these were limited by the prevailing economic constraints and agency budgets.<sup>15</sup>

The Jewish community had certain expectations regarding the ethnic self-identity of Soviet Jews immigrating to Toronto. The campaigns to "Save Soviet Jewry," and the image of Soviet Jews as a group persecuted for their cultural and religious identity, had led Toronto

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<sup>15</sup> Roberta L. Markus and Donald V. Schwartz. "Soviet Jewish Émigrés in Toronto: Ethnic Self-Identity and Issues of Integration." Canadian Ethnic Studies, vol. xvi, no. 2, (1984): 81.

Jewry to believe that an intense awareness of ethnic identity, and a strong desire to enhance it through participation in Jewish institutions and activities, were major factors in their decision to emigrate.<sup>16</sup>

For most Soviet Jews, however, especially those born under the Soviet regime, Jewish identity was an ascribed status and a hindrance to educational and economic opportunities. Those émigrés who had succeeded in retaining a strong and positive Jewish self-identity were attracted to Israel. Those who opted to immigrate to North America tended to possess a weaker sense of Jewish identity. Large numbers had emigrated from major cities that had been under Soviet rule since 1917. These emigrants were mainly second and third generation Soviet citizens. They had grown up in areas of the Soviet Union that were highly industrialized; and they had been saturated with a high level of the dominant Slavic culture. A large number were well-educated and identified themselves as professionals and skilled tradespersons. They had been socially and occupationally mobile, and had successfully adapted to the Soviet regime's dual requirements: that self-identity be expressed in terms of a blend of Soviet socialist secular values and Slavic, predominantly Russian, cultural forms.<sup>17</sup>

Three major areas of tension between the immigrants and the Toronto Jewish community surfaced: employment, Senior care, and education. In none of these areas was the provision of services the product of thoughtful and planned community-wide policy. There were no formal commitments of any kind, including budgetary, made by the

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<sup>16</sup> Markus and Schwartz 72.

<sup>17</sup> Markus and Schwartz 76.

community at large. The attempts to provide limited service within existing institutional frameworks, or to set up ad hoc programs on informal and semi-formal bases served to create, indeed confirmed, immigrant expectations that special status was legitimately due them. The Soviet immigrants in Toronto came to perceive the services that the community provided to meet their needs as basic rights. This assumption of basic rights in turn broadened into demands for additional rights.<sup>18</sup>

When special status was not entrenched, or when results fell short of expectations, a credibility gap developed. Since services were provided by Jewish agencies and Jewish groups, the credibility gap took the form of a loss of confidence by the Russians in the established Jewish community. This in turn effected their integration because the potential for building a base for a stronger identification with the community was compromised, and in some cases even irreparably damaged. On the other hand, the prevailing feeling of the Toronto Jewish community was that they had had little, if any, reward for their efforts.

It was now obvious that the Soviet Jews had not come to Canada with either the background or resources to allow an easy or even likely identification with the established Jewish community. It was also apparent that Canadian Jews had not demonstrated as much cultural sensitivity as they might have. They had erroneously assumed that these Russian immigrants were no different than previous waves of Jewish immigrants and that, after some initial adaptation problems, they would become full members of and participants in the community.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Avrich-Skapinker 221.

<sup>19</sup> Avrich-Skapinker 222-225.

Another inappropriate approach by Toronto Jewry was their patronizing notion that Soviet Jews were like children; that they must be taken by the hand and taught how to be Jews. Soviet Jews may have been without formal education in Jewish cultural and religious practices but they were not devoid of a strong cultural identity and the tools for expanding that identity, as well as the ability to assess for themselves the value of ethnic identification. This paternalistic approach that did not recognize and dismissed the cultural background and identity highly valued by the Soviet immigrants bred resentment. More importantly, Soviet Jews who did receive the instrumental help they required still felt denied the affective side of ethnicity -- the feeling of warmth and belonging.<sup>20</sup>

Canadian Jews had welcomed Soviet Jews to Canada as "members of the tribe," fellow Jews, long-lost relatives. The Soviet Jewry movement had touted the relationship. The immigrants' biases, rigidity, mistrust and disorganization had played their part in limiting the success of integration efforts during this first decade. The meeting of the two groups in Canada proved to be a strenuous test of the bond. Toronto's experience was not unique. As a social worker from Los Angeles observed, "It's not just business as usual with this group."<sup>21</sup>

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Soviet Jewish emigration numbers plummeted in the early 1980s, only beginning to climb again significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These mid-eighties years

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<sup>20</sup> Dr. Fran Markowitz, "Jewish in the USSR, Russian in the USA", address, Conf. JIAS, Toronto, 26 Nov. 1989, 79-80.

<sup>21</sup> Avrich-Skapinker 225.

were a period of reassessment and reevaluation of the staffing and methodologies of agencies dealing with Soviet Jews. The Toronto Jewish community developed and institutionalized better supports for Russian immigrants. The resettlement challenges were met by mobilizing the resources of the Jewish community as well as the government. The Jewish Immigrant Aid Service of Toronto took direct responsibility for resettlement of new immigrants, and a number of other agencies tailored their services to meet their other needs.

Throughout most of the 1970s, Canada continued to rely on standard immigration policy, supplementing it with exceptional legislation to deal with occasional crises, such as the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the Chilean *coup-d'etat*, and the fall of South Vietnam. Small numbers of Soviet immigrants had been arriving in Canada even before the new Immigration Act (April 10, 1978) formally established Canada's current refugee policy. This Act gave authority to the Governor-in-Council to designate a group of people, who did not strictly qualify for United Nations Convention Refugee status, but who did, nevertheless, fear political, social or religious persecution. Three sub-groups were classified as members of this Designated Class, one of which consisted of self-exiled Soviet and Eastern European citizens. The rationale for creating this refugee category was bound up with the tight exit control situation and fears of reprisals by authorities if emigrants were forced to return home. This program existed until September 1990. On 17 August 1990, Canada's Employment and Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall announced a new immigration policy for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tanya Basok. "Soviet Immigration to Canada: The End of the Refugee Program?" Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Resettlement in the 1990s, eds. Tanya Basok and Robert J. Brym Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1991: 141-157.

This new policy was a reflection of Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost* (1985-1991),<sup>23</sup> a stunning novelty for Soviet society, which had won for him the initial support of the intellectuals and the educated public at home, as well as great acclaim abroad. Foreign praise was augmented by the increasingly accommodating and peaceful foreign policy of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

*Glasnost* prompted important immigration policy changes in Canada. Specifically, the relaxed criteria under which Soviet citizens had been admitted to Canada as refugees were removed. No longer received as refugees under the East European Designated Class, former Soviet Jews are being admitted to Canada as economic immigrants and under the family reunification program. These policy changes may be reversible, if the political situations in various regions of the FSU continue to deteriorate.

On February 22, 2000, one day before the start of the Russian presidential election campaign, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ) issued a new report that concluded:

Not only do Jews face specific dangers through incidents of anti-Semitism, but an infrastructure of anti-Semitism at the grassroots and official levels is taking hold throughout much of the country, influenced by Communist, neo-Nazi, Russian Orthodox and other sources of anti-Semitic activity. These forces act with complete impunity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Glasnost*: the open and frank discussion of economic and political realities in the Soviet Union.

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky 592.

<sup>25</sup> "UCSJ Publishes New Report on Antisemitism, Xenophobia and Religious Persecution in 62 Russian Regions." *FSU Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 1, Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, Washington, DC Mar. 2000: 1.

Special measures may need to be taken by Immigration Canada and Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada in the event of a large Jewish refugee outflow from the FSU in the near future.

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## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF TORONTO'S JEWISH COMMUNITY**

If Jewish numbers and continuity are in question, the institutional structure of the community still remains the envy of other ethnic groups. One can point to the peculiar nature of Jewish history in the diaspora as giving Jews a head start in the development of communal organizations. Most often forced to rely on themselves, East European Jews developed self-taxing and organizational mechanisms to deal with Jewish welfare and governance. This led to both the building of a broad range of communal institutions and experience in making the case for Jewish interests. This legacy was brought to Canada. Even to-day, no other ethnic group is as institutionally complete, nor does any other group have a comparable degree of communal self-awareness, as measured by knowledge of organizations and leaders, volunteerism, reading of the ethnic press, community fundraising, and by individual self-identification. Jews are a highly-identified, unassimilated group, religious and secular, while also being well-educated and versed in the ins-and-outs of politics. Indeed, some might claim that Jewish life may suffer from organizational duplication and turf wars, which consume much of the leadership's time and energy. Yet despite the insider Jewish jokes about the foibles of the community, Jewish communal

organizations remain a model for aspiring ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup> The agencies that provide social services for new immigrants from the FSU, as well as all other new Jewish immigrant groups, are part-and-parcel of this structure.

The UJA Federation of Greater Toronto is the focal point of a dynamic Jewish community. As its central communal organization, it is dedicated to preserving and enriching Jewish life in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and to perpetuating identification with the State of Israel. It is the only community body with representation from almost every formal Jewish organization, large or small, religious or secular, social, political, cultural and educational.

As the central communal organization, UJA Federation is the mechanism through which the Toronto Jewish community is connected to other Jewish communities and the broader Jewish agenda throughout the world. In Canada, the Toronto community is connected to other organized Canadian Jewish communities that include Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Windsor, London, Hamilton, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax through the Council of Jewish Federations.

In addition, UJA Federation is closely connected to the Canadian Jewish Congress. It is necessary to distinguish between Federation and Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) because the two agencies work hand-in-hand on many issues:

- UJA Federation is incorporated under the Province of Ontario under the name of United Jewish Welfare Fund of Toronto as a non-profit charitable institution, and is authorized to issue tax deductible receipts for charitable contributions. As such, UJA

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<sup>26</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. "Canadian Jews and Canadian Multiculturalism." Multiculturalism, Jews, and Identities in Canada. eds. Howard Adelman and John H. Simpson, Jerusalem: Hebrew U, 1996: 30.

Federation's activity is limited in compliance with Ontario and Federal law from involvement in political activity and lobbying efforts.

- Canadian Jewish Congress's non-partisan and approved activity is not restricted, allowing it to serve as spokesorganization for the Jewish community in the political arena.
- Canadian Jewish Congress functions on both a provincial and national basis serving as the primary link to Jewish communities that do not have local Federations, such as, Guelph, Kingston, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, etc.
- UJA Federation is the major financial provider for CJC. Both nationally and locally, UJA Federation provides over 45% of Congress's operating budget.

Through the New York Council of Jewish Federations, UJA Federation and the Toronto Jewish community are connected to over 800 other Jewish communities across the continent.

UJA Federation is viscerally connected to the State of Israel in a number of ways, but primarily through the United Israel Appeal of Canada. UIA is the national conduit for Israel-directed funds. Representatives of UIA sit on the World Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which includes several outstanding lay leaders from Toronto.<sup>27</sup>

A new organizational system is emerging that reflects a seamless, global approach to Jewish philanthropy. Its aim is to support a social-service network unparalleled in the world -- one that will attract the best and the brightest from the North American Jewish communities. In Spring, 1997, leaders from United Jewish Communities (UJC) and Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) agreed to form a joint-operating partnership that incorporated, among other things, a shared headquarters, integrated fund-raising and financial resource development; consolidated regional offices and services to federations; and appointed a joint

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<sup>27</sup> Online Internet. [www.feduja.org](http://www.feduja.org). 26 Feb. 1999.

oversight committee. In May 1998, United Israel Appeal (UIA) joined the partnership, and in July 1998, all three organizations moved into a shared headquarters at 111 Eighth Avenue in New York.<sup>28</sup>

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Jews are the most urbanized of Canadian groups, as measured by concentrations in the three major metropolitan areas, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, where they comprise from 1.4 percent to 4.2 percent of the total population. Almost half of all Jews in Canada live in the Greater Toronto Area. This concentration maximizes the group's socio-political impact and visibility.<sup>29</sup>

As a result of continuing, if modest, Jewish immigration to Canada, almost one-third of the Canadian Jewish population is foreign-born. Recent immigrants (East Europeans, Israelis, South Africans, Moroccans and Americans) not only replenish, but augment, what would be a declining Canadian Jewish population.<sup>30</sup> In 1998, Jewish Agency statistics indicated that at the end of 1996 there were 362,000 Jews in Canada. Hidden in this statistic is an estimated 25,000 to 35,000 former Soviet Jews, who have immigrated to Canada, specifically Toronto, over the past twenty-five years. Some of these immigrants have arrived directly from the former Soviet Union; others have re-emigrated from Israel after living for a time in the Jewish state.

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<sup>28</sup> Online Internet. [www.uja.com/ourmission/mission.htm](http://www.uja.com/ourmission/mission.htm). 16 July 2000

<sup>29</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld 28.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld 28.

Markus and Schwartz (1984) have reported that, for second-wave Soviet immigrants, socio-economic considerations and the desire for upward mobility were paramount, and the prime reason for choosing Canada as their country of destination. Also, the majority saw Canada as a peaceful country. The existence, at that time, of both officially-sanctioned and grassroots anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, was also acknowledged as a factor. Most reasons for emigration, however, related to education and occupation. The authors defined the decision to leave as a complex balance of costs and potential benefits, with the overwhelming anticipated benefit being the possibility of pursuing a career that would not be limited by factors such as ethnic identity. The costs, on the other hand, were associated with the risk and uncertainty of losing an acceptable and adequate standard of living, social status, and the cultural infrastructure associated with Russia and the Soviet Union. For most, the enhancement of their Jewish ethnic identity was not a factor in their decision.

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For over seventy years the leadership of the USSR had hoped that ideological pressure in combination with harsh measures applied at the local level could, if not stop entirely, at least reduce to a minimum the attempts of Jews to leave the Soviet Union. Since 1989, the unified state known as the Soviet Union is no more, and its legal successor has become the Russian Federation. Diplomatic relations with Israel have been restored. Every day there are direct flights from Moscow to Tel Aviv and back.

According to the Jewish Agency For Israel (JAFI), 769,616 *olim* (immigrants) from the FSU made *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) between 1989 and 1998, with 53,000 more expected in 1999. Jewish Agency statistics indicate that, in 1989, the potential Jewish

immigrants, that is, persons entitled to make *aliyah* according to the Israeli Law of Return,<sup>31</sup> were numbered at 2,370,000 in the former Soviet Union. In 1999, the Jewish Agency estimated that there were 975,000 potential *olim* remaining in the FSU -- 500,000 of this number within Russia.<sup>32</sup> Their safety is of great concern to international Jewish immigrant and advocacy groups. They are carefully monitoring developments, particularly in Russia, which is going through a volatile period of simmering anger and recriminations. The August 1998 devaluation of the ruble impoverished large numbers of Russians, and the future looks bleak. The democratic reformers have been discredited, and the Russians are looking for the answer to the perennial question there. "*Kto vinovat?*" -- "Who is to blame?"<sup>33</sup>

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In contrast with the situation of the Jews in the FSU, in Canada, the past three decades have been liberating and progressive. It would have been unthinkable a few generations ago that Canada would have Jewish premiers, cabinet ministers, chief justices, ambassadors and university presidents; and that most social and economic barriers would be removed. In Canada, living as a Jew is only one option among many. No external force imposes it, or forces Jews to live in ghettos, or wear badges, or carry identifying labels in passports. It is ironic, therefore, that Canadian Jews are confronted with the classic problem

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<sup>31</sup> Law of Return passed by the Israeli parliament on July 5, 1950, declares that every Jew has the right to settle in Israel as an *oleh* (new immigrant) with automatic citizenship and full benefits.

<sup>32</sup> Jewish Agency for Israel, internet, statistics, [www.jazo.org.il/jafi/grey/russia/htm](http://www.jazo.org.il/jafi/grey/russia/htm). 17 March 1999.

<sup>33</sup> "Where Rhetoric Runs Wild." The Jerusalem Report 15 March 1999: 32.

of living in a pluralistic society. They want to integrate fully into Canadian society, but worry that they may not be able to maintain themselves as a unique, vibrant, and identifiable community. Economic progress with upward mobility and acceptance into non-Jewish social circles, intermarriage, small families, and population-aging have been ethnically disintegrative.<sup>34</sup>

### **CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM**

The roots of official Canadian Multiculturalism can be traced to the 1963 appointment of The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism to inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada; and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races; taking account of the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada, and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution. The final report of the Commission, in six large volumes, appeared between 1967 and 1970.<sup>35</sup>

Official multiculturalism, a touchstone of contemporary Canadian liberalism and an intellectual vision of Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000), has three main elements: a non-racist immigration policy, designed to maintain the lively diversity of Canadian society; official encouragement through generous subsidies for cultural activities that express that diversity; and official disapproval, increasingly forceful and effective, of

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<sup>34</sup> Irving Abella. "Multiculturalism, Jews, and the Forging of a Canadian Identity." The Battle Over Multiculturalism, vol. 1, eds. Andrew Cardozo and Louis Mustro. Ottawa: PSI publishing, 1997: 86-88.

<sup>35</sup> H.D. Forbes. ed. Canadian Political Thought. Toronto: Oxford U, 1987: 467.

any public expression of discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies that naturally flourish in cosmopolitan cities like Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.<sup>36</sup>

In October 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau addressed the House of Commons in response to recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Volume Four, The Cultural Contributions of the Other Ethnic Groups (1970) that emphasized the second element of this policy:

- Resources permitting, the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada and a clear need for assistance, the small and weak groups no less than the strong and highly organized.
- The government will assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society.
- The government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.
- The government will continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society.<sup>37</sup>

Canada's multicultural policy has elicited criticism as well as support. In 1980, Canadian journalist Richard Gwyn's view of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was uncompromising:

Trudeau's imperative, post-1972, changed from doing what was right, rationally, to doing what was advantageous politically. So Trudeau has been criticized for ignoring the Queen; in 1973 the Queen came to Canada twice...with Trudeau at her side every step of the royal progress. So he has been accused of sloughing off the ethnics; up sprang a trebled

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<sup>36</sup> H.D. Forbes 349-350.

<sup>37</sup> "Statement on Multiculturalism." House of Commons *Debates*, 3rd Session, 28th Parliament, VIII, 8545-6, 8 Oct. 1971, Canadian Political Thought 350.

multiculturalism program that functioned as a slush fund to buy ethnic votes.<sup>38</sup>

What is most overlooked, by supporters and critics alike, is that the Brian Mulroney government's Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 obligated all Federal departments and agencies to implement Multiculturalism as it applied to their mandates. Hence, it addresses matters such as justice, the status of women, broadcasting, health policy, museums, small business and international trade. To some, this is a tremendous opportunity; to others, a massive and needless burden.<sup>39</sup>

In the past decade, as Multiculturalism has shifted from symbolic recognition of ethnic pluralism to issues of racial sensitivity, the policy itself has come under attack. The results of a 1993 poll on Multiculturalism, commissioned by the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews and conducted by Decima Research, were reported in a Canadian national newspaper:

Most Canadians believe the multicultural mosaic isn't working and should be replaced by a cultural melting pot. About 72 percent of respondents believed that the long-standing image of Canada as a nation of communities, each nation and racial group preserving its identity with the help of government policy, must give way to the U.S. style of cultural absorption.

The survey found Canadians are "increasingly intolerant" of demands made by ethnic groups, and are frustrated by "the lack of conformity" in Canadian society. Canadians reported a preference for "homogenization" of the society through the adoption by immigrants of Canada's values and way of life.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Gwyn, The Northern Magus (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980) 139.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Cardozo and Louis Mustro, introduction, The Battle Over Multiculturalism.  
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<sup>40</sup> Jack Kapica. "Canadians want mosaic to melt, survey finds: Respondents believe immigrants should adopt Canada's values." The Globe and Mail 14 Dec. 1993: A2.

Neil Bissoondath is a well-known Canadian writer. Born in 1955 in Trinidad, he immigrated to Toronto in 1973 at age eighteen. In 1994 he wrote about the "cult of multiculturalism:"

The Act, activist in spirit, magnanimous in accommodation, curiously excluded any ultimate vision of the kind of society it wished to create. It never addressed the question of the nature of a multicultural society, what such a society is and -- beyond a vague notion of respect for human differences -- what it meant for the nation at large and the individuals who compose it. Definitions and implications are conspicuously absent, and this may be indicative of the political sentiments that prompted the adoption of the Act in the first place. Even years later, the Act -- a cornerstone of bipartisan, federal social policy -- shows signs of a certain haste. In its lack of long-term consideration, in its promise of action with no discussion of consequence, one can discern the opportunism that underlay it. The Act appears to indulge in several unexamined assumptions: that people coming here from elsewhere wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreign. The document is striking in its lack of any mention of unity or oneness of vision, at ensuring that the various ethnic groups whose interests it espouses discover no compelling reasons to blur the distinctions among them.<sup>41</sup>

In the current rush to privatization, and federal and provincial government disengagement from cultural and social spending, the future of multicultural programmes is now far from clear. It cannot be denied that by the early 1990s issues of immigration and refugees had become problematic in the public mind. While the government did not turn its back on multiculturalism, in 1993 it shuffled multicultural programmes into a broadly-based Ministry of Canadian Heritage.

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<sup>41</sup> Neil Bissoondath. Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada. Toronto: Penguin, 1994: 42-43.

THIS THESIS WILL CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Is aid received from the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service, Toronto, and other Jewish social services, in conjunction with aid from the City of Toronto, Province of Ontario, and Federal government adequately helping the former Soviet Jews to rebuild their lives in Canada?
- Is there a difference in the assimilation and integration processes of Soviet Jews who immigrated to Canada directly from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Soviet Jew who have reimmigrated to Canada via Israel?
- Canada's Multicultural Act recognizes community uniqueness and extols the "Canadian Mosaic." Has this policy reinforced the "*ghettoization*"<sup>42</sup> of former Soviet Jews in Toronto?
- Is there a schism between Toronto's established Jewish community and "the Russians?" If so, why?

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<sup>42</sup> The original meaning of the word *ghetto* was a section of a city in which, in former times in most European countries, all Jews were required to live. In the United States the word *ghetto* came to represent a section of a city, especially a thickly-populated slum area, inhabited predominantly by Negroes, Puerto Ricans, or any other minority group, often as a result of social or economic restrictions. The above use of the word *ghettoization* reflects the evolution of a living language with resultant change in popularly-accepted meanings of words over time. In this instance, *ghettoization* is intended to describe a voluntarily homogeneous Russian immigrant community, whose members enjoy the security, sociability, and convenience of residential propinquity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

*This chapter will briefly explain the genesis of my interest in the experience of Soviet Jews, who immigrated to Toronto post-collapse of the former Soviet Union; as well as describe the development of the research methodology necessary to satisfy my thesis questions.*

My parents immigrated to Toronto from Lodz, Poland in 1928 and 1930. They spoke Yiddish at home and within their community. Their English skills were excellent but called upon only when necessary. Polish was their secret language, which they used for "private" exclusionary conversations. Both parents worked in Toronto's garment industry. Politically, they were left-wingers, who described themselves as socialists. At ages seven and eight (1947-48), I was sent to Camp *Naivelt* (new world) near Brampton, Ontario for two weeks in the summertime. Each morning before breakfast, all the young campers marched in military style around the statue of a stern-looking man perched high up on a pedestal. Years later, I would learn that the man had been Lenin. At age nine (1948), I was enrolled in after-school classes at the Morris Winchevsky School (83 Christie Street) which was located within the headquarters of the United Jewish Peoples Order (UJPO). Here I learned to read and write Yiddish and was introduced to the fine Yiddish literature of Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) and I. L. Peretz (1852-1915). At the same time, I was being instilled with leftist political propaganda. Religious studies, Jewish festivals were carefully avoided as was the subject of Zionism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With hindsight and in retrospect, this Toronto school with its Russian-Jewish immigrant teachers was probably in the tradition of the *Evseksiia*, the Jewish section of the Communist Party, that effectively destroyed traditional Judaism in the USSR (1920s-1930s), but

Only after rumours of the murder of twenty-six prominent Yiddish writers in Moscow reached the Toronto Jewish community (1952) did my parents begin to doubt the good intentions of Stalin.<sup>2</sup> In 1953, when the alleged "Jewish Doctors' Plot" was reported by Moscow news services, it attracted immediate international attention.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1956, Joseph B. Salsberg, a Jewish member of the Ontario Legislative Assembly (1943-1955), and also a member of the Communist Party of Canada, visited the Soviet Union for the second time. (On his first trip in 1939, he had discussed the deterioration of Soviet Jewish life with the head of the international Communist Party. Unfortunately, he was not able to pursue this issue because World War Two intervened.) After meetings with Nikita Khrushchev and his junior ministers, Salsberg became convinced that deep anti-Semitic views had penetrated the Soviet leadership. Upon his return to Canada, he renounced his Communist Party affiliation and refused to run in the next provincial election. He wrote a series of emotional articles for the Canadian left-wing Yiddish-language newspaper

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gave rise to a Yiddish-language literature and a large number of Russian-language literary achievements by Jewish authors.

<sup>2</sup> The Soviet campaign to liquidate Jewish cultural leaders peaked on August 12, 1952, with the murder of twenty-six prominent Yiddish writers. They were imprisoned, tortured and killed in secrecy in the basement of Moscow's notorious Lubyanka Prison, headquarters of the dreaded Ministry of State Security, precursor of the KGB.

<sup>3</sup> On January 13, 1953, a number of Jewish doctors were arrested and charged with conspiracy to poison Stalin and other Soviet leaders. Stalin's sudden death on March 6, 1953 rescued the doctors from their probable fate. Various sources report the number of doctors accused and their alleged crimes differently. Suffice to say, the anti-Semitic incident did occur.

*Vokhenblat*, and for the American and Canadian English-language Communist press describing the dangers facing the Soviet Jewish community.<sup>4</sup>

After Salsberg's resignation, many members of the UJPO abandoned that Communist-dominated organization. Some joined the newly-created, secular, New Fraternal Jewish Association (NFJA), which is still in existence in Toronto. Other deeply-disillusioned Toronto Jews, permanently disassociated themselves from "the movement," aligning themselves with Canada's socialist party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) or, as in my parents case, the more mainstream Liberal Party.

Toronto Jewry were slow to forgive or forget the Jewish families who were known to be "card-carrying Communists." As the Cold War heated up, Toronto Jews who were then, and had always been, genuine unionists and socialists were frequently suspected of being "*pink around the ears*."

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Although my interest in Russian-Jewish immigration was genuine, I had no particular connection to that community; knew no Russian Jews personally, and, of course, did not understand their language. I did, however, believe that I had been sensitized many years ago to the inherent dangers and limitations of being identified as a Jew in the Soviet Union. And more recently, I could appreciate the ironic dilemma of Jewish immigrants from the FSU being referred to as "the Russians," and "the Communists" and "non-Jewish-Jews" by Toronto Jewry, while in their abandoned "Motherland" they were perceived to be "Jews" and, therefore, "non-Russians."

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy Eisen 11.

In order to make initial contact with the Russian Jewish immigrant community, I contacted the Community Integration Program (co-sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and the Bathurst Jewish Centre) in June of 1998 and volunteered to become a "Telephone Language Companion." As a TLC, I would help a newly-arrived Russian immigrant improve his/her English-speaking skills. The commitment involved bi-weekly telephone conversations for a minimum of six months. The CIP matched me with a 45-year-old female former electronic engineer, who had immigrated to Toronto via Israel in May, 1998. In this millennium year 2000, my new Russian friend continues to use me as her "Canadian resource." I, in turn, have been able to observe, first-hand, the challenges she and her family are facing as they build a new life in Canada.

I began a literature review in August 1998 to locate previous research that would provide historical background and context for a qualitative study of Russian immigrant Jews. There was a small body of work available dealing with Russian Jewish immigration issues in Canada from the early 1970s through 1989.

Immersed now in dynamic Russian-Jewish issues, I wanted to share this preoccupation with friends. My non-Jewish friends generally thought my thesis topic "very interesting" or "a great idea." My Jewish friends and relatives, for the most part, wondered why I wanted to write about "the Russians" (this can have a pejorative undertone), whom they frequently described as: "pushy," "aggressive," "noisy," "demanding," "crooked," "dangerous," or "smart...very smart." When I asked them if they personally knew any Russian Jews or non-Jewish Russians, they admitted they did not. This negative stereotyping

and the dearth of writing by Russian Jews about their Canadian immigration experience reinforced my impression that further research would be of value.

Although I worried about how I would overcome the Russian/English language barrier, I felt that to differentiate my research, and add to the body of work available, I needed to meet and interview immigrants who had come to Canada directly from Russia (or other independent states in the Federation), as well as immigrants who had emigrated from the FSU to Israel, and then reemigrated from Israel to Canada. I wanted to ask them how they were adjusting to life in Toronto in the 1990s; whether or not they were living as Jews; how they were managing financially; who were their friends; who was helping them; why they had left Israel; and whether they were optimistic about their future in Canada.

I designed two English-language questionnaires which were approved by the Trent Ethics Committee -- a questionnaire for Jews who had emigrated from the FSU to Israel, and later reemigrated from Israel to Canada; another questionnaire for Jews who had immigrated directly to Canada from the FSU.

I had initially received approval from the Trent Ethics Committee to present each Russian interviewee with a gift of wine or candy. I subsequently changed my mind and asked the Committee for permission to pay each interviewee a cash stipend of twenty-five dollars. Permission was received.

I created two small card files. One card file was for data on the Russian Jewish interviewees; and the other card file was for data on the professional interviewees. I recorded contact details, appointment details, comments, and payment of stipends.

To facilitate communication, a Russian translator was located through the Yellow Pages. A recent immigrant herself, she translated two documents for me: a two-page Consent Form to be read and signed by the Russian interviewees, and a one-page advertisement with the heading: "*Russian Jewish Volunteers Needed for Canadian University Study.*" The advertisement, in Russian and English, was displayed in supermarkets and lobbies of apartment buildings in the Bathurst- Sheppard- Steeles area; the Jewish Student Federation at York University; the Jewish Russian Community Centre; and the Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada.

Through January and February 1999, twenty-six former Soviet Jews and one non-Jewish male spouse were interviewed. Four people were referred by Russian Jews; two by Toronto Jews; two Russian students responded to the flyer placed at York University; two were located through the Yellow Pages (translator and spouse); and seventeen interviewees were members of the Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada.

Consent Forms (Russian and English) and the Questionnaires (English) were mailed to volunteers well in advance of their interviews. All the volunteers brought their signed Consent Forms and carefully-completed questionnaires to their interviews. These filled-out questionnaires served as conversation "triggers" allowing the interviews to seem to be guided by the respondents. Before starting the interview, I explained to the subjects that their anonymity was guaranteed and only first names or pseudonyms would be used. I informed them that the interview would be taped and that I would turn off the taping machine if they wished to discuss something "off the record." The subjects were advised that they were free to refuse to answer any question. Not all the interviewees were aware that they

would receive a twenty-five dollar cash stipend after the interview. When told that they would receive a small “gift” at the completion of the interview, some looked pleased, others were embarrassed. Nobody refused. The stipend was presented in an attractive envelope, which contained a hand-written thank you note and twenty-five dollars.

It was my impression that the subjects answered all questions honestly and to the best of their ability. It was important not to appear impatient because there were frequent hesitations as the interviewees struggled for the correct English words. Sentences were often not grammatically structured but I was always able to understand what it was they were trying to communicate. The Seniors and adult males had the greatest difficulty with English. They frequently transposed Russian or Hebrew words for English words. This demonstrated a problem with linguistic “crossover,” not unusual in adults learning new languages and being under a degree of stress. The adult females were more relaxed and had a better command of English. The university-age subjects spoke English fluently. When an interview was being conducted in an apartment with school-age children present, it was not unusual for a frustrated parent to turn to his/her child for a quick English translation.

Some of the Senior Russians were better able to express themselves in Yiddish, and I was grateful for my Jewish education and Jewish-speaking parents. This *mamalashen* (mother-tongue) removed linguistic barriers and conquered shyness. In Yiddish, they told me stories, funny and sad. One gregarious Senior gentleman asked if I would like to hear a song. He sang his song twice; once in Russian and again in Yiddish. He had an excellent strong voice and enjoyed showing off his talent. On another occasion, I interviewed a 55-year-old woman, who had been a university-level French-language instructor. She and I were

able to leap linguistic hurdles with the blessed French I still remembered from a four-year sojourn at Glendon College, the bilingual campus of York University.

I had been advised by my “expert” friends that “the Russians” were “secretive” and “uncommunicative,” and warned that they would not talk to me. To my happy surprise, all the interviewees were very forthcoming, though a little shy at first, and it seemed clear that they were pleased that someone from outside their community, who was not a social worker, was taking an interest. I had expected to conduct one-hour interviews but my two-hour tapes were usually filled. Occasionally the conversation continued long after the tape recorder had stopped. The subjects described the lives they had abandoned in the FSU and their struggle to “make it” in Israel and Canada. The interviews were emotional, intense, and often so exhausting that I would drive home afterwards and go directly to bed. The immigrants on the other hand were quite energized by the interviews and all seemed to have enjoyed the experience. Usually just before parting company, the interviewees would (shyly) ask me why I was doing this research. I told them that I hoped to be able to learn about their community and their experiences in Canada; and then write about them in a university thesis. They seemed pleased that there was to be some sort of academic acknowledgement of their existence as a community

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“When they get on a plane in Moscow, they still have their professional status of doctor, lawyer, engineer,” said Sophie Fischhoff, veteran social worker at Jewish Family & Child Service. “This status is very important in Russia. But when they reach Toronto twelve hours later, they’re nobodies and they have to get in a breadline with everyone else.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Gladstone, “A Look At Toronto’s Jews From Russia” The Canadian Jewish News 10 Nov. 1997: 3.

For balance and a Canadian perspective, I decided to interview Toronto professionals whose work facilitated the resettlement and integration of Russian Jews. I was able to locate a number of volunteers by means of snowball sampling, that is, friends or relatives suggested people, and those people, in turn, suggested others. I was also able to locate some individuals through the Jewish Community Services Directory of Greater Toronto; a directory constantly being updated by Jewish Information Services. This was an excellent resource listing every aspect of Toronto's Jewish organizational life. UJA Federation's website (<http://www.feduja.org>) provided additional on-line information.

I began to clip news articles in the mainstream press relating to current events involving Jews in the FSU and Israel, as well as articles about Soviet immigrants in Canada. I perused the Jewish community's popular weekly national newspaper The Canadian Jewish News for interesting articles about Russians in Canada, reports of escalating anti-Semitism in the FSU, and problems of and with Russians immigrants in Israel. I also watched for names of local Toronto professionals described in the media as working with agencies dealing with Soviet Jewry.

I made telephone calls, wrote letters, sent e-mails and faxed messages requesting interviews; and followed up by mailing one-page information sheets describing my thesis research to prospective interviewees. Where possible, I attached or enclosed business cards that identified me as a Graduate Student at Trent University, associated with the Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies.

An example of a response to my letter to Rabbi Yoseph Zaltzman, Director of the Jewish Russian Community Centre: He passed my letter along to Rabbi Levi Jacobson, the

new Director of the Centre for Judaic Studies at JRCC who, before granting me an interview, suggested I attend a Saturday morning religious service at the JRCC's Orthodox synagogue located within their Centre. Upon arrival, I was directed upstairs to the balcony where I joined the women and girls. New prayer books were available in Russian and Hebrew only, effectively excluding me from participating in the service. Reduced to "observer" status, I nevertheless enjoyed listening to the Hebrew liturgy and the traditional songs in Russian translation. The men seated downstairs were being led in prayer by bearded, black-suited rabbis. Very young Russian boys dressed in long-sleeved white shirts and ties were seated at long tables, covered with white linen clothes, alongside brothers, fathers and teachers. These children were very serious about learning the rituals. Following the service, Rabbi Jacobson invited me to join the congregation for refreshments, which the women were quickly organizing in an adjacent room. Although the women of the congregation had been very polite to me upstairs during the service, I refused his kind invitation, as I could not speak their language and felt very much the outsider. With hindsight, this would have been an excellent opportunity to introduce myself to the Lubavitch rabbis, who are so successfully impacting on the Russian community. But, coward that I was, I declined the invitation and went home.

Between October 1998 and February 1999, I conducted ten professional interviews. These included: three social workers (Jewish Family and Child Service); one employment councillor (Jewish Vocational Service of Metropolitan Toronto); one English As A Second Language teacher (JIAS); one medical doctor, in private practice, who consults on the consequences of stress associated with change; two rabbis (Jewish Russian Community

Centre and Jews for Judaism); the Executive Director, Jewish National Fund of Canada, Ontario Region; the Director of Community Development, UJA Federation; a volunteer who was a recent past-President of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (Toronto) and currently serves on JIAS's Board of Directors; and the Director of the Russian Program of Aish HaTorah Learning Centre in Thornhill. All except two interviews took place in the subjects' offices. One took place in a restaurant and one at my home office.

**I HAD MEETINGS WITH:**

Stephen A. Speisman, Director, Ontario Jewish Archives

Howard English, Director, Communications, UJA Federation

Betty Steinhauer, Consultant to Government, Social Service and Community Organizations, Betty Steinhauer & Associates, Toronto

Diane Uslaner, Director of Cultural Programming, Marketing and Development, Bathurst Jewish Centre

**I HAD TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH:**

Jay Brodbar, Director of Research, UJA Federation

Dennis Mills, M.P. (Liberal, Broadview-Greenwood)

Sharon D. Zeiler, (Past) Executive Director, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, Toronto

Debbie Silver, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, Greater Toronto Area Council

Ella Gurevich, Secretary, Association of Soviet Jewry in Canada

Stephanie Wener, Program Director, Jewish Student Federation, York University

Marcia Gardner, City of Toronto, Community Services, Client Service and Information Unit

Albert Israeli (Messianic Jew) referred by Andrew Barron, Director,  
Jews for Jesus, Toronto

**I COMMUNICATED BY E-MAIL WITH:**

Fran Augenblick, FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions),  
Jewish Information Service, UJA Federation

Joel Verbin, FAQ, Jewish Information Service

Eve Marks, Communications Support Person, UJA Federation

Professor Irving Abella, York University

Professor Stuart Schoenfeld, Sociology Department,  
Glendon College, York University

Andrew Barron, Director, Jews for Jesus, Toronto

Dr. Joseph B. Glass, Halbert Centre for Canadian Studies,  
Faculty of Social Science, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Roslynne Greenberg, ESL Co-ordinator, JIAS, Toronto

**I DID NOT RECEIVE A RESPONSE FROM:**

KOLEL: Centre for Liberal Jewish Learning, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein,  
Director (letter)

RCMP, Newmarket, Ontario, Corporal Perry Nickerson,  
Joint Task Force East European Underworld -- referred by  
Dennis Mills, MP (telephone call)

ORAH School, Sunday school for Russian immigrant children,  
Rabbi Yosef Michalowicz, co-Principal (two letters and a telephone call)

Centre for Jewish Studies, Professor M. Brown, York University (e-mail)

My Thesis Supervisor has advised me that a less than one hundred percent, or perfect,  
response rate is something to be expected in any scholarly research, especially when the

research is being conducted by an unknown student. In light of this, and the fact that there were only four non-responses, I am pleased to report an almost perfect response rate.

Finally, it was necessary to transcribe the interview tapes. The professionals' interviews transcribed easily and quickly. The immigrants' interview tapes took much longer to transcribe because of their heavy accents and idiomatic use of English.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION**

In her study of the development of community among Soviet immigrants living in Brighton Beach, Ocean Parkway, Queens, and “other exotic locales in New York,” Fran Markowitz (1983) reported that, unlike the image of the Russian Jew portrayed in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Jews from the former Soviet Union are, as a rule, highly-educated cosmopolitans, who have lived and worked in the center of Soviet life. More than seven decades have passed since Jews left their little communities, the *shtetls*, or Jewish villages and towns, and urban ghettos that kept them separate from the rest of the population. During the 1920s and 1930s, they flocked to major Russian cities, earned university degrees, and entered the professions. Cutting ties with what they considered to be a parochial and repressive past, most abandoned Yiddish for Russian and the Jewish religion for socialist internationalism. In the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet Jews were often forward-looking members of the professional elite, who identified strongly with their work, high culture and the idea of progress.

Throughout the large cities of the former USSR, Jews lived dispersed among their Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Latvian, etc. neighbours. As religion was a non-issue, there were many intermarriages. The children of mixed Jewish/Russian parents were free to choose their *official* identity at age sixteen. Many chose *Russian*, thereby avoiding the problems associated with *the fifth line* on their identity papers, which identified individuals as Jews. With the exception of a tiny [but well-publicized] fraction of the population who participated in Jewish study groups and underground religious congregations co-ordinated

by, among others, the Lubavitch Hasidim, Jews had no specifically Jewish communal organizations and virtually no public religious life to bind them together.

With the exception of *Sovetish Heymland* (Soviet Homeland), a Yiddish literary journal that in the 1970s and 1980s attracted a very small readership, and the *Birobidzhaner Shtern* (Birobidzhan Star), the Yiddish-language daily of the Jewish Autonomous Region<sup>1</sup> located five thousand miles east of Russia's major Jewish population centers, there were no nationwide or citywide Jewish publications. Nor, for the most part, did Jews *want* exclusively Jewish forms of information and entertainment. Jewish writers, poets, artists, actors, musicians and dancers contributed their talents to the cultural mainstream and took great pride in their accomplishments. For all intents and purposes, Soviet Jews had achieved structural assimilation.<sup>2</sup>

The above begs the question: *If the Jews were so "structurally assimilated" in the USSR, how have they retained their sense of Jewish ethnicity over these many years?*

Under Josef Stalin and *The Party*: by 1930 the time for accommodation with even semi-autonomous groups and spontaneous social forces was over. The choice was made for a monolithic Party and State, with a highly-centralized economy and an essentially homogeneous culture, whose universal content and purpose would serve the aims of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish Autonomous Region: popularly known as *Birobidzhan*, which was the capital city of the JAR. This region was established by Josef Stalin in 1934 as the supposed national homeland of Soviet Jewry. A failure of social engineering, the JAR was designed to create a territorial enclave where a secular Jewish culture rooted in Yiddish and socialist principles could thrive.

<sup>2</sup> Fran Markowitz, *A Community in Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Emigres in New York* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) 8-9.

regime. The decline of Jewish culture as a national culture with unique characteristics was one attribute of the broader systemic change effecting all areas of Soviet life. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Jews, who were among the most internationalist of the old Bolsheviks, with emotional and kinship ties that extended to North America and Palestine, and who had in the first decades of Soviet rule enjoyed a relatively high level of national-cultural independence, became the object of what can be interpreted as an officially-endorsed anti-Semitism.<sup>3</sup>

It is safe to say that, from both organizational and ideological points of view, over the decades the Jewish religion was more severely dealt with in the Soviet Union than the Russian Orthodox Church, the Armenian-Georgian Church, Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Moslems, Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Various unique forms of suffering were experienced by the Jewish population, in addition to the many hardships experienced by the population as a whole. Although official anti-Semitism did not develop in a linear progression, it intensified when the Soviet leadership deemed it profitable and slackened when it was considered less expedient.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1960s, two forms of official anti-Semitism grew to significant proportions. One involved limiting the number of Jews access to certain institutions of higher learning, as well as to certain professional spheres; the other involved the distribution and broadcasting of anti-Semitic propaganda under the guise of anti-Zionism.

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<sup>3</sup> Victor Zaslavsky and Robert J. Brym, "The Soviet-Jewish Anomaly," Soviet Jewish Emigration and Soviet National Policy (London: MacMillan Press, 1983) 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 18.

In the twenty years after the 1967 Arab-Israeli *Six Day War*, the Soviet propaganda machine became the main source of anti-Semitic material in the world. It assembled materials from virtually every archaeological layer of anti-Semitic history, from classical antiquity to Hitlerism. The sheer volume of the material, ranging from endlessly repetitive articles and broadcasts to full-scale books, began to resemble Nazi propaganda. The existence of this fantastic image of a powerful and dangerous Jewish bogey, sharpened by a resurgent Russian nationalism, renders nonsensical all *official* claims to the effect that there was no *Jewish problem* in the USSR. Despite the considerable socio-economic progress made by Soviet Jews since 1917, they remained in a marginal, vulnerable and deteriorating position in Soviet society.<sup>5</sup>

The Communists had effectively banned most Jewish institutions and open expressions of Jewish identity for seven decades. What had not been completely eliminated continued to be undermined by hard demographic facts: high levels of intermarriage, low and declining Jewish birth rates, old and ageing Jewish population, and emigration. The *aliyah* movement of the early 1970s removed important members of the Soviet Jewish community. These immigrants to Israel had been, to a considerable extent, the chief carriers of Jewish culture and tradition. However, an unexpected and positive effect of the *aliyah* movement in the USSR was a renewed interest in the Hebrew language and Jewish history. Books on a wide variety of Jewish subjects were smuggled in from Israel, the United States and Canada. There were underground study circles and here and there the formation of a Jewish choir or dramatic society. It was believed, at the time, that this

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 21.

ethnically-revitalizing effect on at least part of the Jewish population would be short-lived because the *newly-enlightened* Jews were arranging to emigrate.<sup>6</sup>

Optimism for the persistence of Jewish ethnicity in the USSR was warranted when the discussion was broadened to include not just *positive* but *negative* elements of Jewish identity. Positive components of identity refer to those religious and secular expressions that may be found intrinsically rewarding insofar as they render one's life meaningful by helping to locate oneself along a certain social and historical continuum. In contrast, negative components of identity provide ethnic group attachments based on historical or contemporaneous experiences that are intrinsically punishing: for example, persecution, discrimination, and the like. Negative identity tends to be imposed from outside the ethnic group, positive identity to be generated from within.<sup>7</sup>

To follow this train of thought -- positive Jewish identity may indeed have been waning in the USSR, but negative identity had been greatly fortified over the past several decades. It was very much the case that people of Jewish origin still considered themselves to be members of a distinct ethnic group, even if only in a restricted sense. Indeed the strengthening of negative Jewish identity may have actually augmented the numbers of *de facto* Jews in the USSR. If left to themselves, Jews who assimilated, that is, intermarried, and who knew little and cared less about specifically Jewish culture, would eventually have ceased to think of themselves as Jews, and would have ceased to be defined as such by others. However, where such external definitions are imposed in the course of daily life, as

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid 146-147.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 147.

they continued to be in the USSR, Jewish self-identification did not evaporate, even if assimilation as traditionally-defined occurred. When intermarriages took place, the non-Jewish spouses, and even the children of these couples, whose nationality was registered as non-Jewish, might nevertheless *feel Jewish*.<sup>8</sup>

Jews have been living on Russian soil long enough to consider themselves not an alien element but an indigenous population; long enough to have developed their own traditions, history, and even psychology; their own ethnic dignity as precisely Russian Jews. For example -- fighting for the democratisation of Russian society was and still is one of the most important of Soviet Jewry's cultural characteristics, and one which links Soviet Jews to the Russian democratic intelligentsia. It is entirely characteristic that many emigrant intellectuals are careful to present themselves, not just as Jews and not just as Russians, but as members of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, there were academic reflections and speculations about what conditions in the Soviet Union could lead to a revival of positive Jewish identity. If negative Jewish identity was growing stronger, and if positive Jewish identity for many people did not incorporate "passing" as Russians, nor a connection to Zionism, then under what conditions would a positive Jewish identity be possible?

No one could have possibly anticipated the chain of events that began with the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Post-Gorbachev, post-collapse of the Soviet Union, post-mass exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel in the early 1990s, and post-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid 147.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 148.

President Boris Yeltsin, Russia's remaining Jewish community has been trying to regain positive self-identification as well as self-organization through academic and educational activities. In the winter of 2000, courses in Judaica were being taught in nearly one hundred universities and other academic institutions across the former Soviet Union, and every prestigious university in Russia had opened, or was planning to open, a department for Jewish or Biblical Studies.

The *Sefer Centre* in Moscow, a non-profit association established and supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is promoting and co-ordinating the teaching of Judaica, as well as Jewish research, at Russian institutions of higher learning. This association, considered one of "The Joins" most successful ventures in the FSU, operates under the aegis of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and unites more than one thousand lecturers and researchers in Jewish Studies from across the FSU.<sup>10</sup>

An unexpected turn of events, which may or may not effect Jewish identity in the FSU, is that various fundamentalist Christian groups are *spreading the word* and Messianic Jewish organizations are competing with Orthodox Jews for Jewish souls.<sup>11</sup>

The Orthodox Jewish response to Christian proselytizers in the FSU has been the establishment and operation of several religious centres by the international Chabad

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<sup>10</sup> Lev Gorodetsky, "In throwback to Soviet days, Jewish learning unites community." Moscow: Jewish Telegraph Agency, 13 Feb. 2000.

<sup>11</sup> A VHS video "Revival in Russia" documents one gospel service (May 18, 1994) with a reported 30,000 in attendance. Following presentation of the gospel message, over 10,000 people stood and prayed to receive *Yeshua* (Jesus) as their Messiah and Savior. It was estimated at least half of those responding were Jewish. This video, produced by Hear O Israel Ministries, 1326 North Winton Road, Rochester, NY, was viewed at the Aish HaTorah Learning Centre in Thornhill on 6 January 1999.

Lubavitch Hasidic movement. In addition, Aish HaTorah's Russian Program was founded in 1992 to educate, support and offer solidarity to Russian Jews through lectures, classes, seminars and leadership training. These non-related institutions are active in regional centers such as Kiev, Minsk, Moscow and St. Petersburg with branches in smaller communities.

One can say at the start of this new millennium that the former Soviet Union has become the *land of opportunity* for those who would offer salvation and redemption to the religiously unaffiliated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CANADIAN-JEWRY IN THE DIASPORA

In his paper dealing with *Jewish diaspora (1999)*, Professor Stuart Schoenfeld suggests that hybrid forms of Jewish identity are the result of diasporic circumstance. His view seemed germane to the essence of this study. The Canadian-Jewish/Russian-Jewish communities have developed their own “hybrid” Jewish identities; these identities shaped by unique, generational histories.

*The Jewish understanding of what it means to be in the diaspora has been ambiguous from the beginning. Hybrid forms of Jewish identity developed in the ancient diaspora and in modern nation-states, as well as in the contemporary “late modern” or “post-modern” diaspora. The variability of Jewish identity in the diaspora has implications for understanding what it means to consider the Jews to be the “classic case” of a diaspora people and for a general understanding of the diasporic experience.<sup>1</sup>*

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Canada, created as a confederation and explicitly rejecting cultural standardization, only partly adopted the model of the modern nation state. The British North America Act not only guaranteed freedom of religion but also constitutionally protected corporate religious rights for Catholics and Protestants. Consequently, limited cultural pluralism and the separation of private rights from public obligations allowed Canadian Jews to perceive Canada as a setting in which compartmentalization and limited synthesis could be used to legitimate a continuing Jewish way of life. Jews were able, *despite some opposition*, to claim in Canada civic equality and a right to distinctiveness based on freedom of religion, just as they had done in the United States and parts of Europe. In Canada, they were also

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Schoenfeld, “Shape-Shifting As A Diasporic Constant: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Dispersion,” Sociology Dept., Glendon College, York U, 1999: 1 (article under review).

able to claim legitimate distinctiveness based on *culture*. This claim was harder to articulate persuasively than the claim based on freedom of religion because the Canadian context was less clear about the criteria on which the claim would be assessed. On the one hand, a minority excepted, Canadian public figures did not foster a unitary culture. Furthermore, the Canadian government had recruited central Europeans and encouraged ethnically homogeneous blocks of settlement on the Prairies. By the 1930s, it was possible for a popular book on Canada to invoke the image of a mosaic society.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, one could easily argue that the language of a mosaic society was more soothing rhetoric than an expression of a widely-shared cultural vision. For Jews, however, a mosaic vision, like the language of cultural pluralism in the United States, offered an additional way of understanding the new country; a way of understanding Canada that was sympathetic to the maintenance of Jewish distinctiveness.<sup>3</sup>

Jewish immigration and settlement followed the development of the Canadian economy. From about 4,000 Canadian Jews counted in 1881, the number grew to over 125,000 counted by the 1921 census. This large Jewish migration had a high degree of cultural homogeneity, coming almost entirely from central and eastern Europe. The first large Jewish settlement was in Montreal. A few other small cities in Quebec attracted enough Jews to form synagogues and other organizations. Toronto was historically the second largest Jewish community, but overtook Montreal around 1970. Together, Montreal and Toronto have long accounted for over seventy percent of the Canadian Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> John Murray Gibbon, *The Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1938)

<sup>3</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 15.

population. Other cities in Ontario have significant Jewish populations; these were first based on Jewish business proprietors, but are now mostly based on Jewish professionals. With the opening of the West, the Jewish population of Winnipeg surged and stabilized, and then declined gradually as railroads became less central to the Canadian economy. A handful of Jewish farming colonies did not last long in the West, but Jewish businessmen, and later professionals, established and maintained Jewish communities in several Western cities. British Columbia had a small Jewish population when it entered Confederation. Over the past several decades, it has grown, with Vancouver overtaking Winnipeg to become the city with the third largest Jewish population in Canada. In all of these settings, Canadian Jews followed the modernist dual strategy of compartmentalization and integration combined with selective cultural synthesis.<sup>4</sup> Integration into Canadian society was pursued through entrepreneurial capitalism, education and advocacy of non-discriminatory government policies.

Jews had played the role of middlemen in the agricultural societies of Europe and elsewhere. They brought their tradition of small business into a society with rapidly growing cities and an expanding rural frontier. Jewish merchants built up businesses in small towns throughout Canada as well as in urban markets. Many who worked as urban labourers in the "ready-made" garment industries of Montreal and Toronto intended to do so only as long as it took to build up capital for a small business; or to push their children toward economic mobility and cultural integration through education. Jewish immigrants, in general, placed great value on the success of their children at school. Living in neighbourhoods with high

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<sup>4</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 16.

densities of Jews -- a condition which facilitated the compartmentalization of private life -- meant that many schools had high concentrations of academically competitive Jewish students. The alumni of these schools remember them as high-energy, optimistic places where they acquired the cultural capital which would lead to economic success and social acceptance. In addition, because these were public schools, where patriotism and culture were part of the curriculum, these were also settings which encouraged and rewarded the identification of Jewish students with Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Opportunities for success in business and education were far greater than they had been in Europe due to the combination of a developing society and the basic rights Jews enjoyed as Canadian citizens. *Prejudice, however, was common, and discrimination based on religion, national origin, and colour was conventional. Jews, as individuals, and through their organizations, argued that legal protection of discrimination in employment and housing was contrary to democratic norms. They were advocates of the first anti-discrimination bills in Canada, passed in Ontario in 1944 and 1951, which were models for similar legislation in the rest of the country.*<sup>6</sup>

Immigrant Canadian Jews established *lansmanschaften* -- associations of Jews from similar places of origin; fellow countryman. These were self-help organizations which assisted the adjustment of immigrants to Canada, but they also kept up ties with their European places of origin. *Lansmanschaften* often included Orthodox synagogues as part of their organizations, thereby linking themselves through ritual and study to the historical

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<sup>5</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Keyfetz, "Canada," *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 6, 1971: 452-455.

and contemporaneous diaspora. Their rabbis and other synagogue functionaries were generally European immigrants, who looked to European authorities for guidance. More acculturated congregations looked to Britain or the United States for religious leadership and guidance. The first steps in the direction of religious liberalism were taken by those with ties to the Reform movement in the United States. Canadian Jews took it for granted that their religion was transnational and would have considered any proposal for a locally-produced "Canadian Judaism" to be peculiar and heretical.

Paralleling sentiments in other diasporas, Canadian Zionists did not consider their movement to be in conflict with their Canadian loyalty. The high drama of the first World Zionist Conference in Vienna in 1897 was followed in 1899 by the coalescence of Canadian supporters in the Zionist Organization of Canada, headed by a member of a leading Montreal Jewish family. The Canadian Zionist movement did contain some Jews who personally dreamed of participating in the return to Zion. Mostly it was composed of those who saw the hope of a Jewish homeland through the perspective of European nationalism -- as a legitimate movement of self-determination, and as a movement to provide a place of refuge for eastern Jewish masses experiencing a severe intensification of poverty and oppression.<sup>7</sup>

The Yiddish-speaking unions of early twentieth century Montreal and Toronto also played some role in maintaining a diasporic orientation,. Some members and leaders of these unions had personal connections with the Yiddish workers' movements in Europe. The formal ideology of Yiddish socialism was cosmopolitan, but there were strong emotional ties to the Jewish workers of eastern Europe. The Zionists among the workers had ideological,

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<sup>7</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 17-18,

organizational, and emotional ties to the Zionist socialists, who were doing the practical work of settling in the ancient Jewish homeland. Jews were among the leaders of the Communist and Social Democratic movements in Canada, with leadership based on activity in unions with Jewish workers, or electoral success in urban constituencies of Jewish workers. Those involved in these networks were conscious of themselves as a faction within the Canadian Jewish community and the world Jewish community. While a significant minority of working-class Jews concerned themselves with larger issues of social justice, reform, revolution and the future of the international working class, most were concerned with immediate issues of wages, job security, safety and so forth, and expected their children to educate themselves out.<sup>8</sup>

The consciousness of being a diaspora people in Canada was further fostered by Jewish patterns of residential concentration, in-group marriage and community organization. These social patterns maintained the modernist strategy of distinctive identity in private life as a counterpoint to integration as citizens with equal rights in public life. Turn of the century immigrant Jews found housing together, often in slum or near-slum districts. As their material conditions improved, they moved to new Jewish neighbourhoods. Their children and grandchildren, and later Jewish immigrants, also moved to largely Jewish neighbourhoods. Jews have remained one of the most residentially-concentrated of Canadian ethnic groups. Residential concentration has been paralleled by very high rates of in-group marriage. Until the 1960s, marriage with a non-Jew was rare. Although marriage to a non-Jew is now much more frequent, Jews are still much more likely to marry

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<sup>8</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 19.

among themselves than Protestants or Catholics, or members of most other ethnic groups whose presence in Canada goes back three generations.<sup>9</sup>

Residential concentration and kin ties formed a basis for communal organization beyond religious institutions. B'nai B'rith and other fraternal organizations were a strong presence among Canadian Jews. The network of charitable and social service organizations found in other modern diasporas also developed in Canada. Jewish federations were created not only in the places with the largest Jewish populations -- Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver -- but also cities with much smaller Jewish populations: Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Windsor, St. Catherines, Calgary, and Edmonton. Probably 95% of Canadian Jews live in a "federated" community. The Canadian federations are affiliated with the continent-wide United Jewish Communities (formerly the Council of Jewish Federations). Canadian federations plan and support local activities; social welfare services; and Jewish education. They also support national institutions such as the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services. A significant amount of funds raised locally is also allocated to the needs of Israel and world Jewry. Under this one umbrella, the Jewish communities of Canada incorporate support for organizations which sustain a distinct Canadian-Jewish community, support for organizations which advance the agenda of national integration, and support for organizations which link diaspora communities together in common cause.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Schoenfeld, An Invitation to a Discussion: Assimilation, Inter-marriage and Jewish Identity in Ontario (Toronto: Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region, 1987)

<sup>10</sup> Schoenfeld 1999: 19-20.

According to Howard Palmer (1994), there has been a recent burgeoning of historical and sociological research on Anglo-Canadian attitudes toward ethnic minorities. Much of this research, he states, contradicts the view which has been advanced by some Anglo-Canadian historians and politicians that Anglo-Canadians have always adopted the “mosaic” as opposed to the American “melting pot” approach. Palmer believes that much of this rhetoric has been wishful thinking. He suggests that immigrant groups did not “melt” as much in Canada as in the United States; not because Anglo-Canadians were more anxious to encourage the cultural survival of ethnic minorities, but because there has been a long history of racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities in English-speaking Canada, along with strong pressures for conformity to Anglo-Canadian ways.

Predominant prior to World War II, anglo-conformity fell into disrepute and was replaced in the popular mind by the “melting pot” theory of assimilation. This view envisaged a merging of settled communities with new immigrant groups and a blending of their cultures into a new Canadian type. A third theory of assimilation “cultural pluralism” or “multiculturalism” currently postulates the preservation of some aspects of immigrant culture and communal life within the context of Canadian citizenship and political and economic integration into Canadian society.<sup>11</sup>

Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld (1996) state that in spite of its detractors, Trudeau’s multiculturalism statement of 1971 initially struck a resonant chord among many Canadians. During the policy’s first decade, there were those who argued with some

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<sup>11</sup> Howard Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century.” Readings in Canadian History Post-Confederation, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, 4th ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1994) 143.

justification that the policy, when translated from promises into programmes, was tilted more toward support of group cultural celebration than it was to pressing issues such as fighting discrimination. To many Canadians, the question of which programmes the policy funded was less important than the fact of the policy. They supported the idea of equal participation in society irrespective of cultural differences, and the notion that one need not discard one's cultural heritage as a price for that participation. And multiculturalism had symbolic meaning. In its first decade, and through much of the 1980s, the policy became something of a popular Canadian cliché, if not an article of faith. To some it distinguished American and Canadian societies. The United States was characterized as a "melting pot" and Canada as a multicultural "mosaic." This obvious oversimplification suggested that the United States offered an environment in which racial and ethnic particularities inevitably give way before a singular and unifying American identity. In contrast, Canadian citizens were supposedly encouraged to maintain their distinct ethnocultural identities to whatever degree they might wish. In the process, it was said, Canadians developed an openness to the cultural uniqueness of others. And by this idyllic vision, Canada as a whole reaped a rich harvest of social peace, harmony, and loyalty to democratic institutions, while encouraging the widest possible range of cultural expression.<sup>12</sup>

Troper and Weinfeld (1996) remind us that, in the real world, if one wished to distinguish Canada from the United States, this "alleged difference" may represent a difference without a distinction; and suggest it has been convincingly argued that Canada is

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<sup>12</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld, "Canadian Jews and Canadian Multiculturalism" Multiculturalism, Jews, and Identities in Canada, Howard Adelman and John H. Simpson, eds. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996) 23.

no less a "melting pot" than the United States, and the United States no less a "mosaic" than Canada. *But one dare not negate the power of popular images in nation-building.*

There is a commonly-held belief, among Canadians to-day, that the Jewish community is politically and economically powerful, and always has been. Even established Canadian Jews tend to romanticize the Jewish-immigrant experience in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. They have heard about the old revered institutions such as the dynamic Yiddish-language press, the popular Yiddish-language theatre, the unique Jewish bookstores, and the numerous communal organizations -- all gone now.

In fact, Canada was permeated with racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Earlier than the 1930s, and well into the 1950s, the Jew was a pariah in Canadian society. The target of abuse with few opportunities. Jews were excluded from most professions, and legally prevented from living and vacationing in a wide variety of areas from coast-to-coast. Most firms did not hire Jews; Jews were largely barred from the civil services; most hospitals were closed to Jewish doctors; universities publicly restricted Jewish student enrollment; and there was not one Jewish professor in any Canadian university in the period. Indeed, Canada turned its back on Jews seeking sanctuary from the Nazis and has the worst record of any Western nation in providing sanctuary to Jewish refugees. Canada's most telling and symbolic export in those years was the thousands of talented and motivated young Jewish men and women who, unable to make their contribution in Canada, emigrated south to make their mark in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Irving Abella, "Foreward" Multiculturalism, Jews, and Identities in Canada 1996: xvi-xviii.

Official multiculturalism's early focus was primarily on maintenance of mother tongues or ancestral languages, and maintenance of folkloric heritage for transmission from generation to generation. Often the folk arts were learned in Canada, as symbols of no-longer-retained cultures. So, among South Asians, music and folk dance became important community phenomena; among Japanese, Kabuki dance, flower arranging, and paper folding were taught and practised; Ukrainians had bandura [lute-like instrument] orchestras and learned embroidery and the painting of Easter eggs. All these phenomena were eminently suited to display before those who did not belong to the ethnic group, and became stock-in-trade at ethnic or multicultural festivals.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1990s, multiculturalism as government policy has meant that state institutions more and more relate to citizens on an ethnic, rather than an individual, geographic or functional basis, and consult with organizations purporting to speak for respective ethnic groups. The consequent reshaping of many national institutions to reflect the greater salience of ethnicity has allowed various minorities to make collective demands and claims on the state (that were previously politically and ideologically unlikely to be taken seriously) through their specific ethnic institutions. Groups recognize that politics is relevant to the health of their ethnic cultural values and can mobilize their members to engage in political activity based on this awareness. With the passage of employment-equity and affirmative-action laws, ethnicity has become a source of entitlements and group rights in such areas as employment and education. Ethnicity, which was for many a hindrance to full equality in

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<sup>14</sup> Jean R. Burnet with Howard Palmer, "Ethnic Identity," "Coming Canadians" An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) 212-215.

the past, has become a political resource and ethnic organizations have become among Canada's most important interest groups.<sup>15</sup>

All of this has been beneficial to Canada's Jewish community. Jews have throughout their diaspora history lived as self-consciously distinct, sometimes segregated, minorities within larger societies, and even when subject to anti-Semitism and discrimination were often allowed considerable internal autonomy. They have always formed their own agencies of self-government, whether voluntary or compulsory. As such, they have in many ways approximated an institutional completeness resembling that of a polity. Daniel J. Elazar (1969), political scientist, maintained that "members of Jewish communities are linked by a shared destiny and a common pattern of communications...whose ability to consent together in matters of common interest has been repeatedly demonstrated. This situation enables the group to carve out an area of autonomous, though non-sovereign existence in the midst of polities that would otherwise absorb or eliminate them."<sup>16</sup>

Canadian Jews have historically exhibited a high degree of ethnic identification, social cohesion, and solidarity. They have accepted the need for activist organizations working to ensure their group's survival. To this end, they have created a network of organizations involved in the delivery of services. In a liberal democracy, such as Canada,

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<sup>15</sup> Henry F. Srebrnik, "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Ethnicity." Multiculturalism, Jews and Identities in Canada 1996: 101.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel J. Elazar, "The Reconstitution of the Jewish Communities in the Postwar Period." *Jewish Journal of Sociology II* (Dec. 1969), 187-8, in Henry F. Srebrnik 101.

most ethnic adherence is completely voluntary. It can be situational or tentative. Often, involvement is provisional and superficial. Thus, organizations cannot count on the automatic support of the constituency that they purport to represent. One sees the complete institutionalized multiculturalism of some ethnic groups, and the more symbolic or ritualistic forms of others. The former makes conformist demands on its members and assumes high levels of allegiance; a total way of life. Groups such as Orthodox Jewish Hasidic sects and the Amish conform to this model. More common, in an open and pluralistic society such as Canada, are the more non-binding forms of ethnic identification. These non-binding forms allow for a multiplicity of societal roles and more individual autonomy. Members can adjust and interpret their commitment in ways that do not conflict with their other values and interests. In other words, members have a psychological attachment to an ethnic group without being constrained by full-fledged membership in it. For more and more Jews, especially those not religiously devout, ethnic identity is of this sort, making it more relativistic, tentative, and problematic. This shift has made it more difficult for Jewish organizations to assume automatically the support of those who consider themselves Jewish. A paradox is encountered; while ethnicity becomes even more salient as a political marker, individuals are less bound to their ethnic group.<sup>17</sup>

Jean R. Burnet (1988) has observed that with the salience of ethnicity throughout the world, and with the sophistication of many immigrants, people have possessed an ethnic

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<sup>17</sup> Henry F. Srebrnik 103-104.

identity upon arrival and an attitude toward it, either as a burden to be cast off, or as a treasure to be passed on to their children. With the passage of time, both the content and the meaning of the immigrants' ethnic identities change.<sup>18</sup>

Jews in Canada have for several decades been feeling very *comfortable under their skin* with respect to their ethnicity, and have developed over these many years, as Schoenfeld suggests, a hybrid diasporic Canadian-Jewish identity formed and nurtured in a social democracy driven by capitalism. In contrast, the Jews in the former Soviet Union formed a different hybrid diasporic Russian-Jewish identity; one shaped by Communism, atheism and a state-driven economy.

While [most] Toronto Jews continue to enjoy a pleasant lifestyle "at home" in a large city that offers all amenities to those with wherewithall, the Russian immigrants in Toronto are busy reinventing themselves -- new language, new home, new career, new politicolegal system, and new socioeconomic system. And they are aware that those remaining behind in the recently-created Russian Federation are suffering the indignities of escalating anti-Semitism; and are being described pejoratively in the Russian media as "intellectuals," "Zionists," and "Reformers." In Toronto, Russian immigrants are tuning-in via satellite television transmission to bleak news of a devastated Russian economy and the Russian army's brutalization of the republic of Chechnya. Via e-mail and telephone, they communicate with frightened relatives and friends, whom they wish they could rescue.

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<sup>18</sup> Jean R. Burnet 212.

For the most part, Russian-Jewish immigrants have very little in common with the established Jewish community, whose memory of *the immigrant experience* is now historical. Clearly, it was naive to expect that these two Jewish elements, whose identities were molded by very different diasporic experiences, and whose situation in Toronto is (at least temporarily) so dissimilar, could easily and quickly make contact.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ALIYAH FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

#### AND REEMIGRATION FROM ISRAEL

The intake of *olim* (immigrants) by Israel's Department of Immigration and Absorption has been extraordinary. Since 1948, the Department has facilitated the immigration of no less than **2,822,510** *olim*.<sup>1</sup> In everything it does it reflects the resolve of the whole Jewish people to save Jews in distress and to bring Jews, wherever they may be, home to Israel. Representatives of the Jewish Agency can be found promoting *Aliyah* (immigration) in Jewish communities worldwide. They help the *Oleh* (immigrant) prepare for *Aliyah*; organize the actual move to Israel; and arrange initial *Klitah* (absorption) in Israel.

#### THE LAW OF RETURN

In 1950, Israel's *Knesset* (Parliament) passed a remarkable law, beginning with a few simple words that defined Israel's central purpose: "Every Jew has the right to immigrate to this country..." Two thousand years in the diaspora were officially over. Since then, Jews have been entitled to simply show up and declare themselves to be Israeli citizens, assuming they posed no imminent danger to public health, state security, or the Jewish people as a whole. In 1955, the law was amended slightly to specify that dangerous criminals could also be denied that right. In 1970, Israel took another historic step by granting automatic citizenship not only to Jews, but also to their non-Jewish children.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources of figures: The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Immigration and Absorption, on-line, figures updated to 6 August 2000 ([www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/aliyah/clock/table.html](http://www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/aliyah/clock/table.html)).

grandchildren, and spouses, and to the non-Jewish spouses of their children and grandchildren. This addition not only ensured that families would not be broken apart, but also promised a safe haven in Israel for non-Jews subject to persecution because of their Jewish roots.<sup>2</sup>

ALIYAH FROM FSU 1989-1999<sup>3</sup>

YEAR	POTENTIAL	NUMBER OF OLIM	PERCENTAGE OF POTENTIAL
1989	2,370,000	12,721	0.5
1990	2,284,000	185,232	8.1
1991	2,033,000	147,839	7.3
1992	1,820,000	65,093	3.6
1993	1,680,000	66,145	3.9
1994	1,550,000	68,079	4.4
1995	1,420,000	64,847	4.6
1996	1,300,000	59,049	4.5
1997	1,177,000	54,591	4.6
1998	1,073,000	46,020	4.3
1999	975,000	66,481	6.8

Estimated number of immigrants expected in Israel from the FSU in year 2000 is 57,000, with 27,717 immigrants having already entered to date (August, 2000). Current figures indicate that the number of *olim* that have arrived in Israel from the FSU and other countries since 1989 is 988,507.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jewish Agency for Israel, Immigration and Absorption Department, on-line ([www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/aliyah/law.html](http://www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/aliyah/law.html)) 31 May 2000

<sup>3</sup> JAFI, on-line ([www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/dept/bog/.html](http://www.jafi.org.il/aliyah/dept/bog/.html)) 6 August 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Sources of figures: The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, updated on-line 6 August 2000.

Petrus Buwalda, former Netherlands ambassador in Moscow (1986 to 1990) and author<sup>5</sup>, stated that when the question *Why did you wish to leave the Soviet Union?* was put to former Refusenik leaders, now living in Israel and the United States, their first response, without exception, was that they could no longer live under the regime that was ruling the Soviet Union. They hated the system, the anti-humanism of it; a system where you could not be apolitical. “We really were not given an opportunity to be honest, not allowed a modicum of professional integrity.” When asked, “So the main reason was not anti-Semitism?”, the response was often, “Oh yes, that too, of course. We lived with that most of our lives, although personally...”<sup>6</sup>

Jews learned to live with the institutional manifestations of anti-Semitism, where you never quite reached the position you thought you were entitled to; or you did not get the permission to travel abroad that your colleague received; or when your son or daughter was not accepted at the university, the conservatory, or the scientific institute because of the *numerus clausus*.<sup>7</sup> One tried to adapt: to find another university or a correspondence course for the children, or an institute for oneself that did accept Jews. One learned to live

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<sup>5</sup> Petrus Buwalda. *They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967-1990* (Baltimore: John Hopkins U Press, 1997)

Note: The Netherlands' embassy in Moscow assumed the responsibility of document processing to expedite the legal emigration of Soviet Jews. This was necessary because the Soviets cut off diplomatic relations with Israel and closed the Israeli embassy in Moscow after Israel's military victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War.

<sup>6</sup> Buwalda 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Numerus clausus*: established in the 19th century to limit the number of Jews who could attend any given institution. This quota for Jews was applied under the Communist regime as strictly as it had been under the Czars.

with that, but not with a regime that allowed no civil rights or personal freedom, was patently dishonest, and forced you to participate in that dishonesty; even frequently trying to recruit you to spy on your friends and co-workers.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the need to find “alternative routes” to success, opportunities were available to Jews who excelled in academia, the sciences, high technology, as well as in sports and the fine arts. By the 1970s and 1980s, many Jews were relatively well off by Soviet standards. Usually both husband and wife worked and together they earned an income that enabled them to live fairly well. Many had three-bedroom apartments, *dachas* (summer houses), holidays on the Black and Baltic Seas, and sometimes after many years of waiting, the luxury of a car.

Some Jews, such as the ones who had been evacuated to Siberia during the Second World War, and had remained there, were not so well off.<sup>9</sup> Other Jewish colonies, some very old, continued to exist in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan) and in the Caucasus region (Georgia, Azerbaijan). Poverty motivated these Jews to emigrate, as well as more overt anti-Semitism, and fear that their children would not receive an education or a good job. Sometimes they even feared pogroms, the dreaded anti-Jewish riots that occurred at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. When specifically asked, very few of these Jews would say they really thought that pogroms would be repeated, but nevertheless, the fear, fed by rumours, was often widespread.

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<sup>8</sup> Buwalda 32-34.

<sup>9</sup> Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Perhaps as many as 1.5 million Jewish factory workers from the industrial areas of the western Soviet Union were evacuated when their factories relocated to the Urals and Siberia (Buwalda 16).

Inability to exercise their religion seems to have been a motive for emigration for only a small percentage of Soviet emigrants. The Zionists, dedicated to the ideal of building a Jewish state, and believing in the obligation of all Jews to participate in that endeavour, were in the vanguard of emigration in the early 1970s; but they were never a large group, and by 1973 most of them had left. Many other would-be immigrants longed to fully experience their Jewishness, or at least live in a country where they could feel they belonged and not be in a minority. Most Jews knew little about Israel, and that little was often coloured by negative government anti-Zionist propaganda. But what finally tipped the balance for many Jews was the lack of hope. They saw no future for themselves in their country, and no improvement of the situation for their children. So they decided, first by the hundreds, and then by the thousands, to try to legally leave the country.<sup>10</sup>

The Soviet Jews "did not dwell alone." Their internal pressure found a response in Israel, as well as with Jewish organizations in the West, initially especially in the United States. In turn, these organizations (often with the semi-secret *Lishka* in the background)<sup>11</sup> succeeded first in influencing Western public opinion, and then also non-Jewish Western organizations and Western governments to demand from the Soviet government observance of human rights provisions regarding free movement and the granting of exit permits to Jews.

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<sup>10</sup> Buwalda 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Lishka*: Liaison Bureau of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tel Aviv.

Zaslavsky and Brym (1983) cite an editorial in the *New York Times* (1981) that attests there was a positive correlation between the rate of emigration from the USSR and the momentum of Soviet trade with the United States:

In 1971, 13,000 Jews were unexpectedly allowed to leave the Soviet Union. With the signing of SALT I, the first big wheat deal [with the United States], and the promise of more trade, the numbers rose in 1972 and 1973 to 32,000 and 35,000. Then came the Jackson-Vanik Amendment<sup>12</sup> [which infuriated the Soviets] impeding trade unless Jews were allowed to leave freely, and the departures declined sharply to 21,000 in 1974, 13,000 in 1975, 14,000 in 1976 and 17,000 in 1977. This amendment remains in force, but with progress towards SALT II and a further wheat deal, emigration rose again to 29,000 in 1978 and to a record toll of 51,000 in 1979. Then came [the Soviet attack on] Afghanistan, the [U.S.] wheat embargo, and other trade restrictions and the 1980 figure fell to 21,000.<sup>13</sup>

Zaslavsky and Brym (1983) argue that it would be inappropriate to infer from this [apparent] relationship that commerce served as a *force majeure* compelling or enticing the USSR to let Jews out. Any vacuum caused by the USA slowing down the flow of commodities to the USSR, they pointed out, was rapidly filled by other purveyors. Germany or Japan were ready to supply high-technology goods, and Canada or Argentina were ready to supply wheat.<sup>14</sup> They asked: "If American economic inducements are not as important as they are often made out to be, how effective are political sanctions?"

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1974 was an economic inducement designed to deny most-favoured-nation status to communist countries, notably the Soviet Union, in order to encourage more open emigration. Still in force, this amendment is considered by some to be a relic of the Cold War. James A. Dorn, "Time to Repeal the Jackson-Vanik Amendment," *Journal of Commerce* 14 July, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> "What Price A Jew?" *New York Times* 22 Feb. 1981: E18 in Victor Zaslavsky and Robert J. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (London: MacMillan Press. 1983) 64.

<sup>14</sup> Zaslavsky and Brym 1983: 64.

Examining the period 1975 to 1977, during which time the USA and other Western countries applied very high levels of political pressure on the USSR to ease emigration restrictions, the authors reported that the Soviets had, in fact, responded favourably to Western political manoeuvres. In 1975, the Soviet government signed the Helsinki Accord<sup>15</sup> pledging, among other things, to facilitate freer movement of its citizens across national borders. Zaslavsky and Brym (1983) reported that, post-Helsinki, though still risky, complicated and lengthy, conditions for emigration were much improved. In spite of this relatively favourable atmosphere for emigration, the numbers did not soar in 1975, 1976, and 1977.

In their analysis of emigration fluctuations resulting from external and internal economic and political pressures on the Soviet government, Zaslavsky and Brym (1983) remind us that the potential emigrant is a decision-making agent, interpreting possible courses of action in terms of the costs and benefits not to any country but to him/herself. In the mid-1970s, reports of deteriorating security and poor economic prospects in Israel, and of recession and unemployment in the United States, trickled back to the Jews in the USSR, discouraging emigration.

It is important to remember there was a resolute and strong ruling political class in the USSR, who were reluctant to lose control over any part of their population. Thus Israeli, Western, and Soviet-Jewish activists were successful only to the degree that "it worked" for

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<sup>15</sup> 1975 Helsinki Accord: a human rights treaty signed by the 53 member countries of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), excluding Albania, including the United States and Canada. On-Line. Freedom Magazine (Los Angeles: Church of Scientology International, March 2000).

the Soviet hierarchy. When the Soviet internal situation, specifically, economic stagnation exacerbated by low oil prices or bad harvests, forced the communist leadership to make concessions in order to obtain Western credits and technology, emigration of Jews increased. When the internal economic situation improved, when the oil prices increased, or hoped-for political or economic concessions to the Soviet Union were not forthcoming, the emigration of Jews decreased.

Between 1967 and the end of 1990, more than twenty-five percent of the Jews, who according to the 1959 Soviet census lived in the former Soviet Union, had emigrated. By the end of 1995 about 1.2 million Jews, or about fifty percent, had departed. This exodus is comparable only to the first large-scale Jewish emigration from the Russian empire, when some two million departed between 1881 and 1914.<sup>16</sup>

#### NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM<sup>17</sup>

In the crowded and busy Israeli cities, it was easy to spot the most recently-arrived Russians. For reasons of economy, they wore the clothes they brought from the Soviet Union, which looked like holdovers from the 1950s -- the men in tight suits, the women in long, shapeless dresses. The *olim* tended to walk more slowly and formally than the Israelis, who were always in a hurry. Also, the Israelis gesticulated with wide sweeps of the arms in an expansive Mediterranean way, while the *olim* used small, controlled chops of the hand. The newcomers were confused and uncertain. An elderly Russian gentleman stopped a

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<sup>16</sup> Buwalda, Introduction, xv.

<sup>17</sup> "Next Year in Jerusalem" is a traditional Jewish pledge that closes the Passover *seder* (ritual feast).

middle-aged Russian woman on the sidewalk in front of a Jerusalem post office to inquire whether it was legal to mail a letter in an envelope brought with him from the USSR, if he put a stamp on it. "Why not?" she answered. That seemed to reassure the old man, who put the letter carefully back into his coat pocket. "So, how do you like Israel?" he asked. The woman answered softly and thoughtfully, "You must pass a hard period. We did."<sup>18</sup>

"Most of them come hoping to find a mini-America in Israel," said Amos Oz, a well-known Israeli novelist. "The sooner they can get a house and a car -- preferably two cars -- and a good refrigerator full of good food, the sooner they will become solid citizens. They are the survivors of the Marxist fantasy. They come here aspiring for middle-class fulfilment."<sup>19</sup>

The middle class is the natural habitat of contemporary Jews, who seldom settle for less and rarely go further. If Western Jews have *made it* and lost some of their drive, former Soviet Jews struggle to achieve economic and social success wherever they settle. In Israel, their unbridled ambition often was met with disdain by the established Jewish population.<sup>20</sup>

Between mid-1989 and the end of 1991, 350,000 Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel. Some forty percent of them were highly-educated with degrees in medicine, pure science, architecture, mathematics, classical music, and the arts. Other new citizens included fencing masters, women chess champions, and at least one expert on chemical warfare. Most came

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<sup>18</sup> Buwalda 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> Tad Szulc, "The Great Soviet Exodus," *National Geographic Journal* vol. 181 no. 2 Feb. 1992: 46.

<sup>20</sup> Anna Isakova, "The Escape Valve Closes," *The Jerusalem Report* Viewpoint Section 12 Oct. 1998: 56.

as “lambs” and endured a traumatic initiation. Engineers cleaned stairwells; teachers cleaned apartments and houses; factory managers washed dishes in restaurants; lawyers pumped gas; surgeons worked as security guards; professors swept streets; and musicians performed in the streets for charity.

During that period, Israel had an unemployment rate of eleven percent and thirty-eight percent of the immigrants were unemployed. Desperate for work, “the Russians” took many jobs previously given to Palestinians, thus creating additional tensions in that already deeply-troubled region. At a community center in Jerusalem, an announcement in Russian appeared on the bulletin board: *Need ten men, full day, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Hard physical work. Salary: 1,500 shekels* (about U.S. \$650 monthly). The jobs were grabbed by men who had taught college or conducted scientific research in the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup>

In the larger cities where rents were very high and accommodations were in short supply, new *olim* shared living quarters. Sometimes as many as four families shared a one-bathroom apartment. To have more living space, many *olim* by-passed the overcrowded cities for the empty deserts of the north and south; and to the anger and consternation of Palestinians, some immigrants moved into the occupied territories. By late 1991, more than 4,000 Russians had joined approximately 120,000 Jewish settlers already living in the occupied territories; encouraged by a government for whom settlement-building was serving to validate a permanent claim to the lands in dispute since the 1967 war.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ted Szulc 49.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 56.

Soviet *olim*, visiting the Western Wall for the first time, saw hundreds of ultra-Orthodox Jewish men dressed in black, eyes squeezed shut, and hands quivering with religious fervour. At the same time, they observed heavily-armed police at the Western Wall plaza, more police at the entrance, and army sharpshooters on the roofs of the Jewish quarter. Jerusalem's Old City, with its monuments so sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, often seemed more like an armed military camp than a religious shrine.

From the moment the *olim* reached Israel, they were vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as are all Israelis. Sixty-two year old Bela Levitsky arrived from Russia with her son, Vladimir, in January 1991. Weeks later, she was stabbed to death as she walked down a Jerusalem street, by a Palestinian youth wielding a butcher knife. Rosa Elispor, who had emigrated from the Soviet Union seventeen years earlier was also killed in that rampage.<sup>23</sup>

New Russian-immigrant settlers felt more secure in the towns they were helping to build in the Occupied West Bank than in the large Israeli cities. One example is the town of Ariel, which sits in impregnable isolation north of Jerusalem, overlooking green Samaria (now Jordan). Neat white houses with red roofs stand in sharp contrast to the mostly-poor surrounding Arab villages. The *olim*, who in 1991 accounted for some fifteen percent of Ariel's population of 10,000 were attracted to the territories because there were more jobs and cheaper rentals.

In his conversations with *olim*, Tad Szulc, could detect no nationalistic or ideological zeal -- just pure pragmatism. No large immigration to Israel has been less ideological, less Jewishly aware, and less Jewish. Many Russian couples arrived in mixed-marriages where

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<sup>23</sup> Tad Szulc 59.

the gentile partner either had no intention to, or was reluctant to convert. This reluctance was partly a consequence of the rabbinate in Israel having become an ultra-Orthodox bastion insisting that potential converts lead Orthodox lives for at least two years before conversion. In part, this stemmed from the lack of *ulpanim* (conversion study centres). A more determined and courageous outreach effort, said some critics citing the liberal halakhic rulings invoked in the 1970s by the late Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, would have produced more converts. By 1997, conversion had become irrelevant to most non-Jewish immigrants. "Those who aren't Jewish don't feel a need to convert," said pollster Aharon Fein. "They discovered that they don't have to [convert]. Being Israeli is Jewish enough for them."<sup>24</sup>

In a move that triggered protests from former Soviet activist Natan Sharansky's Russian immigrant Party, *Yisrael ba-Aliyah*, the Ministry of the Interior began imposing greater selectivity on who was allowed into Israel. The Ministry became reluctant to grant citizenship to non-Jewish immigrants arriving from the former Soviet Union --even spouses. A spokesperson at the Ministry insisted that the Law of Return was being implemented fully and honestly, but acknowledged a crackdown on *the epidemic of fictitious marriages*. "We have to be careful. A lot of non-Jews want to move to this country. We have forged marriage certificates, forged passports, and forged Israeli visas. Lots of them."<sup>25</sup>

Israel's Ministry of Absorption figures (1997) put the number of potential immigrants from the FSU at 1,177,000, half of them in the Russian republic. The Jewish Agency had predicted the influx of immigrants from the FSU would top the million mark by the year

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<sup>24</sup> Netty C. Gross, "Judaism? No Thanks," The Jerusalem Report 15 Dec. 1997: 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 13.

2000. They are presently close to that number. Emigration from the FSU began declining in the mid-1990s, possibly because of renewed hope for Yeltsin's political reforms and optimism generated by the renewal of Jewish life. The worsening economy, internal political chaos, and a perception of increased anti-Semitism have caused the numbers to once again become significant. The final figures for 1999 indicated that 66,481 FSU Jews immigrated to Israel that year, a 45 percent increase over 1998. The number of Jews making *Aliyah* from Russia alone more than doubled to nearly 30,000.<sup>26</sup> With the potential of yet another mass Russian emigration looming, the small, overburdened Israeli state is beginning to reassess its capacity capabilities.

According to some of Israel's most prominent environmentalists, the country cannot afford to forge blindly ahead with its current annual 2.4 percent population growth. This annual increase, fueled by high birth rates (particularly among the ultra-Orthodox) and immigration, is pushing population density, currently 287 people per square kilometer, toward Japan's extremely-high number of 326 people. Discount the virtually uninhabited Negev desert, imagine borders shrinking as peace processes gather momentum, and you have the most densely-populated country in the Western world.<sup>27</sup>

Israel's road systems are congested, air pollution has exceeded permitted levels, green space has disappeared because of housing development, and water resources have fallen to grim lows. Because of compulsory military service, fear of terrorism, employment difficulties, and a myriad of social problems, especially those caused by the non-separation

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<sup>26</sup> Jewish Agency for Israel, Feb. 2000.

<sup>27</sup> P. Hirschberg, "Population Overload," The Jerusalem Report 3 Jan. 2000:16-17.

of church and state, a percentage of Israel's Russian immigrants reemigrate. According to R.F. Barsky (1996), only five percent of those who migrate to Israel from the FSU eventually leave the country, and most of these people do not consider themselves Jews, or else are in mixed marriages.<sup>28</sup>

Canada has been accepting reemigrating former Soviet Jews from Israel as independent immigrants and for family reunification purposes. There has also been the unsettling issue (to Canadian Jews) of former Soviet-Jews arriving in Canada via Israel as Convention Refugee claimants. The "refugees" choice of Canada must be considered in relation to Canada's dynamic neighbour to the South. Barsky (1996) suggested that "...for refugees from Israel, the reasons for choosing Canada were quite simple; they needed a visa for travel to the United States from Israel, but did not need a visa for travel from Israel to Canada; they feared U.S. racism and violence (often associated in their minds with the presence of a large Black population); and they felt that the 'calm' of Canadian life was better suited to their temperament."<sup>29</sup> Significantly, in October 1989, perhaps as part of a United States/Israel arrangement, new regulations had been imposed by the Americans denying Soviet Jews refugee status, thus restricting their influx into the United States. As a result, the proportion of Soviet immigration to Israel increased, which was followed by a proportionate increase in reemigration. In addition, in the first five months of 1991, about

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<sup>28</sup> Robert F. Barsky, "Refugees from Israel." Multiculturalism, Jews and Identities in Canada 1996:221.

<sup>29</sup> Barsky 257.

85 percent of Soviet-Jewish emigrants went to Israel, which suggests that Israel was a destination often chosen by default or necessity.<sup>30</sup>

In Israel, Canada was perceived as a country that was easy to enter. With the assistance of a Canadian lawyer, you could immigrate there; all you had to do was arrive at a Canadian airport and declare you were a refugee. Barsky (1996) explains that the very notion that Israel could generate *refugees* posed acute problems for Canadian Jews, who had been among the foremost defenders of refugees and human rights, as well as the state of Israel. Allowing themselves to get trapped in a human rights discussion that was affected by their own nationalist sentiments could undermine their position both morally and politically. In terms of Canadian-Jewish identity, outright and unquestioned support of Israel seems to imply that they are liberals only in so far as it does not affect their own identification with Israel as a democratic state.

Canadian multiculturalism, through this discussion, receives from the Russian-Israeli refugee-claimants themselves, on the one hand, a definition that emphasizes tolerance for various nationalities and religions without superimposing an overarching nationality or religion. On the other hand, it suggests another definition of Canadian multiculturalism: one that is revised because it can be subjected to the lobbies of nationalities and/or religions that bring their own biases; in this case, a traditionally most liberal group, Canadian Jews. This makes Canada a *soft* definer of persecution.

If Canada's Immigration Review Board chose to restrict all refugee applications from Israel, it would be commenting on previous decisions made in successful cases concerning

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<sup>30</sup> Barsky 257.

both Israelis and former Soviet citizens. It would be making a judgment that whole countries can be deemed “safe” -- an idea with dire consequences and somewhat ironic implications, considering the experiences that the Jews had in the twentieth century in apparently “safe” countries.<sup>31</sup>

#### TO CANADA DIRECTLY FROM THE USSR/CIS

As a positive response to Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost and the resultant opening up of Soviet society to the West, Canada’s relaxed criteria under which Soviet citizens had been admitted to Canada as refugees were removed. No longer received as refugees under the East European Designated Class, Soviet applicants could apply from within the Soviet Union, either as independent immigrants or through the family reunification programme. They could also come to Canada as refugees if they applied for resettlement from a country of first asylum.<sup>32</sup>

What we were seeing in Canada in the 1990s was primarily chain migration from the FSU in which immigrants were following relatives and friends already living in Canada. Why their forerunners emigrated was well-described in Markus and Schwartz (1984): socio-economic considerations, the desire for upward mobility, escape from the then officially-sanctioned and grassroots anti-Semitism, and an ethnic identity that limited career advancement. These authors emphasized that for most “the potential for enrichment through the enhancement of their Jewish ethnic identity was not a factor in their decision.” They chose Canada because it was a “peaceful” country.

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<sup>31</sup> Barsky 258-259.

<sup>32</sup> Basok and Brym 1991: xx.

Yaacov Glickman (1991) compared the reasons for leaving the Soviet Union and for choosing Canada in year 1978 with year 1991. He reported that his findings corroborated Markus and Schwartz's conclusions. Reasons for leaving the USSR and for choosing Canada appeared to have been based primarily on: a desire to improve economic conditions and life chances in general; being discriminated against in their country of origin; a desire to join relatives and friends; and the perception of Canada as a peaceful country. He concurred with Markus and Schwartz that there was "no clear and compelling reason (for either leaving the Soviet Union or choosing Canada) that would provide the basis for a strong identification with the Jewish community."<sup>33</sup>

The above-mentioned academics presented balanced information regarding the situation of the Jews in the USSR. They pointed to positive aspects of Soviet life, such as, availability of state-supported quality education, steady employment, subsidized apartments, free medical care and exposure to all aspects of high culture (less so in outlying and Muslim regions); but they were also compelled to report that Jewish life was built on shifting ground with anti-Semitism ebbing and waning depending on geography and circumstance.

It is necessary to consider the effects of the dark side of Communist society, endured by all the Soviet peoples over many generations, and understand that the Soviet Jews were part of this society. One must be careful not to suggest that the Jews were living separately as a *chosen people* inspired by some genetically-transmitted or religiously-inspired moral

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<sup>33</sup> Yaacov Glickman. "Russians in Canada: Threat to Identity or Promise of Renewal?" Multiculturalism, Jews and Identities in Canada 1996: 197.

and ethical code. To this end, I turn to Gregory Grossman's compelling presentation wherein he explained the nature and the causes of the Soviet economic collapse.

In his testimony to American Congressional committees on June 25, 1991, Grossman reminded his audience that it was only approximately one decade ago that Western observers could still seriously consider whether the global economic competition would eventually be won by the East:

Although the present economic condition in the FSU is indeed catastrophic, it has not been quite as unexpected as one might have assumed from appearances alone. In fact, the underlying forces of rot and ruin have been at work for decades, albeit concealed by the secretiveness of the dictatorial regime and the silence of an intimidated population (but for a relatively few dissidents). Among such long-term, corrosive trends one might mention the huge diversion of national resources to military and imperial ends; heedlessly wasteful depletion of natural and human reserves for economic growth and progress, combined with lags in civilian technological advance and improvement in quality; inability to feed the population without massive imports; enormous physical degradation and contamination of the environment with major effects on human health; growing sclerosis of the centralized system of economic planning and governance, aggravated by rigid price-wage controls and monetary mismanagement; steady growth of a large underground economy intimately linked with widespread official corruption and (with time) major organized crime; deterioration of work incentives and work morale, not to say initiative, enterprise (except in the underground), and sense of responsibility. And consequent steady retardation of economic growth [with] actual decline. One could extend this dismal list of the underlying factors (not to mention the political, social and ethnic ones) that have been propelling the Soviet economy for decades towards its historic moment of deep crisis.<sup>34</sup>

I am not suggesting that former Soviet Jews, now living in Israel, the United States,

Canada, Australia and Germany, had wielded great political clout in the USSR, or were in

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<sup>34</sup> Part of statement by Professor Gregory Grossman (Berkeley) at the Joint Hearing of the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives and of the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress, June 25, 1991. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky 1993: 604.

policy-making positions, nor am I insinuating they were corrupt. They did, however, learn to swim in Soviet waters, and many enjoyed career success and pleasant lifestyles. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to expect that these immigrants bring to Canada, and other receiving countries, in addition to limited language skills and modest resources (this research does not focus on wealthy immigrants), their ambition, drive and intelligence. More remarkable, I would suggest, are their formidable Soviet-learned survival skills.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS**  
**FOR FORMER SOVIET JEWRY**  
**IN TORONTO**

The term "Independent" immigrants would suggest that the Russian Jews are able to be self-reliant upon arrival in Canada. This is hardly accurate. Fact -- they have some financial resources when they arrive from Israel; or they have been assured of financial support from sponsoring relatives when they arrive directly from the FSU; or they receive financial assistance from the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada, if they enter under their auspices. Fact -- they may have been alerted in the FSU or Israel that finding employment could be a problem in Canada, but they have chosen to disregard these warnings and be *optimistic*. Fact -- many would-be immigrants convince Canadian Immigration officers that they have a workable knowledge of English, having memorized appropriate answers to anticipated interview questions.

The immigrants sell most of their assets before leaving the FSU or Israel. Before entering Canada, they must pay for family emigration documents, Canadian immigration lawyers' fees, Canadian Immigration entry fees, airline tickets and travel expenses. In Toronto, they must find temporary living accommodation while searching for affordable housing, pay first and last month's rent, purchase furniture, plus pay many other necessary resettlement expenses. If they cannot find employment, their modest resources quickly become depleted, and it becomes necessary to seek financial assistance. To add to the stress, relatives of unemployed Russian immigrants often start to resent the ongoing financial burden of the newcomers they have sponsored.

Learning to navigate in Toronto, finding an apartment, registering the children in school, registering the adults in English as a Second Language classes, seeking employment and beginning the acculturation process are early priorities. The hard reality is that many Russians have difficulty finding jobs because their English is deemed inadequate; their work credentials are not accepted by Canadian licensing bodies; no work is available in their fields of specialization; and they do not know how to be proactive about seeking alternative employment. The immigrant families then move into a state of crisis. The good news is that, by this time, most newcomers have made personal contacts within the Russian-Jewish immigrant community. New and sometimes rediscovered Russian friends, better-established and more familiar with the system, direct the traumatized immigrants to appropriate government agencies and Jewish social services.

It is important to assess and reassess the effectiveness of the assistance being rendered the Russian Jewish immigrants. A considerable amount of money is being budgeted on their behalf. Money for governmental assistance is acquired through taxation of Canadian citizens; money for Jewish social services is received partly from government and partly from social taxation in the form of voluntary donations from within the Jewish community. Aside from their fiscal responsibility, the professional responsibilities of the helping agencies are huge. It is not only important to attempt to help immigrants in crisis, it is important that the immigrants perceive that they have, in fact, been helped.

There is the sense among Toronto-Jews that “the Russians” are arriving with great wealth; wealth acquired through suspect activities in the former Soviet Union. True, there are Russian immigrants [Jews and non-Jews] entering Canada that have accumulated

considerable wealth, and have somehow been able to redirect this wealth to the West. True, there are Russian immigrants who drive late model cars, and wear designer clothes with expensive gold jewellery. True, they can be found enjoying themselves in restaurants and late-night clubs in Thornhill and Markham. True, they are purchasing *big* houses, and rumour has it that *they are paying cash*. However, these immigrants are not the subjects of this study. They may or may not be of interest to certain Canadian government agencies, but they are surely not of concern to Toronto's Social Services Division and its "Ontario Works" programme, nor of other Jewish social services.

### **JEWISH IMMIGRANT AID SERVICES OF CANADA**

Through the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s, the United Jewish Appeal Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto (UJA/Federation) along with core volunteers, evaluated the need for improved co-ordinated services on behalf of arriving Soviet Jewry. There was a sense of urgency because large numbers of Jews from Russia and other member nations of the newly-established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were expected to leave for Israel. A reemigration of a small percentage of Russian Jews from Israel to Canada was anticipated. As well, a number of immigrants were expected to arrive in Canada directly from the FSU, the majority of whom would be entering under Citizenship Immigration Canada's (CIC) family reunification programme.

It was decided that JIAS would be directly responsible for the ongoing resettlement and integration of former Soviet Jews (as well as other Jewish immigrant groups). JIAS's growing awareness that their services in the 1970s and 1980s did not adequately address the acculturation needs of new immigrants resulted in fundamental changes in the 1990s, with

new programmes in place to promote and facilitate the integration of newcomers into the Jewish community. By 1992, JIAS Toronto employed twelve staff, including five Russian-speaking social workers.

The celebration of JIAS Canada's seventy-fifth anniversary in the Fall of 1997 occasioned a comparison of the agency's goals in 1922 to their goals in 1997. The following are excerpts from the Charter of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada granted August 13, 1922, which conferred on JIAS the responsibility,

- a. To facilitate the lawful entry of Jewish immigrants at various ports of Canada
- b. To provide them with temporary shelter, food, clothing and such other aid
- c. To prevent them becoming public charges by helping them to obtain employment
- d. To maintain bureaus of information and to publish literature on the industrial, agricultural, and commercial status of the country
- e. To encourage them to follow agricultural pursuits
- f. To take proper measures to prevent ineligible persons from immigrating to Canada
- g. To raise money by appeals to the public for subscription and by the collection of like annual membership fees

It would appear from the original Charter that in 1922 JIAS played an immigrant-screening role and was empowered in areas that later became exclusively the responsibility of government. Agricultural pursuits were encouraged in the Charter. In Russia and Eastern Europe, pre-1918, few Jews worked as farm labourers. Most were peddlers, hawkers, small shopkeepers, small-scale manufacturers (clothing, footwear), and artisans employed in these workshops. After 1918, if a Jew was willing to change his class position and forego Jewish nationalism, there were economic opportunities in agriculture, factory work, and white-collar occupations. According to the Russian census of 1926, nine percent of the Jewish workforce was engaged in agriculture, up from just over two percent in 1897.<sup>1</sup> One can surmise that

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<sup>1</sup> Zaslavsky and Brym 1983.

pre-Depression Canada needed farm labourers, and Jews were allowed into Canada under certain conditions of employment which JIAS was expected to monitor.

Seventy years later, in April of 1992, JIAS's Board of Directors approved the undertaking of the following activities:

- Education and advocacy with the Jewish community to generate understanding and support of JIAS principles, policies and programmes.
- Education and advocacy to influence immigration laws, policies and practices to ensure that Canada's doors are open.
- Establishment of support systems to help those seeking migration to Canada to gain access to the full range of advisory and legal resources.

To ensure successful resettlement and integration, JIAS recognized the following necessities:

- Resettlement programmes meet the basic financial, social, legal requirements of immigrants
- JIAS provide initial integration services in an intensive form that includes English/French language training, orientation to secular and Jewish communities, job readiness, Judaica and psycho-social support.
- Local communities accept the challenge of receiving and integrating newcomers.

In comparison to their original Charter, JIAS had broadened its responsibilities in two principal areas: as an advocate on behalf of immigrants for support from the government and the wider Jewish community; and as a first-line support system for the immigrants' integration into the local Jewish community.<sup>2</sup>

In the fiscal year 1997-1998, JIAS Canada (national office) aided 665 families, or nearly 1,600 individuals in ten Canadian cities, excluding Montreal and Toronto. Although the bulk of JIAS-assisted arrivals came from Russia and the former Soviet republics, the

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon D. Zeiler, Executive Director, JIAS Toronto. Telephone Interview. 30 Nov. 1998.

agency was also seeing an increase in immigration from South America, particularly Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo. JIAS operates local offices in Toronto and Montreal and their numbers are calculated separately. The cities for which JIAS provides services outside Montreal and Toronto are: Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Windsor, Halifax and St. John's. JIAS also provided services that same fiscal year in Kitchener, Ontario, Lethbridge, Alberta and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. This means that immigrants are settling outside the larger centers. JIAS's Toronto office aided 650 immigrant families in 1997-98 and Montreal's office aided 556.<sup>3</sup>

This level of new arrivals to the community is expected to continue for the next few years. JIAS's numbers indicate that sixty percent of the cases arrive in the Independent category, twenty-five percent in the Family Class category, ten percent as Refugees, and the remaining five percent as Minister Permits and other special categories.

**JIAS TORONTO OFFERS THE FOLLOWING SERVICES TO IMMIGRANTS:**

- Information and Referral -- housing, education, medical, government services, Jewish Community Services
- Settlement and Adaptation Counselling
- Immigration Consulting
- Family and Individual Counselling
- Cultural Programming
- Used Furniture Project
- Volunteer Income Tax Clinic
- Orientation to the Jewish Community
- Notary Public Services
- Community Integration Programme

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Csillag. "Five percent more families helped by JIAS in 1997-1998," The Canadian Jewish News 16 July 1998:21.

**THE JIAS INTEGRATION PROGRAMME IS MADE UP OF:**

English As A Second Language  
 Judaica Studies  
 Psych-Social Support Groups  
 Vocational Counselling<sup>4</sup>

**LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR FORMER SOVIET JEWS**

**ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

In 1989, due to the influx of Russian Jewish new immigrants to Toronto, a single-class pilot ESL programme was started. In 1990, the programme was expanded to three, and later, six classes were funded by the North York Board of Education. The ESL teachers were paid by the North York Board of Education, and classroom rental space was provided (donated) by Jewish synagogue facilities and organizations such as B'nai B'rith.

In 1992-1993, Citizenship and Immigration Canada asked for proposals for a new programme called LINC. All social service agencies were eligible to apply. Boards of Education were not eligible to apply without a social service partner. Since JIAS had been working with North York, they decided to apply for LINC funding as partners. JIAS then expanded its program to ten classes. Some of the classes were funded by LINC through the North York Board of Education for only Landed immigrants or Convention Refugees. Other classes continued to be funded by the NYBE for Refugee claimants and citizens as well as Landed immigrants.

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<sup>4</sup> Celebrating Our Heritage: JIAS Toronto 75 Anniversary Community Heritage Book  
 Robin Packard ed. (Toronto: JIAS of Canada, 1997) 64.

In 1993-1994, JIAS Toronto submitted its own LINC grant proposal and was funded independent of the NYBE. Thus JIAS Toronto started to run two ESL programmes; one funded directly by LINC for Landed immigrants, and the other through the NYBE offered to Refugee claimants as well as Landed immigrants.

In 1999-2000, JIAS Toronto is still running two programmes: eleven LINC classes funded by Citizenship Immigration Canada (CIC), and nine classes funded by the recently-established Toronto District School Board. UJA/Federation does not pay for ESL classes; this is a stand-alone project. The classes are offered free-of-charge to all eligible students. JIAS selects the sites for both programmes. The TDSB pays for teachers' salaries and materials only; they do not pay for rent; JIAS Toronto selects the sites and uses donated space for these classes; LINC pays rent for the space they use.

These classes are not limited to Russian Jews. They are offered to all Jewish new immigrants. Some of the students come from South America as well as Hungary, Romania, and other Eastern European countries. There are other organizations that offer classes to Russian Jewish students in Toronto, including the Toronto District School Board independent of the JIAS programme.

JIAS Toronto allows students to stay in its "New Beginnings" programme (LINC and TDSB) for up to one year, depending upon the students' needs. It recommends other programmes to the students, if needed, but encourages them to seek employment as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ms. Roslyne Greenberg, JIAS Toronto, ESL coordinator, letter Dec. 7, 1999. Ms. Greenberg has been ESL coordinator for ten years.

### **INTEGRATION/SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME**

An assessment of the functional needs of each individual client family is conducted by a JIAS Toronto social worker i.e. financial requirements, housing, school, etc. The individual social worker is always available to meet with and counsel the family on a one-to-one basis as the need arises. Regular monthly contact is also maintained. After the initial assessment, all clients are placed in a five-month Integration Programme.

A group counselling model is used as the main vehicle of service. This model fits the immigrant population. They are a homogeneous group with similar problems and concerns, namely, emotional adjustment to a new environment, culture, etc. The Family Life Education group model is most suitable since it combines an information-sharing format with the use of supportive group dynamic techniques. Each group has fifteen to twenty participants which allows a small-group atmosphere, which is intensive in nature, meets weekly, and moves through four modules during the five-month session. Clients stay in their "group" throughout the programme, which facilitates the building of a natural client-based support group. There is a "graduation ceremony" on completion of the programme.

### **JEWISH VOCATIONAL SERVICES OF GREATER TORONTO**

This agency, which marked its 50th anniversary in 1997, has come a long way since the post-war years when it was preoccupied with finding work, chiefly in the needle trade, for war veterans and newly-arrived Holocaust survivors. The Jewish Vocation Service of Greater Toronto was founded by the Jewish community in 1947, and while continuing to serve the Jewish community, it has expanded its programmes and services to meet the educational and vocational needs of all residents of Toronto. Currently, JVS provides a

range of educational and vocational services and programmes through Rehabilitation Services, the Educational Counselling Service, the Career and Employment Counselling Centre, and the Job Placement Centre.<sup>6</sup>

JVS receives most of its funding from the public purse. Three levels of government contribute: Metropolitan Toronto Community Services Department; Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, Human Resources Development Canada, as well as the United Way of Greater Toronto, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto. Because it receives public money, the agency cannot cater exclusively to Jewish clients. Approximately one-third of the 10,000 clients served in 1998 were Jewish. At last count, JVS offered thirty-three programmes and services, with more planned. These encompass traditional job searching; help for new immigrants, including those needing training and re-training; career planning; computer-skills upgrading for foreign professionals; and skills evaluation. Some programmes are offered in conjunction with other communal agencies, such as Jewish Family and Child Service, Reena, and Jewish Immigrant Aid Services.<sup>7</sup>

JVS offers a programme called "Newcomers to Canada" -- four evening job-search workshops, four hours each for a total of sixteen hours. The workshops include:

- Introduction to the Canadian labour market
- How to Research Companies and Tap into the Hidden Job Market
- Identification of Marketable skills
- Access to Job-Matching Services
- Development of a Return to Work Action Plan

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<sup>6</sup> Jewish Vocation Services of Greater Toronto, on-line, [www.pathcom.com/~jvstor/homepage.html](http://www.pathcom.com/~jvstor/homepage.html), February 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Ron Csillag, "Youth, women, priorities for new JVS director" The Canadian Jewish News 26 August 1999: 7.

- Writing targeted Resumés and Cover Letters
- Telephone Communication

This programme is funded by Citizenship & Immigration Canada and is free to Convention Refugees and Landed Immigrants, who have clear job goals and are willing to engage and actively participate in the job search process.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1999, JVS North had two full-time Russian-speaking Employment Counsellors working to help Jewish immigrants from the FSU to find positions.

### **JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD SERVICE**

For more than 125 years, the emotional, social and physical needs of Toronto's Jewish community have been served by Jewish Family and Child Service. JF&CS evolved from a tradition of communal charitable caring dating from the founding of the Ladies' Benevolent Fund of Toronto in 1868. A non-profit agency, JF&CS is comprised of more than 100 committed staff, including social workers, child care workers, family life educators, therapists and counsellors, foster parents and some 900 volunteers.

Services are offered for every age, social and economic background. Many of the services are available in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian and French, reflecting the changing face of the Jewish community. As a Children's Aid Society, JF&CS protects the well-being of all Jewish children in need in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). They are also sensitive and responsive to the ever-changing needs of the GTA's approximately 160,000 strong Jewish community. Although the agency remains firmly rooted in the traditions and experiences of the Jewish people, many of their services are non-sectarian.

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<sup>8</sup> Pamphlet, Resource Centre, JVS North, 1280 Finch Ave. West, Toronto, Feb. 1999.

JF&CS offers assistance to anyone who is experiencing difficulty in handling day-to-day problems of living in the community. Their social workers are sensitive to Jewish values and traditions, and are trained for individual, marital, family and group counselling. The staff are caring professionals with degrees in the mental health field. Consultants to the staff include psychiatrists, psychologists, rabbis, and legal personnel. Volunteers are involved in many areas.

JF&CS is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto, United Way and client fees. Client counselling fees are geared to income. Nobody is denied service due to an inability to pay.

The agency's services fall into three areas: Child and Youth Services, Family and Rehabilitation Services and Community Services.

### CHILD AND YOUTH SERVICES

JF&CS is the lifeline for children at risk in the Jewish community. The agency offers personalized services to support, strengthen and rehabilitate families while promoting child protection, nurturing and growth within the home.

These services include:

- Protection for abused or neglected children
- A day treatment programme for adolescents with emotional and/or behavioural problems
- Foster care
- Group placement
- Adoption services
- Family support for families with special needs children
- Big Brother/Sister programme
- Respite care offering short-term care for children with special needs

## REHABILITATION AND FAMILY SERVICES

JF&CS deals with issues such as family violence, poverty and unemployment, problems of aging and disabilities, the changing roles of men and women. These services include:

- Counselling -- individual, marital and family
- Financial assistance
- Rehabilitation and support
- Group therapy
- Residence of ex-psychiatric patients
- Family violence services, including a shelter for abused women and children
- *Picking Up The Pieces* for children of separation and divorce
- Jewish hospice
- Information and referral services
- Multilingual Access programme

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

JF&CS is an active community participant creating outreach services which identify and meet dynamic needs within the community setting. These include:

- Direct Service volunteers
- Chaplaincy services for the more than 1,200 Jewish residents in health care facilities and penal institutions
- Adolescent Outreach Project
- Hebrew and Russian outreach projects
- Social work services for day schools
- Family life workshops which address a broad spectrum of issues
- *Just A Second Shop* allowing community members to purchase new and gently used clothing with dignity
- Speakers' Bureau<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Information Pamphlets, Main Office, JF&CS, 4600 Bathurst St., Toronto, 5 Nov. 1998.

### **JEWES FOR JUDAISM**

Jews for Judaism, often referred to as the “Jewish 911,” was established as a non-profit organization in 1983 in the United States, and now has offices in Los Angeles, Baltimore, New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago and Johannesburg, South Africa. The Canadian branch opened in Toronto in 1989, and it is now the official source of information on missionary-related issues for the Canadian Jewish Congress. Jews for Judaism responds to the aggressive missionizing of the Jewish community by evangelical groups, many of whom camouflage their activities with a Jewish veneer. It is estimated that there are more than 300 Messianic synagogues in North America. More than 250,000 Jews worldwide have been converted by this new form of Christian evangelism.<sup>10</sup>

On January 6, 1998, Jews for Judaism moved its new Canadian headquarters next door to the City of David Messianic Synagogue, a Hebrew-Christian missionary church. This was in reaction to the City of David having located in a large shopping plaza [Main Exchange Plaza at Bathurst Street and Steeles Avenue West in Thornhill] in the heart of the fastest-growing Jewish population centre in Canada and the heart of the Russian Jewish community.<sup>11</sup>

Jews for Judaism claims that there are over 50 missionary groups in Canada, with over 40 of them in the Toronto area; that they target alienated, assimilated or elderly Jews, who are ignorant of their own heritage; and that they employ sophisticated and deceptive

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<sup>10</sup> “Jews for Judaism Opens New Counter-Missionary Centre Adjacent to the City of David Missionary Church,” Edmonton Jewish Life 15 January - 15 February, 1998: 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 23.

new techniques, frequently disguising Christianity with token Jewish symbols and practices in order to attract Jewish converts. A deceptive format is often used in which the Gospel is preached by pastors, who call themselves “Messianic Rabbis,” and who wear skullcaps and prayer shawls at “Shabbat” and “High Holiday” services. Jews for Judaism claims that they misquote, mistranslate, and misinterpret Jewish scriptures and rabbinical texts to substantiate their claim that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah; and that their recruits become convinced that they are not complete as Jews until they accept Jesus as the Messiah. Instead of calling themselves Christians, most Jewish converts to Christianity refer to themselves as Messianic Jews, Hebrew Christians, or Jews for Jesus, and to their Christian faith as Messianic Judaism.<sup>12</sup>

In their attempt to make Christianity more acceptable to Jews, many missionary groups have renamed their church buildings calling them Messianic Synagogues. Devoid of Christian symbols, they often have an Ark, Torah scroll, Star of David, and other Jewish symbols. Hebrew is used in the prayer service and Jesus is referred to as *Yeshua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah). This misrepresentation allows prospective Jewish converts to feel little of the guilt that normally accompanies conversion by a Jew to Christianity.

Jews for Judaism's primary goals are providing counter-missionary education programmes which instill a greater appreciation of, and commitment to, Jewish beliefs and

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<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Michael Skobac and Julius Ciss, “Finally, the answer to missionaries who target Jews” Pamphlet (Toronto: Jews for Judaism, 1998).

values; and winning back those Jews who have been influenced by Christian missionaries.

They achieve these goals through the following programmes and activities:

- Exit counselling
- Family crisis counselling
- Lectures and classes
- Speakers' bureau
- College campus programmes
- Audio and video tapes
- Books and literature
- Television and radio programmes
- Advertising campaigns
- *Russian outreach*
- Outreach to Hebrew Christians
- Newsletter
- Shabbat hospitality
- Resource library and archives
- 24-hour hotline
- Monitoring missionary activity
- Counter-leafleting Jews for Jesus missionaries on streets<sup>13</sup>

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, missionaries had their sights on Russian immigrants at transit centers in Italy and upon their arrival in North America and Israel. Offering ESL (English as a Second Language) programmes, financial assistance, and friendship, evangelical groups found that spiritually-starved Russian Jews with little or no Jewish education were easy prey. By 1990, there were about a dozen "Hebrew Christian" congregations catering exclusively to Soviet Jews in North America and several in Israel. With the advent of *glasnost* and the subsequent opening up of the Soviet Union, North American missionary organizations realized that they could take their conversionary programmes directly to the Jewish people in the former Soviet Union.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid 1998.

The first missions visited the larger Soviet cities during Passover, 1990. Since then, there has been a full-scale missionary effort. Hoping to convert as many Jews as possible should the doors close again, several Hebrew-Christian organizations established full-time branches in the major population centres of the CIS. In 1995, there was one Hebrew-Christian bible school training over one hundred Russian students to proselytize within Jewish communities. One evangelical organization from Rochester, New York has been running large Hebrew-Christian music and outreach festivals for several years and claims to have converted 17,000 Jews.<sup>14</sup>

Jews for Judaism considers former Soviet Jews living in the Greater Toronto Area a high-risk community, because they are very vulnerable to proselytizers who offer them community and friendship.

### **AISH HATORAH**

Aish HaTorah's large, recently-opened (1996) centre is located in the heart of the Orthodox Jewish community at 949 Clarke Avenue West, Thornhill. Aish's primary agenda in Toronto is to bring non-affiliated young-adult Jews back to Judaism through classroom and grass-roots activism. The centre houses administrative offices, classrooms, activity areas, and a small synagogue (200). Funding for this building was provided by a small group of supportive Toronto-Jewish families. Russell Myers is the Associate Director of Aish HaTorah's Russian Program in Canada. He explained,

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<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Michael Skobac, "To Russia with Love: Rescuing Russian Jews," Lifeline Magazine vol. 1 (Toronto: Jews for Judaism, 1995) 3.

Aish HaTorah's Russian Program was founded in 1992 to educate, support and offer solidarity to Jews in the Former Soviet Union, most of whom were spiritually devastated by the communist regime. Aish HaTorah means the fire of the Torah. Aish means fire. We are re-igniting the fire of the Torah; rekindling the flame. We are inspiring that spark of Jewishness in the Russian Jews that we know exists, but after eighty years was almost extinguished.<sup>15</sup>

With headquarters in Jerusalem, the Russian Program is active all over Israel, educating Russians immigrants about Judaism through seminars, radio shows, weekly newspaper articles and more. The Russian Program has twelve branches in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus and runs programs in twenty cities in the FSU.

They have had considerable success in finding motivated and gifted young Russian people, who have been molded into committed Jewish leaders. A high priority is given to bringing these Russian students to study at Aish Hatorah's World Centre in Jerusalem, so that they can return to Russia as teachers who will carry on Aish's outreach program.

Aish's program encourages Russian Jews to move to Israel and supports them after they have made *aliyah*. Through *Aviv* (started in 1994), a social action and educational organization for Russian immigrants (active in 29 cities in Israel), legal, medical and personal services are offered to ease the immigrants' adjustment. Aish reaches out to unaffiliated, unknowledgeable Jews all over the world using ordained rabbis from Aish's *yeshivahs* (Orthodox religious educational centres for men) in Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup>

Efrim Svirsky, Education Director of the Aish HaTorah Russian Program in Jerusalem, visited Toronto in the Fall of 1998 to teach a "Discovery" seminar [see Myers

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<sup>15</sup> Russell Myers. Personal Interview. 6 January 1999.

<sup>16</sup> "Aish HaTorah Russian Program," Information Kit . January, 1999.

interview] to 200 Russian Jews who had signed up for the event. Sponsored by the philanthropic Dan family of Toronto, the seminar was received with much enthusiasm by the participants who, after learning that Svirsky would be in Toronto for an additional two weeks, asked for follow-up programs. Using the Jewish Community Centre on north Bathurst Street, Svirsky taught two seminars, "Torah and Psychology," and "Where Was G-d During the Holocaust?" There were over 150 Russian participants at each seminar ranging in age from 20 to 60. A number of Russian English-language teachers, who had participated in the "Discovery" seminar, arranged for Svirsky to teach classes on Judaism to their students.<sup>17</sup>

The success of these seminars indicated that when Jewish education is presented in the Russian language at a convenient time and place, in an intellectual format, a respectable number of Russian Jewish immigrants will attend. Russell Myers, Associate Director of the Russian Program in Canada, has acknowledged that there is a need for Jewish-education programs for Russian immigrants in Toronto, particularly Russian youth. He admitted that the local (Toronto) program had been slow to start due to lack of adequate funding and insufficient Russian-speaking teachers.<sup>18</sup>

### **JEWISH RUSSIAN COMMUNITY CENTRE OF TORONTO (JRCC)**

It was a case of the rabbi pursuing the scientist. The rabbi's goal was to reach every Russian Jew in the city -- those immigrants from the former Soviet Union who knew nothing about Judaism. The physicist's goal was to escape the rabbi and all his talk about the Torah, the importance of Jewish holidays,

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<sup>17</sup> Newsletter. Jerusalem: Aish HaTorah Russian Program, Fall 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Russell Myers. Telephone Interview. 18 May 1999.

his offers to place a *mezuzah* [a parchment inscribed with religious text] on the doorpost.

“He persistently tried to hook me -- to come and listen, to attend classes. I resisted. What could it do for me? I am a physicist. What would I do in a synagogue?” asked Arkady Ulitsky. Today, Ulitsky is a devout Jew. He goes to synagogue every day, observes the Sabbath, keeps a Kosher household, wears a *yarmulke* (skullcap) and other articles of faith. And next week he will join with others in the Russian Jewish community to celebrate Passover, the eight-day festival that commemorates the exodus of the Jews from Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Yoseph Y. Zaltzman, spiritual leader of the growing Jewish Russian Community Centre, was born in Moscow in 1956. His family had been Lubavitch Hassidim for generations, and young Yoseph studied at an underground Yeshiva until 1971. That year, at age fifteen, his family emigrated from the USSR and the young man continued his studies at the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, New Jersey. In 1979, he received his rabbinical ordination at the Central Lubavich Yeshiva, Crown Heights, New York. He then pursued post-rabbinical studies at the Kolel Avrichim in Brooklyn, NY. In 1981, upon completion of his studies, Rabbi Zaltzman was sent to Toronto by the revered Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson [since diseased and not yet replaced], at the request of Rabbi Z.A. Grossbaum from Chabad Lubavitch of Ontario for a spiritual leader for the Russian Jewish immigrant population. Rabbi Zaltzman assumed the position of *shaliach* [emissary] of the Lubavitch Rebbe to a community comprised of over 2,000 families residing in the Greater Toronto Area and nearby suburbs. To serve their

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<sup>19</sup> Leslie Scrivener, “Turning to Judaism after the dark years,” The Toronto Star Life Section 27 March 1999: L1-L2.

multifaceted needs, Rabbi Zaltzman founded the Jewish Russian Community Centre of Toronto.<sup>20</sup>

In 1986, when Rabbi Zaltzman realized his rapidly-growing community badly needed its own centre, he initiated an ambitious fund-raising drive to acquire and convert an old Ontario Hydro sub-generator station into a community centre/synagogue. Since then, thousands of Russian newcomers to Toronto have come to the centre, located at 18 Rockford Road, in the heart of the Russian Jewish community. They come seeking a helping hand, guidance and understanding.

Whether it be bar mitzvah lessons, a wedding ceremony, a *brit milah* (ritual circumcision), programmes for Seniors, Talmud Torah classes (Hebrew school), *mezuzahs* for the doorposts, lessons in *Kashruth* (Jewish dietary laws), funeral, shiva or unveiling arrangements, or the retelling of the stories in the *Chumash or Talmud* (Old Testament), the JRCC was there to meet each individual or family need and interest.<sup>21</sup>

Twenty-five-year old Rabbi Levi Jacobson, the first director of the Centre for Judaic Studies, located in the JRCC building, arrived in the autumn of 1998 from venues more exotic than Toronto. He had been coordinating adult Jewish education and outreach programmes in Sweden, Finland, Alaska, Greece and Shanghai -- a testament to Lubavitch's global reach. Rabbi Jacobson has stated that he is acting on a principle learned from the late

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<sup>20</sup> Biographical information sheet provided by Rabbi Levi Jacobson, JRCC, January, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Brochure, Jewish Russian Community Centre of Toronto, January 1999.

Rebbe Schneerson, "The Rebbe used to say that either you can put on a fur coat to warm yourself while everyone else freezes, or you can build a fire."<sup>22</sup>

As part of ongoing efforts and programmes for preserving and promoting Judaism, the JRCC offers classes for adults of all ages -- from beginner to advanced -- in Torah study, Jewish mysticism (kabbalah), Torah law, women's studies, Moshiach (resurrection of the dead) and the Hebrew language. There are special events and lectures on topics concerning Jewish thought, Shabbatons, children's programs, and more.<sup>23</sup>

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Irene Belozersky (1990), clinical social worker, has reported that immigration with its accompanying feelings of uprootedness and numerous losses is a powerful stressor, disrupting the functioning of even the strongest individuals and families.<sup>24</sup> Adjustment to a new society takes the form of a spectrum of physical and emotional reactions: from initial euphoria and idealization to confusion, anxiety, anger, depression and illness. For Jews, as for other immigrants from former Communist countries, transplantation to North America can be especially difficult because of the great differences between their old and new social systems. Usually only the worst cases of negative adjustment reaction come to the attention

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<sup>22</sup> Ron Csillag. "New Education Director at JRCC" The Canadian Jewish News, 12 November 1998: 6.

<sup>23</sup> Brochure, "Windows of the Soul" JRCC Fall 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Irene Belozersky, JF&CS, Boston, "New Beginnings, Old Problems: Psychocultural Frame of Reference and Family Dynamics During the Adjustment Period" Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service. Philadelphia, 4 June 1990.

of caseworkers in resettlement agencies. This does not imply that those who did not seek or receive professional help were having an easy period of adjustment.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to consider, when analyzing the Russian-Jewish interviews, [see Appendix II] that the immigrants' recollections or non-recollections of the quality and effectiveness of efforts on their behalf by JIAS Toronto, as well as other support services, is coloured by the stress and anxiety they were experiencing at the time of receiving these services. It has been pointed out that people, once they have become settled, tend to forget or block out bad times; in particular, times when they were in need of practical assistance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Irene Belozersky 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Betty Steinhauer, Telephone interview, Toronto 5 Dec. 1998.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CANADIAN INTERVIEWS

*This chapter includes excerpts from the ten Canadian interviews. Because these interviews are available in their entirety in Appendix I, I have selected comments and criticisms that, I believe, are most interesting. Each interview is unique, therefore, each is presented in a slightly different format to allow for optimal readability. The thesis topic, post-Soviet Jewry in Toronto, deals with a subject that is very current and can be regarded as historical only in the sense that it was necessary to juxtaposition the Jewish experience in Canada alongside the Jewish experience in the Soviet Union. A ten-year perspective [1989-1999] is a short-term perspective. The story of the former Soviet Jews in Canada is still unfolding. The interviews do, however, reinforce previous scholarly work, as well as offer some new "food for thought." No doubt, the relevance of these interviews will be better assessed in the future...with the benefit of hindsight.*

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**Ben Prossin, Jewish National Fund (JNF)** had been involved with Soviet Jewry issues "for a few years" before he became Director of the *Toronto Committee for Soviet Jewry* (1987 to 1990). "It was an interesting transition period -- from the really rough stuff, to when we knew the gates were opening, until the gates were opened." He described the Soviet-Jewish issue as, "*a chicken bone choking the throat of Russian diplomacy,*" and credited Gorbachev with freeing the Soviet Jews. Prossin explained that although he was involved in the struggle to free Soviet Jews, he was not involved in resettlement issues.

He talked about the "built-in sense of responsibility for other Jews that has been part

of the character of Toronto's Jewish community since its inception...a record that goes back nearly a century." Prossin stated that the Jewish population of Toronto "about 175,000" was expecting to raise [through UJA Federation] approximately 41 million dollars in 1999; as compared to Los Angeles's Jewish population of 519,000 which was expecting to raise 42 million dollars.

When the thesis topic was explained to him, Prossin suggested I speak with a former Soviet immigrant, who had successfully integrated and was currently active on the Board of Directors of JIAS Toronto. "You should speak to him. He knows it from both sides; from the establishment side, of which he is now a part, and from the immigrant's side." I wondered if this Russian individual was an anomaly in his community.

When I brought up the subject of negative stereotyping of the Russian-Jewish immigrants, Prossin hesitated, then asked if I had heard negative comments from people in the Jewish community. When I answered affirmatively, he reluctantly admitted, "Well...there have been some problems," and became defensive, "They are also very hard working... as is every immigrant group...trying to send their kids to school...." When I told him that I was hearing comments from Toronto Jews, such as, "[They are] a bunch of crooks," Prossin replied, "Jews are human beings too. They can stereotype as well as anybody else."

We discussed the stereotyping of earlier immigrant communities [Italians and Irish]. Prossin then called his [Canadian Jewish] secretary into the office, explaining that her home was in the midst of the Russian-Jewish ghetto. He asked her, "What do you think of the Russian immigrants who have come to Canada in the last ten years?" The secretary

responded vehemently, "Don't ask me that question! I don't like it...because they are taking away jobs that my sons can have...and they are taking away money that my sons should be getting.... I think they are very rude. They think they own the world...and you have to see them at garage sales...they are even worse! They are not what my parents were when they came to Canada! They dress to kill...they do...but they cry poverty. They go anywhere they can for money, and they get it! When you are coming into a foreign country, you should be thankful that you are here...and be very grateful for what you are getting!"

After the angry secretary departed, Prossin acknowledged that, "Some people find them so; but I think they have to be recognized as individuals."

Prossin explained that JNF's mandate in Israel was environmental concerns, tourist sites, lakes and forests, and that all monies raised in Canada [less administration costs] were sent to Israel. He was proud that JNF supported Soviet immigrants in Israel by hiring almost 3000 immigrants a year to do manual labour in the forests, etc., helping the local workforce.

We discussed Russian reemigration from Israel to Canada, and Jewish community objections in this regard. "I am a Zionist and I work for Israel...but I am not as vehement [against Russian reemigration] as others. I think people should be allowed to be happy. If they feel unhappy on financial terms, or social terms, or cultural terms... [let them leave]. Some want to enlarge their universe. If a family decides they want to do that [leave], I believe they should have freedom of choice. I have heard the argument, '*But the Jewish community has spent money to free them and bring them to Israel.*' Well, that's true, but we had that obligation as Jews and as human beings. I am not so rigid as to say, '*If they don't go to live in Israel, don't give them a cent!*'"

Prossin felt that “perhaps” reemigrants who received assistance [for the second time] from the Jewish community had some obligations, “If the Russians do manage to make it, and many of them will, maybe they should be asked to contribute back to the community. Here I will take a strong stand. I don’t believe as many as could do contribute to UJA and to JNF, to Jewish community organizations that helped to bring them to Israel and to Canada. Many [recent immigrants] are just getting established. They are in fact recipients. They are not in a position to give charity. However, I really feel that they could be more involved in community matters that don’t require donations. On the one hand, I am very liberal, and believe that the Russian Jews should be allowed to go where they want. On the other hand, they are here...they have children...[they should] start the process of introducing their children into the [Jewish] community.

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**Sandra Atlin, Past-President, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (Toronto)** currently serves on the JIAS Toronto Board of Directors. She stated that the Russians’ expectations are much more realistic now than in the past; and they understand the immigrant experience isn’t easier anywhere else. Because of glasnost and perestroika, and exposure to western influences over several years, the current immigrants are generally more sophisticated than previous waves. And they see themselves that way too.

When asked about the Russians’ attitudes towards religion, Mrs. Atlin stated that, “Religion is not their mindset. The Russians are culturally Jewish. They went through a lot to maintain family links. They don’t know ritual, for example, [they don’t know] death customs. And they certainly are not going to become religious Jews, unless they become

*born again*, and that's not what is going to happen. But it's our job to welcome them into this community, as they are, and to acknowledge what they've come through; acknowledge their excellence in so many areas."

Mrs. Atlin explained how *assimilation* differs from *integration*, "The Jewish notion of assimilation equals *unJewish*; becoming like the rest. Integration, as JIAS means it, is trying to redress the wrong that was done to the Jews in the Soviet Union by restoring their lost Jewish roots and helping them to become a vital part of the Jewish community."

When asked whether there was discrimination towards the Russians within the Jewish community and whether there was resistance to any new entity unwilling to become homogenized. Mrs. Atlin responded, "Yes...because the established community has been here a long time and has a lot to lose. We have all clawed our way to the top and we don't want to make the ladder all wobbly again. It has ever been thus. The Germans [Jews] looked down on the East Europeans; and they in turn looked down on the *greenies* [greenhorns] that came after World War Two. I think that established Jews, given their own struggles to integrate, worry that newcomers will somehow put in jeopardy their achievements. We try to be publicly less different because the more different we have been, the more troubles we have had."

"The thing we have forgotten is that they had their own culture. They were Russians and they lived in a closed society for a very long time. But the younger ones have had a lot of exposure to western ideas and people. So when Toronto Jews hear "Russians" and they turn their noses up, they may be thinking of a whole class of people who came in the 1970s, who were truly refugees and had left before the Soviet Union really opened to the West. But

in the 1980s and certainly the 1990s, that was not the case. The code words [pejoratives] for Russian Jews always included *westernized*. The true Russian only wants to be identified with Mother Russia. I think there is a real need to educate the established Jews here as to who we have in this migration. We are coming to grips with this at JIAS now."

Recently JIAS has started to shift financial resources and staff-time away from settlement issues and towards problems of integration and immigrant youth. Mrs. Atlin explained. "In the past ten years or so, JIAS has focused on resettlement issues and has provided really fine services for the immigrants. Now, we want to make a change to a much more integrative model. We won't forget our settlement mandate because that is obviously extremely important. but we want to encourage integration. Yes, they have to get settled. but integration into the Canadian and Canadian-Jewish communities is an area we have not prioritized to date. We have had a lot of problems coming to terms with this."

There has been disappointment registered by the Toronto Jewish community that some Russians chose to immigrate to Canada rather than Israel, and that some went to Israel, but did not stay. Mrs. Atlin suggested. "What you have to address in your thesis...in terms of trying to define why there hasn't been an outpouring of affection for these people...the money went out, but not their *neshumah* [soul]...is that the community said, *Oh, they have abandoned Israel; they have used it as a stepping stone to get out!* If the issue is the building up of Israel, we [Canadian Jews] are established...we have everything...we can take it with us...wouldn't we be the ideal immigrants? But we aren't pushing ourselves [to Israel] and we are not pushing our kids!"

There was discussion about the social and cultural habits of Russian Jews and their different perspectives on friendships and manners. "...Culturally there are a lot of differences, and some are offensive to us, unless we are really willing to delve into them and try to understand where the Russians are coming from. And some of our attitudes are offensive to them."

Evaluating the effectiveness of JIAS's programmes on behalf of the Russians has been very difficult. "The Russians who have received help from the Jewish community don't want to be offensive in any way. It is very hard to get decent evaluations; they are almost without exception positive. The only thing we hear, time and time again, is that the Jewish community lets them down regarding jobs."

Mrs. Atlin ended the interview with a thought-provoking comment. "The community has made a big contribution to the resettlement of Russian Jewish immigrants in the past three decades, but I question your premise here that Toronto Jewry is more experienced and more sensitive. *It is more experienced...but sensitive...I don't know. The community is small and it was homogeneous...but that is changing now.*"

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**Perry Romberg, Director, Community Development, UJA Federation** initially appeared surprised at my suggestion that there was negative stereotyping of Russian Jews by the established Toronto community; and resentment that Russians preferred to send their children to Russian language and Russian Heritage classes rather than Hebrew language and Jewish religious classes. "I have never heard that! I am wondering where you are hearing this?!" When I suggested that the Toronto community's lack of interest in the Russian Jews

resulted in loss of self-esteem in some Russian immigrants and exacerbated family problems with Russian youths, Mr. Romberg replied, "Do you really believe that?! I don't agree with you. That's giving the Canadian Jewish community a tremendous amount of power on the perception of Russian Jews about themselves and their kids. I wish we wielded that much influence...." I suggested to Mr. Romberg that he underestimated what an effect Toronto Jewry had on this immigrant community, "*What I am hearing from many people is that they feel terribly isolated. They feel like second-class citizens.*"

We discussed ghettoization of Soviet Jewry in Toronto. Mr. Romberg believed this to be an acceptable paradigm for immigrant adaptation. "Your notion that there is a ghetto within a ghetto being created...you are probably right...but I would challenge you and say that if you looked at the history of any immigrant group in Toronto. Jews and non-Jews...[you would find the same behaviour]. And that is part of the strength of our multi-ethnic community here...*birds of a feather flock together*. I have found that being able to live together in their own cluster has been to their advantage...it's a safety net. Yes, the same thing has happened to the Soviet-Jewish community, no question about that. The challenge -- the negative side -- *how do you build the bridges?*"

Mr. Romberg acknowledged the excellent efforts of the Jewish Federation and its generous financial support of agencies like JIAS. He also registered concerns, "I agree that on a functional level the community has really done a lot for this [Russian] population, as it has for other [immigrant] groups. What always bogs us down, and I know there is a lot of anger [out] there, is, once you have helped the person put some bread on the table or rent an apartment, etc., how do you then help him/her feel comfortable? If you can find an answer....

*Every community in North America is struggling with this issue of integration. What is successful integration? What are successful integration programmes? How do you create a social fabric between communities? How do you get people, on an organized basis, to talk to each other...to care?"*

Mr. Romberg admitted it was difficult to connect the Russian Jews to the established Jewish community, "...to some extent it's the same problem that we have with our local Jews as well. The struggle for Jewish identity is a struggle. You are right, this immigrant group has come from a country that has taken them away from their traditions and Jewish values for seventy years...so they come here without that knowledge base...but it's just as much a struggle for us with our own Jews, who have allegedly grown up in a community that is rich in organizational Jewish life. [Jewish]education...the whole thing. And we are struggling [to retain that Jewish identity] as much as anybody else."

We discussed the difference between earlier-arriving Eastern European immigrants, who were our fathers and grandfathers, and the Russians. The former were, by and large, minimally-educated tradesmen, craftsmen and factory workers, who emigrated from Jewish villages [*shtetls*] or towns and cities with dynamic Jewish ghettos. Most ended up in sweatshops and factories, satisfied to earn their daily bread and raise their families in the "goldene medina" [the land of milk and honey]. The Russians, we knew, were a different element. Educated professionals, who were discovering, to their horror, that almost everything they had achieved in the former Soviet Union was, in the eyes of Canada and Canadians, worth absolutely nothing.

Mr. Romberg had recently consulted with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in New York. He had asked that organization, "What's successful in the States?" What he learned was that the Soviet Jewish community [quarter million] in New York was growing out of its adolescence and starting to approach HIAS telling them...*this is what we want*; that Russian youth, having learned the ways of North America, were *beginning to work the system*. The New York Russians were starting to tell the Jewish Community Centre what their community wanted to accomplish, and were asking for the necessary funding.

Mr. Romberg took this information to the Toronto Federation for discussion. "Maybe we have to take some of the dollars that we have been throwing at a very dependent population. and instead of the attitude. 'We give you. and you have to say, thank you.' maybe we have to start to say. '*Here 's a pot of money; who 's out there that will help? Come and tell us what you need.*' That's really much more of a community-development approach."

I asked Mr. Romberg to answer a question often presented to me by the Russians. "*Why do they hire outsiders? Sure, we have an accent, but we've got PhDs. We'll learn!*" Mr. Romberg explained that in the 1970s the community was very helpful because there were still many Jewish-owned factories. Factory-owners, when pressed by JIAS, would say, '*Send me three people.*' "But now, in the nineties, when you look for Jews who can help us...they're into high-tech industries...or the Jews are now professionals...there are not a lot of factories here anymore. If you are the owner of a high-tech computer-operated company to-day, you're going to say, 'Well, send me a résumé. I can't let just anybody sit

at this very expensive machine.' The fact is there are some very well-trained Soviets, and there are some extremely poorly-trained Soviets, who you would not allow near your equipment. You might start them at a data-entry level. A lot of it boils down to the fact that most of our contacts now can only hire people at certain levels; and there are certain constraints because of the nature of the businesses the Jews are in to-day. A lot of the problem is that, like most newcomers, their expectations of what we can do for them and what they are able to do are sometimes out of kilter...just not realistic."

We discussed the issues of professional recertification, professional qualifications, availability of professional openings, and other bureaucratic roadblocks facing the Russians. We acknowledged that many immigrants are forced to abandon their professions in order to survive, and how unfortunate that is, and what a terrible waste of education [paid for by the USSR] and work experience.

Mr. Romberg did not like my suggestion that we were creating a subclass of immigrant citizens in Canada, "The hairs on the back of my neck go up a little bit to hear you say that we have created an underclass here. The Canadian government has opened the doors...we have provided opportunities...we need to provide more, yes...but if you go up and down Bathurst Street...and see dental and law offices...you see Russian names...it's their kids. *We could capitalize on the immigrants' talents...but we haven't yet.*"

I asked Mr. Romberg if Canada can afford to continue to bring in thousands of well-educated, *Independent* [high immigration points] immigrants annually, knowing many are going to end up needing financial assistance. He responded, "That's a problem. Under the new Immigration Act, that is currently being refashioned, what is going to count more is

your education, your language skills, and transferable skills. *The government in the future will be looking for adaptability and creativity in immigrants who will probably not be able to use their professional training in Canada.*

Mr. Romberg reminded me that we do not have a state-driven economy in Canada; an economy that guarantees employment. "...*These people are in a state of freefall really, beyond what [we] can do for them to provide their basic survival needs. That's the free market. That's the strength and weakness of Capitalism.*"

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**Debra Feldman, Sophie Fischhoff and Ivetta Isakovan, Jewish Family and Child Service (JF&CS).** Debra is Social Work Supervisor; Sophie and Ivetta are Russian-speaking Social Workers.

Debra explained. "You have to understand that we are talking to you as a Jewish Family Service and a Jewish Children's Aid. I am not talking to you about the family that has not needed JIAS...has not needed financial assistance...has not had problems with their children. We see the problems. I am describing to you our experience in terms of who the population is that we service..." Sophie explained that there were different types of Russians who had immigrated to Canada in the 1990s,

There is the Ashkenazi Jew that comes from the western part of Russia...the Ukraine...Belarus...Moscow...the European part...highly-educated...engineers, doctors. There is another kind of population that came from Russia.... They came from the Asian part of Russia...the mountainous part, more eastern and northern. Their republics bordered with Iraq, Iran and Turkey, so their culture is very eastern. They come from villages, not big towns, and they have lived in those villages for a very long time and protected their Judaism. Their Judaism has a different flavour than the Ashkenazi Judaism...their education is lower...grade 8, grade 9 or grade 10. They are a less

sophisticated group, from a western point of view, but I hesitate to call them peasants. They have very different dynamics within their families and with their relationship to society. Those who emigrated to Israel...did their initial *character-breaking*, their adaptation there. When they came to Canada, it was a culture shock, but much less of a culture shock .

Debra talked about the experience of this population when they came directly to Canada from the FSU. "*That's like getting a whammy in the face.*" This element of Jews arrived with a different set of survival skills. They had developed a *personality-set* that allowed them to survive in the villages.

And using that set of skills over here, they are in trouble all over the place. There, it was very important to manipulate the system...it was very important to have the wherewithall to buy the services that you needed... ..that's the way of life there. I am not judging it. But you start with ...that kind of stuff [here], and you are in trouble. Plus, they don't understand why [Canadian] people don't react positively to that [behaviour].

Sophie added, "If you wanted a pound of butter, you brought a bottle of vodka. You had to give something [a gift, a bribe] to get something."

It would seem that these immigrants would be extremely disadvantaged in Canada, but Debra viewed this differently,

According to some Canadians, they come very advantaged. It can be interpreted that the Russians think we are stupid...because this is a democratic society...fundamentally built on trust and honesty. From a social worker perspective, you believe them...you go where the client is at, and give them every benefit of the doubt. Some would say we allow ourselves to be manipulated.

Debra explained that it was the social worker's job to "unravel and undo" the inappropriate behaviour system. It was particularly confusing for the immigrant youth, who were caught in the middle of one value system being taught at home, and a totally different value system being experienced outside the home. Add to that the confusion with the new rules and the

new way of life...and all the issues of loss...leaving a homeland...a decision that was not their choice.

Anti-Semitism is viewed very differently in this population. The young people are not necessarily or obviously religious...but let somebody drop a remark, and they are fighting. They are aggressive with respect to defending their Judaism...their identity. "Don't forget they are used to that...that's how life was over there. Here's a gang of kids that are Jewish, and here's a gang of kids that aren't...there was a constant battle...and in their minds. it's still going on over here.

The social workers talked about their work in Toronto public schools with large Russian-immigrant student enrollments, and their efforts to counsel families in crisis.

Problems of adolescence are almost universal. and this stage of development is as difficult for Soviet families as it is for Canadian ones. In the immigrant families. the stresses of this stage are aggravated because often parents have lost their authority role in the eyes of their children. while the children themselves are experiencing the double task of development and adjustment. Children feel threatened when suddenly their parents stop being protectors and providers, and as true teenagers, they begin to test and to push the limits of parental authority. In turn, parents feel threatened by the increasing independence of their children, especially because the Russian parents live in great fear of their children falling victim to sex and drugs. They try to re-establish their authority, but often lose their credibility and strain the relationship with their children to the limits.

Because the Russians have no frame of reference from which to understand the difference between state and voluntary agencies, any agency is perceived as a continuation

of the state and any caseworker or social worker is seen as a bureaucrat. This view interferes with the social workers' efforts to establish trusting relationship with their clients. In the Soviet Union, individuals were forced to split their personality and to present one face to the world and another one to their family and friends. There is a strong cultural prohibition against sharing private thoughts and feelings with strangers. Debra said,

There are a lot of families that are in trouble that we don't know about...but we sense it, or we guess it. These families are also incredibly private because they are scared. This is not a group of people who come to us, who represent authority, and expect help. They don't expect help. All they think is that we are going to make trouble for them. Because we offer financial assistance and concrete help, there are families that we can get close enough to to work with. It is all based on the level of trust that can be developed. Often, we'll work with a family for two years before they tell us about something that has been going on for years.

Debra explained that JF&CS is developing new ways to reach out to the Russians. Because they understand learning and classrooms, the agency has developed Jewish Family Life groups "which basically cover everything from womb to tomb" in an unthreatening and social environment.

Although the Russian "Independents" passed Immigration Canada's English language requirement, it is obvious that many entered the country with minimal language skills and needed to attend ESL classes. Many of JF&CS's clients "simply do not have the capacity to learn English." Debra believes that, "There is going to be a certain population in Toronto without English. I am not sure it is a learning disability...it's just that after a certain age, it becomes very, very hard."

Compared to previous immigrant groups, the Russian women [if able to attend ESL classes] usually master the English language more speedily than the men. They are also

more flexible about accepting a “little” job, and will often find work first. Thus the husband loses his role as breadwinner, at least initially. To make matters worse, she continues to take responsibility for running the family affairs [as she did in Russia]. Many husbands lapse into depression and become demoralized, angry and complaining. This behaviour puts a serious strain on the marital relationship, especially if the couple had experienced problems before emigrating.

[Debra] He was the boss and receiving status in Russia for being the boss... from his peers... from his family...and then he comes over here...you can call him a chauvinist, if you want. ...he is probably going to spend a year depressed because he is losing control.

[Sophie] And worst of all, his 14-year-old daughter is going to school wearing makeup. The father is used to school uniforms...chaperons.

[Ivetta] The word *abuse* doesn't exist in the Russian dictionary. The action exists but there is no such word.

[Sophie] We are talking about spousal abuse...in Russian there is a saying: *You love somebody like your own soul, and you shake them like a pear tree.* That's a definition of spousal abuse.

[Debra] The kids are all being taught that abuse is illegal. *Take your hands off me! You don't have any right to touch me! Who are you?*

[Ivetta] The poor parents say, *'I am a parent...I am raising them...that's the only way I know how to do it!'* **THE STATUS OF THE HUSBAND...THE STATUS OF THE PARENT...EVERYTHING IS ROCKING AND ROLLING.**

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**Rabbi Michael Skobac, Education Director, Jews for Judaism** is a New Yorker, who has lived in Toronto for ten years. Initially a consultant to Jews for Judaism “in my spare time”, Rabbi Skobac has been “on board” full-time since April, 1998. He is very

concerned about Russian Jewry because of the amount of proselytizing of Jews taking place in the former Soviet Union as well as all other receiving countries,

First of all, when the Jews were in the Soviet Union, it was very hard for Christian missionaries to access them; there were informal underground activities. Christian missionaries would bring in literature from Finland to the Soviet Union and underground churches would proselytize Jews there. Once in a while, when Jews trickled out from the SU, they would try to reach them, either in North America or Israel, wherever they were going. At the end of the 1980s, when the SU began to disintegrate, there was more opportunity for western missionary groups to come to the Soviet Union.

A lot of Jews were accessed during the years when they couldn't come straight from the SU to the West. They would have to live in Rome or Vienna for about a year. Many Christian groups set up shop in these transit centres. They would offer ESL classes; they would prepare people for immigration, and they would say, *Look when you end up in New York, here's the number of some friends. They can help you find an apartment and get a job.* And these are the Christian missionaries. Many Christians would sponsor Soviet Jews into citizenship in the United States. That meant going from the Soviet Union to a transit centre and ending up maybe in Florida, being part of a Baptist community, because this is the community that is giving you your sponsorship.

Here in the West, the Russians are heavily targeted. For example, in Toronto, just about a block south of here on Finch Avenue, there are two congregations of Jewish people from the FSU, who believe in Jesus. Soviet Jews for Jesus, just a block south of us. They have hired a Russian-speaking fellow to be a full-time missionary to Soviet Jews. In Montreal...we just had a major problem there...where there was a deceptive Russian-Jewish concert that was being offered around *Shavuot* [Jewish spring festival] where they advertised with Jewish stars and Israeli flags, and they didn't indicate that it was Christian missionary programming.

If you read the missionary literature [the Russians] are seen as the most open Jewish people to the Christian message. Open because they haven't been given a Jewish education, and vulnerable because...they are in a new country.... It's a fact that people in general, who are in transition or who are undergoing a crisis, are always the most vulnerable people for conversionary efforts.

Our understanding of the problem is not that Jewish people convert to Christianity, or embrace Buddhism or other religions, but that conversion is a symptom. *The problem is that there is a lack of spirituality in the Jewish community. We really are trying to serve as a catalyst for a renaissance in the Jewish world, so that people won't want to leave the Jewish community. So that they will find that it is meaningful, powerful and spiritual. That's why we didn't name this organization Jews against anything...not Jews against Christianity...but Jews for Judaism.*

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**Rabbi Levi Jacobson, Director, Centre for Judaic Studies, Jewish Russian Community Centre [JRCC]** is a young man [late 20s], who at first sight appeared much older than his years. Black-bearded, black-suited, originally from New York, the rabbi is a dedicated member of the ultra-Orthodox Lubavich Hasidic sect. Rabbi Jacobson did not have a problem about *degrees* of Jewishness in members of the Russian immigrant population. "Every single one of them is Jewish, and every single one of them is precious. What we are trying to do is help them reveal the *neshomeh* [soul, spirit, divine element in man] that they all possess."

Having attended an impressive Saturday morning religious service at the JRCC's synagogue, I asked the rabbi how his ultra-Orthodox group had managed to integrate a community of secular Russian Jews,

...some people just walk into my *shul* [synagogue] because they are curious. Those people that you heard [singing, praying, chanting]...these are Russian people that are educated here by us...I would say 90 percent of them. They came from Russia not knowing anything, and somehow they bumped into this synagogue and the JRCC and, for whatever reason, because every person has his own story, they stayed...and that's who you saw in *shul*. And the children you saw are their children. They are going to our institutions. *So we are building a Jewish Russian community.*

We have a Hebrew Academy, which is a full Hebrew day school, where they obviously teach the regular maths and sciences, but they also teach three hours of Hebrew a day. It's not only the Hebrew language, it's Judaism, giving them the message of pride in being a Jew, so that they feel good about it. So that when they go to university, they have that Jewish pride. They have the basic Commandments...the basic Jewish things that we are supposed to do...they will remember.... Also, we have the after-school class, which has 190 kids...and we have day care with something like 60 kids....

Rabbi Jacobson explained that the JRCC's purpose was to help the Russian immigrants become more comfortable with who they are and what their real essence is; to encourage them to stop worrying about the way people look at them...or the way people don't look at them. *"They are very concerned about how they are regarded. I see that concern as an American. I don't know if the other people working over here see that...but as an American, I do."*

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**Dr. Albert de Goias** was originally a family physician. He branched into what is now known as GP-Psychotherapy. I asked him to explain his practice. *Within the medical community I could be classified as a medical psychotherapist, a recognized group within the [Canadian] Medical Association. However, the range of activities I do allows me to step outside of that envelope. I also do executive coaching in life management; a preventive educational programme; rehabilitation counselling for substance abusers; and life management skills for the correctional services. Perhaps, [for the purpose of this thesis] I can be called a life management counsellor.*

Dr. de Goias has been receiving referrals from physicians with patients suffering from stress-related problems for more than twenty years. More recently, he has also been

receiving referrals from criminal lawyers . He explained that his background was physics before medicine. As a result, he became interested in change and chaos [sociological and economic change] and also change within family dynamics -- changes that precipitate the stresses that cause people to lose management control. "I began researching change and the literature about change, and my physics background brought me to *chaos theory*.... A lot of people don't realize it, but there are a lot of diseases that are purely initiated by stress. *Immigration is a huge stressor.*"

When asked to discuss his experience with Jewish immigrants from the FSU, the doctor explained that in his practice he had seen mainly Russians: well-educated people who were in a hurry to become economically stable. He described *two streams*.

The first stream is quickly establishing themselves in business. They are hardworking and because of their intelligence are actually making it very quickly. The ones that I have seen are not coming over with money. They are getting some help from the Toronto Jewish community; but they have also been able to utilize their own community.... They support each others' businesses. Those who are business-minded are starting to do well. Almost like the Jewish immigration after the [First] World War, who settled in the Spadina and Queen Street area...who through sheer hard work were able after a few years to move to Forest Hill.

Then there is the second stream, which is the unfortunate stream. I think those are the Russian Jews that the Canadian Jews are a little bit reluctant to associate with. And these are the ones who are quite capable of using their intelligence to commit crimes. What I have noticed is that there is quite a connecting factor. Those who are in crime all know each other, and they are, again, intersupported. They are quite sophisticated in types of petty crimes...not big crimes...like shoplifting and break-and-enter. They are gathering quite a significant amount of merchandise and [are] having no trouble fencing it off.... [For example] jewellery stores...they will go in and pose as a young couple...they have these little schemes...and clothing stores...and they all dress extremely well, particularly the young people. It is unfortunate that, because of their intelligence, they will also succeed too

well in that area [crime] as they do in the other one [business], which creates problems.

None of those that I interviewed were involved in criminal activities before they came to Canada. This is not a Canadian-grown phenomenon...it's just the Canadian opportunity...their intelligence tells them...*here's something ripe for the picking!* ....I saw a self-confessed Russian career criminal in my office... [the doctor asked him not to return]. He was quoted in a Canadian newspaper [as stating] that the Russian criminals, who come here, see Canada as such a laid-back country that it's easy to do whatever illegal activities...laundering money...whatever they can. ...To them it's easy, because what they have learned in Russia may not have been applicable there [because of controls], but Canada has this liberal, open society. [They are] almost like university students going back to grade ten. Oh yes, the women are participating. They are an essential part.

Most of the Russians seem by Dr. de Goias are young adults in their twenties, who are *not* dealing with stress-related problems. They have been referred by criminal lawyers because of their illegal activities. If they are involved in petty crimes and their lawyers provide the Court with an assessment of their clients' personalities and redirection plans [prior to the cases being called], a negotiation easily can be done with the Court on their behalf, because they have attempted to get into some form of counselling.

"I haven't seen any of the older Russians in my practice. I have seen the parents of some of these kids...very simple, not simple-minded, but simple in terms of needs...and hard working...and deeply spiritual, though not necessarily religious. They just tolerate their children because they are not of the same mentality."

Dr. de Goias believes that these young Russians do not have disdain for their parents. They respect their parents. They see themselves as doing a job; crime is their career, and if they are unlucky, they have trouble with the police. He agreed that Canada may have imported a criminal element and suspects that these young people are not a "self-generating"

criminal element. They are young adults, who have been brought to a new environment, and because they never attended school in Canada, they do not fit into the social fabric. Because they have been well-trained in the FSU, and are very intelligent, they become criminals. Dr. de Goias suspects that these young people may be the pawns of a more sinister element, "But I don't know who are the bishops, and the captains, and the kings. I don't believe it is the same group of people."

He does not think the Jewish agencies are doing enough and suggests they could do more to integrate the younger Russians. "*They are just left on their own.*" He acknowledged that the Orthodox Jews are reaching out to these young people but. "They are so overfocused on religion to the extreme that they are getting those that really want to be the *black hats*. That's fine if the children are very young, but to get these twenty-year-olds...I think it's too severe."

As we concluded the interview, the doctor pointed out that young-adult Russian Jews are, "*...settling down much more readily than North American Jews with non-Jewish boys and girls after they get to Canada. So the great fears of the traditional Jews are coming to pass! Well, my dear, you [the Jewish community] are getting diluted...except for the ones who are being streamed into Jewish Orthodoxy.*"

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**Russell Myers, Associate Director, Canadian Office, Aish HaTorah Russian Program** is quick to explain that his organization's experience with Russian Jews in Toronto is very limited. He praises the work of the Jewish Russian Community Centre and in particular, Rabbi Zaltzman, and the Lubavitch organization, whose efforts on behalf of

former Soviet Jewry have been outstanding. Aish's Russian Program in Toronto has functioned mainly, though not entirely, as a fund-raising office to raise Canadian support for their many educational centres in the former Soviet Union and Israel. "You see, they [the Russians] have been told that Judaism is all a bunch of fairy tales and made-up stories, so they want to [intellectually] understand what is really happening...there is a great demand in Russia [for information on Judaism] on the part of young Jews, village Jews, intellectuals..."

Aish HaTorah's Russian Program is separate from any of their other educational programmes worldwide. "We have a totally separate budget just for Russian Jewry...in Toronto, in Russia, and in Israel." Myers explained that there had been no adequate religious-education infrastructure in Israel to accommodate the huge influx of Russian immigrants. And, he believes, that is why so many became alienated and left the country when they could. If the Russians become involved with Aish HaTorah centres in the former Soviet Union, and then make *aliyah*, they will find a familiar, welcoming Aish community in Israel, and there will be some continuity. Myers states,

So we have to educate them in Jewish principles and ideals. Otherwise, they will just be floundering youths on drugs walking the streets of Israel; or leaving Israel when they can...without any element of *Yiddishkeit* [Jewishness]. What we have found is, if we reach them there, before they leave, we are able to give them something of substance that they can take with them to Israel...and not matter where they go...they will understand what it means to light sabbath candles...to go to a Hanukkah party, or to a sabbath meal. [Then] they won't be so adverse to it...they will have had a taste of it.

Myers discussed Aish HaTorah's educational *Discovery* seminars, which he described as "the most attended Jewish seminars in the world to-day." Aish ran this [usually] two-day, full week-end, seminar in Toronto in Russian in the Fall of 1998, but condensed it to

a one-day Sunday programme, because they believed “the Russians would not come back and forth.” Over two hundred people attended the [full-capacity] seminar, which was held at the Jewish Community Centre on north Bathurst Street.

He admitted there were problems with Russian immigrant youth in Toronto, and asked, “Why do we expect them to be *mentchen* [decent human beings], when they don’t even know what a *mentch* is?” He feels, however, they need to be held accountable for their behaviour and to respect Canadian law. “But they need a strong helping hand.” Myers admitted that religion is not necessarily what attracts Russian youth to the Jewish community. “You have to attract them with other approaches...like karate, concerts...fun programmes. The evangelical groups are doing it. You have to get them excited. So hopefully, that will happen.”

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**Myrna Bornstein, English as a Second Language teacher, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (Toronto) in partnership with LINC ( Federal Government)** has been teaching Russian-speaking immigrants for ten years. Students usually attend ESL classes for six months. Linguistic progress of students depends generally on their level of English proficiency when they emigrated. “If they came in with TOFEL level English...they finish...they refine...but if I get intermediate level students, after six months they are not ready.” When asked if a diligent student could find a job in a store after six months of ESL classes, she replied, “They could. They would learn the specific language [of the business]. Many do. Many go on to professional courses. Usually after six months, they try to get into a co-op type of programme where they are taught job-search skills, and then they get a

volunteer position that gives them a chance to practice.” How did the immigrants support themselves during this transitional period? *“Welfare.”*

Myrna does not teach many young adults as they are encouraged to attend regular high school. However, some prefer to attend ESL classes because they feel “too old.” They know they will be “put back” in school. By age eighteen, most youths had finished high school in the FSU, plus one or two years at an Institute.

Myrna teaches students not only from Russia but from other former Soviet-block countries. “The biggest percentage are from the Ukraine...Azerbaijan...Tashkent. People from the south-east are totally different from the people in Leningrad and Moscow. The people from the mountains are different from the people from the sea. We get students from Latvia...from Lithuania...Moldova.” She uses the same teaching techniques for all students. When asked if she saw herself as a language teacher or an integration teacher, Myrna replied.

Definitely an integration teacher. We are liaison and facilitators. Most of us spend a great deal of time teaching survival skills...skills they will need to get along in Toronto and in Canada...to go to a supermarket or department store...their favourite store in the world is Canadian Tire. Ten years ago, I got my first group, who came directly from Russia. When we ...did a lesson on bread, they would say, *‘In Russia, we were happy to get bread. Here, we have to worry about white bread, whole wheat bread, rye bread, pumpernickel bread, bagels and buns.’* They were amazed when they went into a supermarket in January, and customers were turning up their noses at the peaches. *‘Peaches in January! And people are saying, oh, they’re not good!’*

The Russian émigrés from Israel are not surprised by the abundance in our stores. They are totally sophisticated. They know our banking systems. They know most things available in the western world. Right now, most of my students have come via Israel. ...I help them to learn patience...they are used to a very aggressive society...we have to teach them to be polite...to wait their turn. The immigrants that come directly from the FSU know how to

wait in line. But they are also aggressive, and they like to use the world *must* -- *you must teach me!*

Myrna regrets that the Russians are not being accepted into the established Jewish community. They are longing for contact with Canadians, but they don't know how to meet Canadian families or to make Canadian friends. "*They come here and live within their own community. They feel cocooned.*"

Part of Myrna's mandate is to teach Judaica, which is part of her weekly curriculum. "We teach life cycles: *bris, bar mitzvah, chupa* [circumcision, confirmation, wedding]. We teach alternative choices in Judaism: Lubavitch, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist. We teach them the Jewish holidays. All the immigrants from Israel know the holidays very well. The ones from the FSU know nothing, especially if they come from a mixed [marriage] home."

When asked if religious organizations like Aish HaTorah and Lubavitch are impacting on her students, she replied. "Some of them rebel against the Orthodox because it is too extreme for them. They believe that to be a good Jew, you must follow all the rules. To keep Kosher [dietary laws] is too expensive. We are trying to introduce them to Kolel [Centre for Jewish Learning], which is Reform. Kolel is trying...they come into our school to promote their programmes. *Sometimes my students feel they have too many choices. They don't know what to do; so they don't make any [choices].*

Myrna has not personally taught elderly Russians, but her colleagues have. "They love them. The older people are very interested in learning English. They are all educated people...doctors, dentists. They are not even aspiring to finding work, but are coming to

class so they can watch [English] television and go to the [English] theatre, if they have the money. ...they come in the most severe weather. They are the ones that are *shlepping* [dragging themselves] over the snowbanks to come to school...with their canes...to learn English.”

We agree that Canada is a very generous country. When asked if the Russians appreciate their adopted country’s generosity, she replied, “*They think it’s their right.*” As do the Russians who have reemigrated from Israel believe they are entitled to aide the second time around. “*They know they are going to get their free medical, their welfare, their education.*”

When asked if the Russians have found the freedom they were looking for in Canada, she laughed and replied. “*Over here they are working like horses...but they are free to make choices.*”

Myrna knows of a former ESL student, a young adult, who was convicted of first-degree murder and is in jail. “None of my students have been in serious trouble...scrapes. parking tickets, speeding tickets.” Sometimes her students verbalize concerns about their teenagers, “Yes, they are worried...very worried. It’s different here. The parents don’t have the same control. Kids don’t have the same school ethics...homework ethics...motivation. The parents think the school system is too easy...the discipline too lax. They also have a hard time adjusting to the fact that you can’t use physical punishment in Canada...they don’t understand our notion of abuse of a wife or a kid. It was first nature to them...not even second nature.”

It is no secret that employers in Toronto [Jews and non-Jews] are taking advantage of the Russians, because they are immigrants, and very anxious to work. "Very not nice...like being paid five dollars an hour cash. They accept it...they understand they are being taken advantage of and verbalize it. If you are a dentist from Azerbaijan or Baku City...and you come to Canada...and have three children to feed...you accept being taken advantage of because you have responsibilities."

They come to me, and they say, 'Myrna, I feel like I am a baby. I come to this country and I have to learn everything.' I always say to them, 'I am the baby. I was born in this country. I have never emigrated. I have never left anything behind. I have never started over. I learn from you more than you learn from me.'

You know, Thelma, and I mean this from my heart...I learn every day from these people: they give me strength. I love them [tears in her eyes].

*As opposed to...?*

Many people in the community, who find them aggressive, pushy and ungrateful.

*Ungrateful for all the things the Jewish community is doing for them? Is that the perception out there among some Toronto Jews?*

Yes.

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**Tamara Novik, Employment Counsellor, Jewish Vocational Service of Metropolitan Toronto (JVS)** was a Russian immigrant herself. She left the Soviet Union in 1989, and has worked as an employment counsellor for seven years. In advance of the interview, Tamara had prepared a special file that documented the history of one Russian immigrant's struggle to find employment in Toronto. This well-educated man (Russian MA

in Mathematics and Russian PhD in Electrical Engineering), who had been in Canada almost three years was, at the time of our interview, receiving welfare. Tamara had been trying to convince Welfare representatives, who were urging her to instruct her client to take any job available that, "He can't clean the street...mentally, he can't do that."

Tamara explained that if this Russian gentleman were able to enrol in a special course in electrical engineering, he could find a well-paying job. "...in Canada, he can earn \$100,000 per year, and pay big taxes. But he doesn't have enough money to pay for this course." Tamara is very frustrated, "Instead of paying him this thousand-and-something for a year, better Welfare should provide him with the course. He has great potential. He can work!"

Welfare also refused this gentleman the opportunity to take a computer programming course, which would have assured him a junior position job. According to Tamara, "They [Welfare] are giving the course to people who have no education. I am sorry; if there is a computer programming course, what is the reasoning to give it to somebody who was never educated? He will finish this course and never find a job. This gentleman, after a two-month course, I guarantee he will be working!"

This welfare recipient is in a Catch 22 situation. He is able to borrow the money for the computer programming course from the Toronto Jewish Free Loan Cassa [UJA Federation], but if Welfare learns he is taking a course, his welfare monies will be reduced. Welfare's rationale is, if an agency lends this man money to take a course, this money is considered additional income. "Before it was the same with Employment Insurance recipients. They changed it [the policy], so now recipients may take whatever courses they

want.” Tamara feels that an electrical engineer with a PhD, who is willing to take a job as a junior programmer has shown enough flexibility. “...but to be a gas station attendant, that is not for him. This is not a possibility. If he has found some other way to find a job, let him do it!”

Tamara and her family came to Canada as refugees with the help of JIAS. While they were waiting for immigration papers in Italy, the Canadian Counsel warned her husband, an electronic engineer, that he might not be able to find work in his field in Canada, and that he might have to change his occupation. “That was okay. We escaped from Russia. You know, we just escaped from there, and it didn’t matter where we went. We were in a hurry to escape, and we came with no expectations.”

When asked if it was better to come with no expectations, Tamara replied. “Yes. it is better...without money and without expectations. Can you imagine the kind of expectations they have, if they come to a Canadian government representative, and he tells them, *Oh, your age is great. Your English is good enough. You are a civil engineer, that’s great. Canada needs civil engineers. Welcome to Canada!*”

Tamara believes potential immigrants are being given false hope, and offers some practical suggestions,

Suddenly [in Canada] they figure it out. First of all, that in civil engineering there are not a lot of opportunities. Secondly, even if Canada needed civil engineers, they need to have Autocad knowledge and experience [computer design and computer graphics], which most of the immigrants from Russia don’t have. If they would get this information, while still in Russia or Israel, they could prepare themselves for immigration. Number one, if they were told, in order to be a civil engineer in Canada, you have to have this-and-this knowledge, these-and-these skills; second, if you can’t be an engineer at the beginning, you should be a draftsperson, so you need to do this-and-this

drafting in this-and-this time frame. So they could take courses there, before they leave. This is a most difficult and ridiculous situation!

Immigrant women, she reports, are more flexible in their job search. They are not so frustrated and depressed. "...for the woman, who used to be an engineer, who starts working as a salesperson, or even dishwasher, it is much easier than for a man."

JVS has two Russian-speaking counsellors, whose combined caseload is six hundred individuals per year. It is very stressful, because 500 of them are newcomers who need time to adjust, change, and accept unexpected realities. Tamara had one very happy-ending immigrant story.

Two years ago, one of my clients, a PhD in Mathematics, who did software testing in Russia, opened a new school in Toronto for new Russian immigrants. It was the first school for software testing in Toronto. I called up all the Toronto Universities and Colleges and they didn't have this course here. She started this school, and she was doing miracles. I referred to her a few of my women engineers, who had never seen a computer in their entire life. In three months, she taught them how to test existing software products. Just to test...not to write programmes. They just need to locate the problem, using automatic tools...then a programmer will work to solve this problem. In three months she taught them, and they found employment within a month after they finished her school, with a salary range between \$35,000 to \$45,000 per year. By now, she has about 100 students, who have found employment after finishing at her school. And she continues. It doesn't mean she has 100 percent success, but her success rate is about 85 percent. That's pretty high. And after this, more schools will open. She charges \$3000, but you are getting an occupation! Where are you going to get an occupation in such a short time?

When asked about clients who had completed JIAS's six-month ESL programme, Tamara expressed disapproval of one of their methods. She did not agree that new immigrants should learn to write résumés in groups. "This is one more time when you can mislead the person." When the student informs the ESL teacher that he/she is an engineer,

the teacher will teach that person how to write an engineering résumé. “For newcomers this is especially dangerous. At JVS, what we do is see them first, individually. We decide together, that if he can’t be an engineer initially, he should be a carpenter, whatever, because he has these skills...so I’ll help him develop a résumé for carpenter. Even for Canadians -- my colleagues teach Canadians -- if a person can’t do whatever he was doing, he should change career direction, and then write résumé.”

The idea of writing a résumé is totally alien to immigrants from the FSU. In Russia, there was only the *job book*.

Each employer can look in this job book and see what you did before. I hire you and put down my stamp that you are hired as an ESL teacher. Then you quit the job. I put down in the book, left because you quit, or you are laid off, or you are fired, and I put down my stamp. Only reality. Nothing about personality. Nothing about duties or position. So, next employer would never hire you, unless he sees this book. The immigrants assume that résumé is like this book, only in English.

Tamara proceeded to explain that the Russians had been taught for over seventy years that they should never say anything good about themselves. Modesty was preferred, and if there was praise for excellence, it should come from others. Therefore, it was very difficult for them to “sell themselves” in their résumés. Russians, who had spent some years in Israel, had less difficulty with this concept. Also, they had less difficulty finding jobs in Canada because their skills were more up-to-date, particularly if they were working in high-tech industries; and their English skills were somewhat stronger, because they may have used English on the job. Tamara states that although these reemigrants are more self-confident, they are not any more realistic. Most of her clients had been working in their

own fields in Israel. On arrival in Canada, they experienced the same shock and disappointment as the others. "But they are still just a little step ahead."

When asked if Canadian immigration lawyers contribute to the immigrants' false hopes, Tamara said that the lawyers give them the correct information; but they facilitate the immigrants' entry to Canada with some unethical coaching. The last step in the immigration process is that each immigrant must meet face-to-face with a Canadian government representative.

Do you know what these lawyers are doing? They ask people to learn by heart the script of their presentation. I saw a woman [client], who doesn't speak a word of English...not 'hi,' not 'bye.' I asked her, 'Can you speak English?' and suddenly she started the *megillah* [story] about her education...what she was doing. I was shocked! Yes, the lawyer wrote the script and she memorized it. You can learn [the script] in Italian, or whatever language. Learn a few pages of script, and your life will be perfect in Canada. If your government representative would have put aside the script and asked her questions, he would have seen that this woman doesn't speak English. So, she got her points because she speaks English.

Is he stupid? Is he naive? You know, one day, ask if he is getting money for each person he brings to Canada, and that is why he is interested [so co-operative]...because it's his business. I don't know...but it's really ridiculous!

Tamara said that Russians on welfare almost never consider looking for work elsewhere in Canada. They want to remain within their community. She tells of a JVS client family that found themselves living in an Etobicoke apartment thanks to the well-meaning efforts of a Toronto friend. "They were sitting in my office and crying...they felt so isolated." There are Russian communities elsewhere, but they are very small and the immigrants are nervous, especially when they have elderly parents, who cannot speak English. At Bathurst and Steeles, the Seniors can live independently.

Tamara had a suggestion for the Federal government. Send JVS employment counsellors to Russia and Israel to do assessments and provide accurate Canadian labour market information to would-be immigrants.

The interview almost over, Tamara had one last example of bureaucratic wrong-thinking to share,

To find a civil engineering job was almost impossible. I spent a month talking to my client, and we realized that he can be an excellent building superintendent. He can live in the apartment with his family. His wife is not working, so it is an excellent job for him. He is a very intelligent man with excellent English skills. He is on welfare. We found for him a private school in Toronto. I talked to the owner of the school, and she told me that after two-weeks of training, she would guarantee him a job. *He went to his Welfare Worker and told her, 'I am so happy. I have found this school...only \$1000...I will pay. They will train me and they will place me.'* *She cut off his welfare.* He couldn't support himself and his wife and two children. So I called her...we discussed...we negotiated. Grab the logic...two more weeks! You can't imagine! So, he didn't take the course, and they continued to pay him welfare. Then, later, he took that same course without telling Welfare. In three weeks, he had his job...an excellent condominium building...a free apartment...and \$27,000 per year. *He is happy now...but he went through hell!*

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE RUSSIAN INTERVIEWS**

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted in late 1998 and early 1999. I did not bring any preconceived or ill-conceived stereotypical notions to the interviews; only an appreciation for the volunteers' willingness to be interviewed, and a genuine interest in their personal stories. I believe several subjects agreed to participate in this study because they perceived it to be an academic effort, authorized by a Canadian university. This gave the study, myself, but also themselves, credibility. These individuals understood that the *confidential and anonymous* interviews would add to the body of work that had in the recent past examined Russian-Jewish immigration and integration issues; and they were happy to contribute to the process by sharing their personal experiences. Some participants were curious as to why I was interested in them, and asked what I was going to do with the information, even though they had been provided with background information. A promise had been made in the flyers that there would be some monetary compensation for volunteering; this was, no doubt, an incentive for some people.

Seventeen interviews were taped at the offices of the Association of Soviet Jewry in Canada. This is a social organization made up of Russian-Jewish immigrant families (approximately 120 people) located at 5987 Bathurst Street. Two interviews were taped at Ross Library of York University, and eight interviews took place in the subjects' homes, where tea and cookies were always graciously served before the interviews began.

Thirteen questionnaires and interviews were completed with people who had emigrated directly from the FSU to Canada. Fourteen questionnaires and interviews were

completed by people who had left the FSU for Israel, and then reemigrated from Israel to Canada. The interviewees were Seniors, middle-agers and young adults. This range of ages was both helpful and unhelpful for the study. It allowed for a glimpse of the Russians' immigration experience from the perspective of their different life-stages, but tended to fragment the information, and not allow for systematic observation and interpretation based on age.

Toronto Jewry refer to this immigrant community as "the Russians," as though everyone arrives in Toronto from the same place. These 27 volunteers came from a variety of towns and cities; and from countries other than Russia. I met individuals from Bobruisk and Minsk in Belarus; Tashkent in Kazakhstan; Kishinev in Moldova; Gudernes. Leningrad. Moscow, St. Petersburg. and Yakutsk (Siberia) in Russia; and Dnepropetrovsk. Ivano-Frankovsk. Kiev. Odessa, Pervomaisk and Vinniza in the Ukraine. One university student had been born in Paris. France, to Russian immigrant parents, taken to Israel as a baby, and brought to Canada at age five.

What the interviewees did have in common was: their Russian language and culture, life experience in a state-driven society (communism), fragile links to Jewish ethnicity, exposure to varying degrees of anti-Semitism, for many, living for a period of time in Israel, and now, of course, Canada.

The complete Russian interviews are available in Appendix II. This chapter will categorize selected responses in the immigrants' questionnaires. This kind of group data collection tends to "homogenize" the people, impressions are diluted, and there is a risk of drawing incorrect conclusions. How can we learn about "the Russians" if we don't hear

their individual voices and stories? The volunteers filled out their questionnaires with time-consuming efforts, because responding in English was very difficult for them [so much for Canada Immigration's language requirements]. Also, they had not as yet met me personally; thus, I have no doubt, the questions were answered very cautiously and self-consciously. These were highly-intelligent, well-educated people painfully aware of their language limitations. Better not to write down a badly-expressed or badly-spelled response; better to leave a question blank, than make a fool of oneself. Therefore, I strongly recommend the personal interviews be examined closely. The interviewees tried very hard to express themselves coherently and honestly. They deserve to be heard.

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#### **EMPLOYMENT HISTORIES - (Immigrants via Israel)**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>FSU</u></b>	<b><u>Israel</u></b>	<b><u>Canada</u></b>
Sergey	Electronic Engineer	Delivery Clerk, Supermarket; Engineer, Electronic Company	JIAS* & Welfare** Unemployed Attending Computer School
Karen	N/A	N/A	University Student
Gennady	Mining Engineer	Labourer, Archeology Sites	Contract work, Mining Engineer; Welfare
Ilia	ESL Teacher	ESL Teacher Interpreter	Welfare; Taking Software Testing Course
Alexander	Student	Student	University Student; Welfare; Part-time Videographer
Valery	Mechanical Engineer	Mechanical Engineer	Welfare Looking for work

Michael	Student	Student	High School student; Part-time Dairy Worker
Lydia	Teacher	Domestic	Factory Worker; Hospital Worker; Part-Time Accounting Student, Seneca College
Janna	Piano Teacher Elementary School Teacher	E.C.E. Teacher Music Teacher	JIAS & Welfare; Music Teacher
Alina	Student	Student	Student
Svetlana	Physiotherapist	Cleaner; Physiotherapist; Senior Caregiver	JIAS & Welfare; Domestic Worker
Marina	Russian Language and Literature Teacher	Children's After- School Russian Language Teacher	Part-time Russian Language Teacher JIAS & Welfare
Alla	Translator and English Teacher	Translator and English Teacher	Welfare & Part-time Translator
Ella G.	Chemical Engineer	Medical Laboratory Worker	Social Club Director

\* financial aid from JIAS

\*\* City of Toronto and Province of Ontario

### **EMPLOYMENT HISTORIES - (Immigrants from FSU)**

Natalia	Pediatrician	JIAS & Welfare; Retrained; Registered Nurse
Boris	Professional Singer	JIAS & Welfare; Teaching guitar and voice; occasional Singing
Natasha	University Professor; Theatre History	York University Researcher (one year); Welfare; Completed CD-ROM Production Course; Looking for Job.
Boris	Machine Operator	JIAS; Machine Operator; Chess Instructor

Zoya	School Teacher; Russian Language & Literature	Welfare; Retired (Senior)
Larisa	Mechanical Engineer	JIAS; Retrained; Certified General Accountant (CGA); Working as Auditor for Federal Government
Liudmyla	Professor of Foreign Languages; French Specialist	JIAS & Welfare; Plans to take one-year Teaching Certificate at University of Toronto
Sofia	Russian Language Teacher	Babysitter; Welfare; Retired (Senior) ESL Student
Joseph	Mechanical Engineer	JIAS; Upgraded at Seneca College; Mechanical Engineer
Seyman	Civil Engineer	JIAS & Welfare: Retired (Senior)
Sofiya	Mathematics Teacher	JIAS & Welfare: Retired (Senior)
Olga	Student	University of Toronto Student: Financial Aide from Toronto Friends: Welfare
Ella K.	Doctor	Babysitter: JIAS & Welfare; Retired. Senior

### **REASONS FOR LEAVING THE FORMER SOVIET UNION**

- Political and economical unstable situation
- Parents' desire to go to Israel
- Because so-called "perestroyka" was a direct way to criminalization and destruction of economy in my country
- Anti-Semitism, unpredictable social situation
- Parents' decision; to escape anti-Semitism; idealist-Zionist
- Political situation
- Political crisis, "perestroika"
- Political instability in middle Asian region of the former USSR
- Anti-Semitism
- Parents' decision to leave for Israel
- Unpredictable situation; fear for children's future
- Economic and political situation; anti-Semitism
- Not satisfied with current situation in the USSR
- The main reason - anti-Semitism
- Safety, economics, anti-Semitism
- Son army age - in danger
- Hope for stability, better future for our son, secure future for us, better job

- Political situation in Moldova
- We wanted to reunite with brother's family, and I wanted to leave Ukraine
- Unstable political and economic situation in USSR
- Economic and social instability as well as escalating anti-Semitism
- Because my son left Russia for Canada
- Not stable political situation in former USSR
- Unstable political and economical situation in USSR and anti-Semitism
- Unstable political and economical situation in USSR
- Anti-Communist upbringing
- My son in Canada from Ukraine [he] came in 1987

### **REASONS FOR LEAVING ISRAEL**

- Political; Anti-Russian sentiment; weather
- Parents found jobs in Toronto: terrorism
- I had no possibilities (even theoretically) to find a job in my specialization
- Anti-Russian sentiment; weather
- My aunt invited me [to Canada], and I was seventeen and looking for adventure
- Threat of war
- Political; economic; anti-Russian sentiment; religious
- Political; economic; anti-Russian sentiment; religious
- Threat of war
- Political; the constant threat of war
- Political; religious; weather too hot; terrorism and war
- Political; anti-Russian sentiment [particularly in media]
- My husband is a mining engineer, he did not have any prospects for his career
- Economic

### **WHAT WAS YOUR WORST SURPRISE IN ISRAEL?**

- Almost three years I could not work in my occupation
- Parents witnessed a bombing in Jerusalem
- Tense relations between Jews from different countries (from North Africa and Europe)
- Contradictions between different ethnic groups of Jews
- Confrontations among different groups of Jews (e.g. Sephardic, Ashkenazic)
- The constant threat of war
- The place we ended up living in
- Division between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews and unwillingness of Sephardis to accept Russian Jews
- The constant threat of war
- The constant threat of war

- Relations between communities; very expensive in Jerusalem
- Confrontation between different groups of Jewish people
- The fact that our friends, at whose place we stayed the first few days [in Israel], were unemployed, and that their apartment was not heated in winter, since they could not afford it

### **WHAT WAS YOUR WORST SURPRISE IN TORONTO?**

- Nobody needs my husband as professional
- That it was not much different from Moscow; there was no Western paradise; another surprise was that although my English was fluent, it was difficult to get meaningful answers from government agencies; much more difficult than in Israel, where I also communicated in English (and their English was much worse than in Canada) and got better responses
- Difficulty learning English and question of identity
- People's coldness
- As opposed to Israel, I did not find too many like-minded friends
- The racism among lower class families
- Troubles with Immigration [Problems with Refugee Board]
- Cold weather again! I had forgotten....
- The great Canadian cold
- Unpredictable weather
- High humidity
- [Lack of] Connection between people
- Expensive; need lots of money to live decently
- Architecture disappointed; museums, cultural life disappointing; lack of history; prejudice against my mixed-marriage by Jewish Russians in Toronto
- Weather
- No negative feelings
- Had to pay a bribe in order to rent an apartment [1990]
- Some minor problems with Welfare social worker
- I was diagnosed with prostate cancer
- My husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer
- Hypocrisy of Toronto people, masks; nostalgia
- Not allowed to use my occupation in Canada

### **WHAT WAS YOUR HAPPIEST SURPRISE IN ISRAEL?**

- Abundance of fruits and vegetables
- Two daughters were born there
- Can't remember [too young]
- Many historical places
- Variety of climatic zones; possibility to enjoy three seas

- I made a lot of friends
- The great diversity of the population
- The different surroundings; the beach; different cars; more toys, etc.
- No surprises which could have pleased [disappointing experience]
- The population is very diverse
- The great diversity of the population
- Nature and Jerusalem
- Nature; desert in Spring
- The country; the people

### **WHAT WAS YOUR HAPPIEST SURPRISE IN TORONTO?**

- Very nice city; young
- Friendly people; Big Russian community; safe environment, TTC
- A lot of synagogues
- Synagogues. Jewish stars
- My little niece, who was born in Canada
- Jewish community
- Getting the citizenship
- Friendly people
- My little granddaughter, who was born in Toronto
- Fir trees; u-turns; lots of good looking men
- Peaceful and kindness of people
- A lot of squirrels
- Many parks and recreations
- Peacefulness of living
- A lot of greenery
- Lack of prejudice (at least on the surface)
- Personal security
- Very nice people; many opportunities
- National diversity and ability of different religions and people to coexist peacefully
- Personal security
- The beautiful architecture
- I did not expect to see wild animals in the big city: Raccoons, foxes
- A lot of parks with wild animals and birds
- Weather

### **SOME PERSONAL COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MY IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE IN TORONTO (OPTIONAL):**

- My daughter is a student at Ryerson. She is going to be a dietician. She works part-time at Shoppers Drug Mart.

- My son finished high school in Toronto. He is studying computers at Seneca. His English is good now!
- Every morning when I wake up I feel happy because I am Canadian. More I live in Canada more I love this wonderful country. Especially I'm proud when I show my Canadian passport abroad. Canadian people are polite and friendly, they always try to encourage if you embarrassed with your English or to show direction in the street. I'm thankful to Canadian government, to JIAS for the help in any ways I got. I appreciate schools of English As a Second Language, helping us to integrate in Canadian society.
- English course at JCC [Jewish Community Centre] was very helpful. I signed up for accounting course at employment and immigration centre, and was offered a 52 weeks accelerated accountancy program. After I finished the program, I got an accounting job with the help of my friend. Then I got enrolled in CGA [Certified General Accountant] program and received my designation in 1998. Now I'm a professional accountant and work as an auditor. During my study I met a lot of people who were very helpful and always ready to give me a hand. Same at both of my working places.
- I took a Computer Aided Design Course (CAD) at Seneca. I will continue to upgrade academically.
- 1) I believe (it's my experience) that only pro-Zionist Jews who immigrated to Israel are content with their decision 100%.  
2) It's impossible to research the "stigma" of relations (tensions) between new immigrants and traditional Jewish population without fully examining the class issues underlying the phenomenon. This especially is true for the "future" of the children question.
- Canada is a very nice country.
- Am I tired of these Canadian winters? YES!
- 1) Immigration procedures are based on pure bureaucracy and political preferences not on the objectivity of the real facts.  
2) Very often the very process of correspondence between Immigration and its clients is confusing and inconclusive, so people are forced to wait for the decision of their fate for years, and after that (in most cases) to be deported.
- I was surprised that Canadian Jews were even less interested in us than Israelis, and mainly what they wanted to hear from us was that anti-Semitism was bad in Russia

(which was not exactly true).

I thought that people who share their mother-tongue [Russian] are naturally interested in each other, and are willing to help [one another]. But in my experience, Yugoslavians helped each other much more than Soviet people. (Even in such simple things as obtaining information). My impression is that the level [class] of immigrants in Israel was much higher than those in Canada.

There have been comments in this thesis about the ghettoization of “the Russians” in Toronto, and concerns voiced by social service providers about the difficulties of *building bridges* between the established Jewish community and the Russian Jews. One of the items in the Questionnaire was a four-part question addressing the immigrants’ social patterns: *Are your friends in Toronto (a) Russian Jews from the FSU? (b) Russian Jews from Israel? (c) Non-Jewish Russians? (d) Toronto Jews?*

The following were the responses of fourteen emigrants from Israel:

(a) Russian Jews from the FSU?	10 yes	4 no
(b) Russian Jews from Israel?	11 yes	3 no
(c) Non-Jewish Russians	6 yes	8 no
(d) Toronto-Jews	7 yes	7 no

The following were the responses of thirteen emigrants from the FSU:

(a) Russian Jews from the FSU?	13 yes	0 no
(b) Russian Jews from Israel?	12 yes	1 no
(c) Non-Jewish Russians	11 yes	2 no
(d) Toronto-Jews	10 yes	3 no

An “armchair analysis” of the above numbers might conclude that 1) Russians reemigrating from Israel were less inclined to mix with non-Jewish Russians than Russians who arrived in Canada directly from the FSU. 2) Russians reemigrating from Israel interacted less with Toronto Jewry than Russians from the FSU. 3) Reemigrants from Israel

and emigrants from the FSU socialized with each other. 4) Reemigrants from Israel are socially more insular or ghettoized than emigrants from the FSU.

All 27 people responded “yes” to the question: Are the Canadian (Toronto) Jews you have met friendly and helpful? When asked specifically if they were invited to the homes of Toronto Jews, the responses were mixed:

Immigrants from FSU:	8 Yes	3 No	2 “Sometimes”
Immigrants via Israel:	7 Yes	4 No	1 “It depends. Many are not friendly.” 1 “On Jewish holidays” 1 “Twice”

When I pressed a little, during the interviews, some of the subjects who had written “yes” regarding being invited to homes of Toronto Jews, admitted it was only for special Jewish holidays meals, such as Passover and Chanukkah, and they knew the people were performing a *mitsvah* [good deed]. They were genuinely appreciative of these efforts and thoroughly enjoyed the evenings. Usually, they were not invited back again, which was explained away by, “We have nothing in common” or “Why should they bother, they have their own friends.” Most felt they could not reciprocate the hospitality because of their reduced economic circumstances and humble living conditions.

Some wished that the Toronto Jews could see beneath the surface. See who they really were. Or, at least, who they had been before they left their identities behind in the former Soviet Union. That they were cultured and well-read and had been well-respected professionals. That they did not enjoy the role of needy, unemployed immigrants, who were taking from the community and giving back nothing.

The most satisfied and accepting of their new circumstances were the Seniors, who

seemed to be very pleased with their lives in Toronto. Jewish and government social services have taken care of all of their needs. They live in subsidized apartments in the heart of the Russian-Jewish community. Neighbourhood shops and services are staffed by Russian-speakers. They receive free medical care and prescription benefits, and JIAS has provided information sheets that give locations of dental clinics. Each month social benefits money is deposited in their bank accounts. Many Seniors enjoy swimming and exercise classes at the Jewish Community Centre closeby. And for socializing, there is the Betel Centre, the Jewish Russian Community Centre and the Association of Soviet Jewry in Canada. Although they are not religious people, they remember the *Yiddishkeit* of their parents and grandparents, and are happy to be living in a vibrant Jewish community. They do not miss Russia. They enjoy being near children and grandchildren, often helping out with after-school child care. They watch Russian television broadcasts beamed in by satellite, read their Russian newspapers, and understand how difficult life has become for elderly friends and relatives left behind to survive on meagre pensions in an atmosphere of escalating anti-Semitism. They know they are lucky to be in Canada.

The middle-agers are having a harder time. Employment is their greatest concern. The realities of making a living in Canada, which they had chosen to ignore, have come home to roost. They are scrambling to recreate themselves. The stresses are enormous. Religion is the last thing on their minds. During the interviews, I could hear the dislocation: sense the depression. Some were having a difficult time letting go of old attitudes and patterns of behaviour; longing for the familiar. But a few were already on their way: optimistic, goal-oriented, and adaptable.

The young adults were very interesting. Two female university students -- attractive, academic achievers -- not yet sure of their "place in the sun" -- hoping to find happiness by escaping the familiar. The two young men I interviewed were more grounded. Hardworking, goal oriented, their dreams would be attainable -- a car, a job, a wife, a family, a home of their own.

All of the interviewees were happy that someone outside their community was interested in talking with them. Learning from them. The interviews were emotional, draining, and inspiring. It was always hard to say goodbye.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

*Chapter One introduced the thesis topic and four primary questions that my research would eventually attempt to answer. In order to provide answers that were not entirely simplistic, I found it necessary to wend my way through a good deal of background information, not only regarding former Soviet Jewry but Canadian Jewry as well. I am certain my patient readers must at time have wondered, "Where is she going with all this information?" The truth of the matter was that I knew as little about Toronto Jewry as I did about Soviet Jewry at the outset so, to borrow an expression from a social worker, I experienced a "double whammy." Because I had minimal personal involvement with Toronto Jewry's organizational milieu and, of course, none with the Russians, it was relatively easy to keep an open mind throughout the research. This "outsiderness" has allowed me the freedom to be totally honest. If some of my observations are less than enthusiastically received, they are mine nevertheless, and I take full responsibility for them. When one is dealing with two elements, there is always this-side and that-side, and somewhere in the middle usually is truth.*

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CANADA'S POLICY OF MULTICULTURALISM RECOGNIZES COMMUNITY UNIQUENESS AND EXTOLS THE "CANADIAN MOSAIC." HAS THIS POLICY REINFORCED THE "GHETTOIZATION" OF FORMER SOVIET JEWS IN TORONTO?

Soviet Jews, under various Communist administrations, have lived for seven decades in the larger cities and towns of the USSR among the general Soviet population. In

the more remote northern and eastern Soviet villages, Jews tended to live in close-clusters because of more overt anti-Semitism. In Toronto, the immigrants' decision to live in a circumscribed, self-generated Russian-Jewish ghetto reflects their Canadian immigration experience more than their abandoned former Soviet lifestyle.

Here, the established Jewish community tends to live in "Jewish neighbourhoods," geographically differentiated by economic status. They tend not to think of themselves as living in ghettos because Toronto is a very cosmopolitan city and no one ethnic group totally monopolizes any neighbourhood. Struggling Jewish-immigrant forerunners did, in fact, live in Jewish ghettos in downtown Toronto, but those days have been relegated to nostalgia and are of interest mainly to Jewish historians.

The Russian-Jewish ghetto on north Bathurst Street developed over time (three decades) because of proximity to Jewish immigrant services for earlier-arriving Soviet Refugees, chain migration, propinquity, affordable rental units in familiar-looking (dismal) high-rise apartment buildings, subsidized apartments for Seniors, excellent public transportation, and availability of Russian-speaking professionals, such as, doctors, dentists and lawyers, and last but not least, word-of-mouth recommendations. Very few decided to settle in this neighbourhood because of proximity to synagogues. A Russian community centre and various religious facilities geared for the Russians eventually followed the immigrants, spearheaded by the ultra-religious Lubavitch Hasidic organization.

The fact that the Russian community located itself in the heart of a lower-to-middle-class established Jewish neighbourhood may or may not be significant, because we now know these immigrants arrived with their own dynamic Russian culture and their own

unique sense of Jewish identity. It was, however, significant to the Toronto-Jews, who found themselves sharing their “turf” with unfamiliar, Russian-speaking neighbours.

We know that the Russians arrived in Canada with a state-oriented perspective, and thus a natural orientation toward state entitlements. The Canadian state’s explicit support of ethnic diversity has given the Russians licence to enjoy and preserve their own culture; a culture of which they are very proud. Also, since they have had to abandon almost all attributes of personal success in the emigration process, their “Russianness” remains their touchstone in Canada. In day-to-day activities, the immigrants feel free to use their mother-tongue inside and outside the home. Heritage Canada [part of Federal Multiculturalism] provides free mother-tongue instruction for elementary level students enrolled in public schools located in predominantly ethnic communities. Italian children are given the opportunity to learn Italian; Polish children learn Polish; Israelis learn Hebrew, and so on. This, of course, has set a positive precedent for Russian-language instruction for Russian children. There is no shortage of unemployed and experienced Russian-language instructors among the immigrant population, and many parents encourage their children to study their highly-regarded Russian language and literature after school. Because many Russian children are not studying the Hebrew language after school or attending religious classes after school, this is perceived by Toronto Jewry as a rejection of Jewish education and traditions. Many Russian parents believe their children are receiving an inferior education in the Toronto public school system. Therefore, they ensure that after-school hours are used for additional lessons. Academic subjects not available in regular classes are studied; geography, physics, music, dance and sports are encouraged. The Russians do not want

their children to waste their time. One can see the potential for conflict here as the Russian children grown into adolescence in Toronto, surrounded by Canadian peers who enjoy a less-demanding, more easy-going lifestyle.

There has been very little effort made in the established Jewish community to understand the culture that the Russians have brought with them to Canada. They are prepared to teach the Russians, but unwilling to learn from them. Some Toronto Jews have made it clear that they are uncomfortable with, and embarrassed by, overt displays of "Russianness." This is very confusing for the Russians, who are getting mixed messages: the Federal government encourages respect for ethnic variety and promotes co-existence, while Toronto Jews seem to prefer homogenization. This has slowed down the integration process.

Naturally, the Russians retreat to their own community, unable to express their concerns; partly because it is not in their nature to openly complain about sensitive matters; partly because they know that in many respects the established Jewish community has been very generous and supportive; and partly because they do not yet have enough confidence in their English-language skills to attempt to discuss issues with Canadian Jews. Also, they do not have articulate and skilled Russian-immigrant community leaders, who will speak for them. Unlike the earlier East European immigrant Jews, whose children and grandchildren make up the well-organized and politically-active Canadian Jewish Congress and the representative Jewish Federation, the Russian newcomers did not arrive in Canada with organizational skills and experience in community self-governance.

IS AID RECEIVED FROM THE JEWISH IMMIGRANT AID SERVICE, TORONTO, AND OTHER JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICES, IN CONJUNCTION WITH AID FROM THE CITY OF TORONTO, PROVINCE OF ONTARIO, AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ADEQUATELY HELPING THE FORMER SOVIET JEWS TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES IN CANADA?

Yes, of course. None of the Russians that I interviewed even hinted that they had feared they would not have a roof over their heads, bread on the table, or clothes on their backs after arriving in Toronto. When the families did not have any resources, JIAS provided; when the families had only limited resources, JIAS supplemented. And when JIAS was not responsible, the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario provided Social Assistance (Welfare) and subsidized housing where necessary. Also, Federal Old Age Pensions were eventually received by Senior immigrants, after a qualifying residency in Canada.

English As a Second Language is readily available free of charge, as is vocational information and job-skills training. When families run into serious problems, Jewish Family and Child Service is there to see them through. Interest-free money is available from the Toronto Jewish Free Loan Cassa to help immigrants become independent and self-sufficient. The Russian immigrants know that help is available for them.

Since 1991, most Independent immigrants from Israel have arrived in Canada with some financial resources; and immigrants from the FSU enter under the Family Reunification program, with relatives on hand to render support. I interviewed only one family that entered Canada from Israel as Convention Refugees. They were very unhappy in Israel. In Canada, they did not ask for any financial assistance from the Jewish services. They received social assistance from the City and Province while waiting for several anxiety-

ridden years for a decision from the Immigration Review Board. They received Landed Immigrant status by default when Immigration Canada landed a large number of refugee claimants, who were deemed to have been waiting for an unreasonably long time for a decision, and who in that period of time had proven themselves honest and hardworking.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN THE ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION PROCESSES OF SOVIET JEWS WHO IMMIGRATED TO CANADA DIRECTLY FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION, AND SOVIET JEWS WHO HAVE REIMMIGRATED TO CANADA VIA ISRAEL?

Yes. Many of my interviewees from the FSU were Seniors, who had reunited with children who had preceded them to Canada. They were a satisfied group; grateful for Canada's generosity, and pleased to avail themselves of all that the Jewish and non-Jewish communities provided for Seniors. Many found new friends in the Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada and the Russian Club for Seniors at the Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living. As they were at the end of their working years, they were not unhappy about abandoning professional careers.

The middle-agers from the FSU were finding life in Canada more difficult. They had to rebuild abandoned economic bases, learn English, retrain, and often begin anew in junior positions. Problems with adolescent offspring and spouses had to be resolved with methods acceptable to Canadian society. Most found living on Welfare very demeaning.

Young adults, who had left good friends behind in the FSU, had no comparative Canadian peer support system. Some did not wish to return to school where they would be set back because of language deficits. They had a difficult time fitting in socially, and found the harsh realities encountered in Canada were not what the Western media had led

them to expect. The community and JIAS have not adequately recognized that this age group has special problems. In 2000-2001, the needs of young adults will be better addressed.

Immigrants, who had spent some years in Israel, entered Canada with better financial resources and more exposure to high-technology. They had experienced democracy and capitalism; and, while living in the Jewish state, had also experienced the stresses and strains of terrorism and the constant threat of war. They understood it would be difficult to resettle in Canada, but they had experienced immigration once, and this time would at least know what questions to ask. However, like the emigrants from the FSU, they preferred not to believe unpleasant realities pointed out by Russians already in Canada or Canadian Immigration. They too entered Canada with rose-coloured glasses and proved to be only slightly more successful than Russians from the FSU in the employment arena.

#### IS THERE A SCHISM BETWEEN TORONTO'S ESTABLISHED JEWISH COMMUNITY AND "THE RUSSIANS?" IF SO, WHY?

The research has pointed to a wide schism between Toronto Jewry and the Russian Jewish community. My hope was that the personal interviews would help explain why the Russians were not integrating into the established Jewish community; why the Toronto Jews were so uncharacteristically reluctant to welcome the Russians into their personal worlds; and why, when they did, the Russians perceived their hospitality as *noblesse oblige*.

On my desk is a clipping from The Canadian Jewish News, the largest-circulated, national, Jewish ethnic weekly newspaper. A bold-faced-type header reads, "UJA

**Federation seeks to integrate Russian-born Jews.”** This article was not written in the 1970s or 1980s, it is dated January 20, 2000. Once again, this award-winning newspaper, that supposedly speaks for all the Jews in Canada, is providing a forum for a UJA Federation committee member to bemoan the lack of integration of Toronto’s Russian Jewish community, *“You can count on one hand the number of people integrated into the larger Jewish community.”*

Why have I selected this article for discussion? Because it introduces yet another integration solution that has recently surfaced in the Committee Rooms of the UJA Federation offices on north Bathurst Street. I respectfully suggest here, that although the well-meaning Integration Committee members are writing new lyrics, the old melody lingers on.

UJA Federation’s Integration Committee is admitting past attempts at integration have failed. Their solution is to divert a larger percentage of community-raised dollars to encourage Russian integration. Nine organizations (out of fifteen applicants) will in 2000-2001 share one-year grants totalling \$265,000. None of these organizations received the amount they requested because funds are scarce, and the demands great.

Perry Romberg of UJA Federation (see interview, Appendix I) has been quoted in the article. He assures that these grants represent a reorganization of the existing budget and do not preclude other budgetary items, such as, tuition subsidies for Russian students. He estimates that almost half of the monies would fund programmes for youth, and noted that the programmes are aimed not only at newcomers, but also at long-time residents who have “never connected.”

The grantees and amounts received were:

- Ameinu, a volunteer group based at the Orthodox girls' high school Bais Yaakov. \$20,000 for outreach, including Jewish holiday celebrations, to Russian families.
- The Bathurst Jewish Centre, \$23,000, for its Maccabi Sports Club, which includes an informal Jewish education component.
- Beth Tikvah Synagogue (Conservative) \$5000, for Shabbatons aimed at Russian families.
- Kolel: The Adult Centre for Liberal Jewish learning (Reform). \$10,000. for the Russian version of its "Doing Jewish" program.
- Jewish Campus Services, \$17,500, for its York University based club for Israeli students, among whom are Russian-born students who came to Canada via Israel.
- The Jewish Russian Community Centre (Orthodox-Lubavitch) \$120,000 for adult education, and for its Hebrew school serving 180 children.
- Jewish Vocational Services \$35,000 for a mentoring and career-planning program aimed at immigrant youth and adults.
- Jewish Immigrant Aid Service \$30,000, for a joint JIAS-B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO) program aimed at Russian teens, and for a Jewish holiday series.
- Moan Noam (Orthodox), \$5,000, a fledgling Russian-Jewish synagogue and educational organization.

"Nine organizations with different approaches to integration will give the Russian community more options," Romberg noted. "I think that's the real strength of this."

Mr. Romberg, et al, are convinced that *the more lines they have in the water, the more fish they will catch*. My question to Mr. Romberg and the Integration Committee is: *Why do you persist in believing that the only way to integrate the Russians is to allocate more funding to increase their exposure to religious dogma? Why do the folks at Federation persist in believing that Russian young adults, or for that matter, most of their parents, will*

rise to the bait of free potato latkes at Chanukah, free seder meals at Passover, or religious sermons masking as lectures. Why is the established Jewish community so afflicted with tunnel-vision?

A considerable proportion of the more than quarter million dollars made available to encourage Russian integration was allocated to organizations that serve religious Jews. Although other denominations of Judaism received token funding, the largest amount went to the ultra-Orthodox Hasidic Lubavitch organization. No doubt, because they have the best record of religious success with a small proportion of the Russian community. Sports and social organizations with a religious "hook" also received some monies, as did JVS, who work so hard to help Russians find employment (their greatest priority.)

Since most of the Russian immigrants are secular Jews, arriving in Canada with only a vestigial remnant of Jewish identity (maintained by default), one wonders if a decision has been made at the corporate level to give up on these secular Russians, who do not want to assimilate religiously, and to support outreach programmes primarily directed at the small percentage of willing-to-be-religious immigrants? To give up on the large number of Russian-Jews, who might serve and enhance the Jewish community with other unique and special attributes?

Let me digress to make this point.... On November 14, 1999, 15-year-old Dmitri (Matti) Baranovski was brutally beaten and kicked to death by young assailants barely older than himself. This tragedy, which took place in G. Ross Lord Park, in the heart of the Russian community in north Toronto, shocked the entire Jewish community, as well as the community at large. Messages of condolence for the parents arrived from Canada's Prime

Minister, Ontario's Premier, and various other Canadian dignitaries. Memorial funds were set up in Matti's name, and a fifteen foot Chanukah menorah (candelabra) was erected in the park where he died.

This crime was an epiphany for Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. Matti was not the victim of anti-Semitism, anti-Russianism, or outside gang violence. He was killed by members of his own Russian/Israeli/Jewish community.

One of the most significant aftermaths of this tragedy was the establishment of the *Russian Jewish Initiative*, a body of concerned Russian mothers who joined together to acknowledge and address the problems of immigrant youth in their own community. On June 27, 2000, in cooperation with UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, this newly-formed organization presented a fine-art silent auction and concert, at the Leah Posluns Theatre in the Bathurst Jewish Centre. This gala evening was dedicated to the memory of Matti Baranovski, and all proceeds from the event were directed to Russian immigrant youth programming. A large advertisement promoting the concert, well in advance of its date, appeared in The Canadian Jewish News. This occasion would mark the first time the UJA Federation and the Russian-Jewish community co-operated in a significant fundraising and social undertaking. Many Russian artists enhanced the theatre's lobby areas with their beautiful original art, available by silent auction. Imports from the FSU were on display for sale. Refreshments were available. The evening's organizers were very busy and very excited.

The concert was first-rate, featuring a variety of talented Russian immigrant artists: instrumentalists (including two child protégés), vocalists (classical, pop and jazz), ballroom

dancers, circus performers, and more. The program was hosted by Aelita, a gifted and glamorous international performer from Latvia. The concert closed with the delighted capacity audience on their feet enthusiastically singing *Havanegillah* in Hebrew. (So, who says they're not Jewish?)

The point of this digression is: Were there any Toronto-Jews in the audience? Yes, a few. Did this important evening receive any coverage in The Canadian Jewish News? Not really, their reporter didn't attend. Eventually there was a tiny blurb in a Federation public relations insert -- weeks after the event. Were the concert organizers disappointed? Of course. Does this type of establishment apathy reinforce the Russian community's sense of isolation? Yes. And the folks over at the Jewish Federation worry and wonder about their failure to build bridges to this community.

According to Ella Gurevich, the Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada's dedicated and dynamic secretary, the Russian immigrant community has problems with their young adults. *They don't feel they belong...they don't have connections...and they are suffering. It is very difficult for Canadian people to understand what Russian people really need. There are cultural walls that need to be broken down...*

May I take this opportunity to suggest that the synagogue and Jewish religious institutions are not the only way to make contact with "the Russians." Toronto Jews interconnect in many ways that are not religious. Some Toronto Jews never go to synagogue but feel very much a part of the Jewish community. Perhaps if we allowed a little air into Jewish organizational thinking, some Russian Jews might cross that "bridge." Or, perhaps, Toronto Jews have to cross the bridge first, one at a time. Example...the Russians have

a “circus camp” where children can go to learn to be clowns and acrobats and jugglers in the summertime. Jewish circus performers!!! Example...the Russians have ballroom dance classes for children taught by professional Russian dancers in their homes. Jewish ballroom dancers!!!

I did not know three years ago that I was embarking on a project that would allow me the privilege of meeting generous and caring professional people and volunteers. Altruistic, sincere, dedicated individuals, who were trying very hard to help the Russians to successfully reclaim their lives. And how much I have learned about the Russians! What a dynamic community of artists and dancers and circus performers; of musicians and poets and computer programmers; of doctors and nurses and translators and entrepreneurs. And their children...their beautiful Russian children...breathing in Canadian freedom and grabbing all the opportunities it affords.

There are problems identified in this thesis that are not unsurmountable. My hope is that a few Canadians will read these chapters and hear the voices in the interviews, and appreciate that Canada has gained what the former Soviet Union has lost. And if any members of the Toronto Jewish community read this thesis. I hope that it will encourage them to revisit their attitudes and perceptions because we are losing time. We just may have to let this *lost tribe of Israel* into our hearts on their own terms.

## APPENDIX I

### THE CANADIAN INTERVIEWS

DEBRA FELDMAN, SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR  
SOPHIE FISCHOFF AND IVETTA ISAKOVAN  
SOCIAL WORKERS  
JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD SERVICE  
NOVEMBER 5, 1998

*There are all these wonderful social services available...and then there are the Russian immigrants...how are they impacting on each other? Will I find that all the efforts being made on behalf of the Russian immigrants are working? Are [the efforts] being appreciated?*

[Debra] We don't keep a lot of statistics [on Russians.] Regarding your first question, for example...we don't ask the new clients coming in whether they are Russian. We can give you statistics on how many are immigrants. However, we don't ask whether they are from the Soviet Union or from Israel. We don't differentiate [with statistics] between Russian and Israeli immigrants. What we do as an agency is essentially [provide] two major services. First, we take the role of the Family Service Association for Jewish people; and second, we are a Children's Aid Society for the Jewish population. Within the Family Service part of the agency, we have a financial assistance program; and that is a dollar program that comes directly from the Jewish Federation to the Jewish poor. Again, we can tell you subjectively that a large portion of the people receiving our assistance may well be Russian immigrants, but again, we do not add up how many are Russian immigrants and how many are not. In terms of our service, that is not an important statistic.

*I find that interesting because different groups have different needs for different reasons.*

[Debra] When they meet with their social worker those needs are addressed. That is why we have Russian-speaking social workers, who can address the needs of those Russian clients who cannot speak.

The second thing this agency does, specifically for the Russian-Jewish community, is that we have a school outreach program. We have two social workers, who work directly in the schools with the children and their families. These are the public schools located primarily along the Bathurst Street corridor; elementary, junior high and high school levels. The social workers' time is spent at the schools. Their job is group work with the children themselves; family counselling or educational work in terms of transition issues...new rules, new country...that type of thing.

We have nine days per week of social worker time in eight schools. When we started about five years ago, it was school outreach for the general Jewish community, work that we still do, and then it became more specialized...in terms of a Hebrew outreach program...because there were many people that had come from Israel. At this time, we are doing the same thing for the Russians. As the immigrant population from Russia grew, the needs grew. The Israelis had become settled; they had adapted; they had learned the language. Their needs lessened and the Russians' needs increased. And so the shift in terms of the school outreach work that gets done...it moved over to the Russian population.

*My impression was that most of the Russians that came to Canada in the 1990s were very educated, sophisticated people...engineers and scientists. Where did I get that impression from?*

You have to understand that we are talking to you as a Jewish Family Service and a Jewish Children's Aid. I am not talking to you about the family over here that hasn't needed JIAS...hasn't needed financial assistance...hasn't had any problems with their children. We see the problems. I am describing to you our experience in terms of who the population is that we service.

*Have you found any difference between the immigrants who come to Canada directly from the FSU or via Israel?*

[Sophie] Yes, there is a very big difference. There are two types of Jews that came from Russia and I would like to explain to you my answer to your question. There is the Ashkenazi Jew that comes from the western part of Russia...the Ukraine, Belarus, Moscow...the European part. And that may be the people you are talking about...the highly educated, the engineers, the doctors, etc., etc. Then there is another population that came from Russia. They come from the Asian part of Russia...the mountainous part, more eastern and northern. Their republics border with Iraq, Iran and Turkey, so their culture is very eastern...and these are the people that come from villages and not from major towns. And they have lived in those villages for a very long time and protected their Judaism. Their Judaism has a little bit different flavour than the Ashkenazi Judaism. And their education is lower...they may have grade school or grade 8, grade 9, grade 10. Yes, they are a less sophisticated group from a western point of view, but I hesitate to call them peasants because they have very different dynamics within their families and with their relationship to society. Now those who went to Israel...they did their initial character-breaking, their adaptation, in Israel. And the hardest part happened in Israel, so when they come here to Canada, again, it is a culture shock but it is much less of a culture shock coming from a Communist country to Israel to here.

[Debra] They have had the experience of living in a democratic society. They have had support within that country. They have also learned the skills necessary to adapt. They have emigrated twice. They have moved to Canada, and although, of course, it is traumatic, they

have gained some confidence through the Israel experience.

The population that moves directly from Russia to here...that's like getting a whammy in the face. But part of the culture that the second group lived with in Russia, that is more on the eastern side, is [survival] skills. Their education is not a formal education; it is in lifestyle and living; a personality-set that one has to have to survive there. And that's the [personality] set that they bring here...and using that set of skills over here, they are in trouble all over the place. Because there, where it is very important to manipulate the system...it's very important to be able to have the wherewithall to buy the services that you need in any way you can...that's a way of life there. [I am] not putting a judgment on it...that was a survival technique and a necessary one.

[Sophie] If you wanted a pound of butter, you brought a bottle of vodka. You had to give something to get something.

*What you are saying is that even though it is the 1990s, the immigrants coming directly from Russia have not been educated before they emigrated as to the western way of living and thinking; they come very disadvantaged and they have a lot to learn.*

[Debra] Or, according to some, they come very advantaged. Sometimes how it is interpreted from the Canadian point of view is that the Russians think we are stupid. That's because this is a democratic society and, if you look at the fundamental value basis of this society, trust is number one, as well as honesty. Especially from a social worker perspective, you believe [them]...you go with where the client is at, you give [them] every benefit of the doubt. Some would say we allow ourselves to be manipulated.

Again that becomes the social worker's job; to start going there and unravelling and undoing and going back to the value system...because, essentially, what they are doing with us in our interview room is what they are doing out there. Plus, you get a kid, who is stuck in the middle between values being taught at home...and every parent does it...what you have learned...whatever you have grown up with...you pass on to your children...and you think you are doing them a favour...and [there is] a totally different world out there in terms of socializing with [Canadian] children.

You know, anti-Semitism is viewed very differently in that group. It does not necessarily come out in experience in terms that they need to be religious and show how they are Jewish...but let somebody out there call them something and they are fighting. They will take anybody on. They are aggressive with respect to defending their Judaism...their identity. Don't forget they are used to that...that's how life was there. Here's a gang of kids that are Jewish, and here's a gang of kids that aren't...so there was a constant battle...and in their minds, it is still going on over here. You add to that their confusion with the [new] rules and the [new] way of life. When you look at immigration, you can look specifically at the Russian immigration process, if you like, but I think you can't omit the general immigration

experience...where you are dealing with all the issues of loss, leaving a homeland that was not your choice to leave, but having it thrust upon you.

The [problems of the] first-generation-group population is generally what these parents are going through. The hope is with the second generation...and that's why the focus right now is much more in the schools in terms of working with the children to bring them along.

[Ivetta] Another point to make...because I used to do outreach work at a [Jewish] day school [Associated Hebrew School], I came to the decision that even the immigrants who were sending their kids...some of their kids were born here...the kids became Canadians, but the parents they stayed immigrants...so there were conflicts between the children and the parents.

[Debra] You see, that is what I am saying...in terms of there are really interesting aspects to this...because if you compare them to the Ashkanazis, who came over just after World War Two, their relationships with their parents were different. The value system and the cultural rules that they brought here may have been different...and you had the children that were growing up Canadians and doing what Canadians do, and you had the parents that were stuck in their value system...but somehow, within their family systems, there was some adaptation to accept both. The difficulty here [and now] is [that] I think the world is a more sophisticated place...the technology is changing...I don't think the parents [can adapt], even if they have the skills. It's an awesome thing to adjust to.

Also, it depends on the age of the children. You can go into as much depth and analysis as you want to, but you've got to [consider] the developmental stages...the normal, healthy developmental stages of the different age groups. So, if you've got an adolescent from there that starts acting out the normal, healthy, rebellious identity stuff that is normal here...you're going to have a kid who is in a lot of trouble.

Are we dealing with kids who are in trouble with the law? Sometimes. You see, the difficulty is that we are not a research or a teaching facility...so we do the work, and the guesses that we make about things are guesses...and they are all subjective. On the other hand, we are the Children's Aid Society, and certainly part of our population is Russian. I wouldn't say in terms of that area that it's even most of it. It's not. In terms of the Family Service fact, there are a lot of families that are indeed in trouble. And there are a lot of families that are in trouble that we don't know about...but we smell it, or we guess it. [These families] are also incredibly private because they are scared. This is not a group of people who come to us, who represent authority, and expect help. They don't expect help. All they think is that we are going to make trouble for them. And their life here is to avoid trouble...whatever that trouble, with a capital tee, means. Because we offer financial assistance and we offer concrete help, there are families that we can get close enough to to work with. It is all based on the level of trust that can be developed. Often, we'll work with a family for two years before they tell us about something that has been going on for years.

There is no such thing as psychotherapy in Russia. It doesn't exist in a communist society. The most that exists is a doctor that would be similar to what we call a psychiatrist; who would be able to prescribe medicine and have places where people who are really 'looney tunes' go. But it's not a culture where it's okay to go to see someone and tell him you're having a problem. Because then you don't get into the schools...particularly if you are Jewish knowing that you have a problem could be a very serious thing over there...another roadblock. They usually deal with the very serious stuff; less serious problems they deal with as best they can. A kid is either a good kid or a bad kid. With a good kid, there is a much larger scope of acceptance.

*I think what I am hearing is that a lot of the immigrants with whom you are dealing currently are Russians.*

[Debra] Yes. One of the ways in which we are trying to reach out to the Russians...one of the ways that they are learning to be able to accept help is when it's not presented in an analytical or insight-oriented format. They understand learning. They understand a classroom. They understand an expert talking and teaching. So, we have lots of what we call Jewish Family Life groups here. Groups which basically cover everything from womb to tomb. They can go out to a group and feel like human beings...sit and listen and go home. There isn't somebody sitting there with you analysing. *Look at your family...what's happening with your son?*

Those kinds of techniques are humiliating for them...and they don't even necessarily have the shift. It's not an intellectual problem or a language problem...it's much more a conceptual and perceptual way of looking at information. They can't make the shift to be able to do this internally because, again, that is something that is taught in a very subtle way. You know, when our kids are little we ask them, *Do you want the blue or do you want the pink?* And that is a process that is learned. We teach. *Say thank you for the Kleenex...as opposed to How can you get the Kleenex?*

I think the difficulty for the [Russian] community are the biases and prejudices that are developed because they present themselves as liars and manipulators. That may be how their behaviour may appear, but it really comes from a whole set of survival techniques...and they did survive, God knows. I don't know how any of us [Canadians] would have been...so it's not a judgmental thing.

*Very few Russians are coming [to Canada] as refugees. They are coming because they qualify through our Canadian Immigration's point system as Independents...which means they have, according to the federal government, a lot of resources...at least professionally...but it seems that, in reality, although they had the points, when they get here they find themselves in a difficult situation.*

[Sophie] For example...the way the point system works...you get the most points for

knowledge of French or English...so it's a very subjective [Immigration Officer] kind of thing. You go for an interview and everything else looks good. If you are a computer engineer, you get extra points. Then you come here and you don't speak English. Computer technology is moving forward every day. By the time you learn enough English to go back to your computer, you have lost the knowledge. So you get points...you speak a few words of English, *Hello. How are you?*

[Debra] Part of what we are identifying here is that this language business is not such an easy thing, if you've got somebody who is emigrating from Russia to Israel to Canada. Generally, if he has been able to learn Hebrew, he will be able to learn English. Many of the clients that we have simply do not have the capacity to learn English...and, you know, you can send them to how many schools and ESL programs...and I am not even sure it is a learning disability...it's just that after a certain age it becomes very, very hard. Some can, in fact, do it at any age, but some can't...and I think there is going to be a certain [Russian] population without English.

Compared to previous immigration groups, we are not finding among the Russians that it is the women [who are not learning English]. Many times, it is the women who are out there working, and it's the men who are sitting at home not being able to talk English.

*I am hearing that the women adapt quicker; perhaps they are more realistic...the women will move forward with the language and find a "little", if not a "big", job; and that the husband is so upset and so depressed about his status over here this becomes another cause of friction between husband and wife.*

[Debra] Yes...if he was the boss and receiving status in Russia for being the boss from his peers, from his family...and then he comes over here... You can call him a chauvinist, if you want but, on the other hand, he is probably going to spend a year depressed because he doesn't have a clue...and he is losing control.

[Sophie] And worst of all, his 14-year-old daughter is going to school wearing makeup. The father is used to school uniforms...chaperons.

*So the parents have to adjust to the free and easy lifestyle that our teenagers enjoy here, and the sexuality, and the peer pressure?*

[Debra] And there is the physical punishment and also the supervision aspects of it. They are coming from a population where, when the parents left to go to work, there were others around to supervise...and everything was okay. That's not the way things work here...and there was no law there that said you couldn't hit your children.

[Ivetta] The word "abuse" doesn't exist in the Russian dictionary. The action [behaviour] exists but this word they don't have.

[Debra] Never mind spousal, I am sure it [abuse] goes on at every level of society...the police...the army. You are talking about a society that is run by control.

[Sophie] We are talking about spousal abuse...in Russian there is a saying [translates], *You love somebody like your own soul, and you shake them like a pear tree.* That's a definition of spousal abuse.

[Debra] The more you love somebody, the more frustration you can experience because that person reaches your soul. So, for example, if a child is not doing well, it tears you apart on your inside, so you have the right to shake him...so the [abusive] actions come out because you love and care.

The kids are all being taught [that abuse is illegal]. *Take your hands off me! You don't have any right to touch me! Who are you?*

[Ivetta] This is a big problem between kids and parents. This is [such] a different culture for those poor parents. [They say], *I am a parent...I am raising them...that's the only way I know how to do it!*

[Thelma] *The status of the husband, the status of the parent...everything is rocking and rolling....*

[Debra] And there is no such thing as a social worker over there. It's a control agent.

[Ivetta] The Russian people, they always had to be careful; especially the Russian Jews because of the politics. Here [JF&CS], I have to make an arrangement just to ask them something. They ask me so many questions...and you can feel they are so scared. They think I am the KGB!

[Debra] They ask, *What do you care? What does it matter? Why do you need to know? Who are you?*

[Sophie] You have to earn your client's trust. I find, if we can speak their language and are familiar with their culture, we can educate them; and because we have an easy-going approach, they learn to trust us.

[Debra] From the perspective of a non-Russian, what we do is ask them. A rule of thumb in social work with any group is that if we don't know where we are going, we ask. For example, we deal with a population of Orthodox Jewish people. Not everybody in this place is religious; not everybody knows all the rules; if we're not sure, we ask...and they will teach us. The Russian population isn't any different. They will tell us sometimes. Whether they do tell us or don't tell us, we are earning their trust because we are giving it [control] to them. We are saying *tell me...*we're not telling them...and our interest in them may very well be a

new experience.

*Are there any other Russian-speaking social workers with JF&CS?*

[Debra] The two in the schools and Sophie and Ivetta. We also have a group of volunteers in our agency that is made up from our client-population. Many clients are Russian-speaking, so we use them. People need to apply for housing...to go deal with different people...so we will send a Russian-speaking volunteer with them to act as a kind of mentor. We have twelve volunteers right now and there has never been a problem finding them...men, women, older, younger.

[Sophie] They [volunteers] are people who have time and are not working, for whatever reason. They might be retired; they might not need to work; some of them are unemployed. Some have been here for a long time; and there are some who haven't been here for that long. They came with English [skills]. They have the immigration experience in common.

[Debra] It's their way of giving back and saying *thank you*.

SANDRA ATLIN  
 PAST-PRESIDENT  
**JEWISH IMMIGRANT AID SERVICES OF CANADA**  
**TORONTO OFFICE**  
 OCTOBER 22, 1998

[Sandra] The Russians' expectations are much more realistic than earlier on. They know it isn't much better anywhere else. It is very hard for them to get into the United States. The American immigration laws are terrible. They don't want any immigrants...no matter where they are from. There are all kinds of refugees in the United States but they never get [in]. We have Landed Immigrant status, the U.S. doesn't have that. We are wonderful here in Canada.

In some ways the Russians feel intellectually superior to the Canadian Jews and dislike being patronized by them. They have a European outlook. The people who came here are generally more westernized [than previous waves]. They had been exposed to western influences for the past ten years, so that those who have come in the 1990s are much more sophisticated than those who left Russia earlier...and they see themselves that way too. They did have excellent educations and good incomes. They had made it. Culturally, they have had exposure to music and the arts and all of that, so there is a real dichotomy as to how they feel about their whole [immigration] experience. Of course, they could feel this way anywhere else. They almost all have language problems. They almost all have to reestablish themselves in terms of their professions.

*I would suggest that perhaps the religious...the more observant Jews...hoped that these Russians would appreciate the opportunity of learning [Jewish ritual] and becoming Jewish, because historically we have been smuggling religious artifacts to Russia...and matzah and prayerbooks at Passover...and they have suffered because they are Jews...the stories that we have heard. So they are here now and the synagogues are here....*

[Sandra] Religion is not their mindset. The Russians are culturally Jewish. They went through a lot of hell to maintain family links and so on. They don't know [ritual], for example, death customs, they don't know them as we do. And they certainly are not going to become religious Jews unless they become "born again" and that's not what's going to happen. But it's our job to welcome them into this community, as they are, and to acknowledge what they've come through; acknowledge their excellence in so many areas.

I am not sure that I agree with you [that we thought the Russians would reinforce our established Jewish community] and I would be interested in seeing your sources. That [assumption] has always been a bone of contention between JIAS and our funders, the Federations that represent the established Jewish community. We [JIAS] have had to justify our existence and, if what you say is true, my efforts are negated.

I am sure Rabbi Zaltzman will talk to you...he is the Salvation Army...remember that analogy. There is no doubt that he wants to convert everybody to...he wants to save souls...and to do that, he does good...but it's from a religious and from a Lubavitch perspective. Yes, the Russian-Jewish Community Centre is Lubavitch run. Yes, the Russians that go to the Lubavitch centre [Orthodox] are generally more comfortable in that environment than at the Holy Blossom [Reform] or one of the Conservative synagogues. Holy Blossom Temple connected with JIAS through a Community Integration project several years ago. They offered to give free memberships to new Russian immigrants. Temple became part of the Family-to-Family programme and a lot of Holy Blossom families connected with the Russians. So, at one point, they had perhaps fifteen new immigrant Russian families in their congregation.

In the past, when other groups of immigrants came to Canada, there were the *land-manshaften* [associations made up of immigrants from the same East European community]. They don't have that anymore. Just by way of my own experience, it seems that unless there is a connection made with [Jewish] individuals with whom they hit it off and who are of the same general class and sophistication and with whom they can communicate, they will not become part of the established community...and I only know the tip of the iceberg. Our social workers know because they came as Russian immigrants themselves. You are peeling away a layer, and each person you talk to will give you another layer.

Right now they want to have bar mitzvahs for their kids. Not that they are religious but they want that party. It's an opportunity to socialize. If they have the money, they throw big weddings. Their kids are marrying people from established Jewish families. Their kids are going to university here and they meet a lot of people. The Russians are very clever...I know I am generalizing, but there are a lot like that. They are not a bunch of *shleppers* [uneducated losers], these people that are coming in. That is not who Canada is allowing in now. These are not the big fat ladies who did whatever in the Soviet Union. No Jews didn't do that [sweep the streets]. Jews were members of the middle class; if there was such a thing as a middle class, that's what they were. And the intelligentsia and the elite.

In the past ten years or so, JIAS has focused on resettlement issues and has provided really fine services for the immigrants. Now, we want to make a change to a much more integrative model. We won't forget our settlement mandate because that is obviously extremely important, but we want to encourage integration. Yes, they have to get settled, but integration of the Russians into the Canadian and Canadian-Jewish communities is an area that we have not prioritized to date. We have had a lot of problems coming to terms with this.

What is integration? We still don't know specifically what the indicators are going to be. The Federation wants one of the indicators to be that every Russian immigrant gives a minimum of one hundred dollars to the United Jewish Appeal [laughing]. They don't really

say that, but they want them to show that they feel a connection to the community and assume some responsibility, not only for their very own, but for the Jewish community in general; and that they show that connection, in fact, by becoming contributors.

Perry Romberg, our previous Executive Director, had a very hard time getting his head around making a shift of our resources and staff-time away from the 'Cadillac' settlement services that we have been providing for the past ten years; to make it a little more of a 'Chevrolet' service, moving some of our staff and dollar resources to setting up a cultural centre for Russian immigrants, for example, particularly for young people and for anything [else] that can provide long-term integration and discourage assimilation. Obviously, the Jewish community donors want to see immigrants that they put money into stay in the community, and become part of and assets to that community.

Oh yes, assimilation is different from integration. It is a totally opposite idea. The Jewish notion of assimilation equals *unJewish*; becoming like the rest. Integration, as we mean it, is trying to redress the wrong that was done in taking their roots away from them as Jews in the Soviet Union, and helping them to become a vital part of the Jewish community.

You can take your question to another level and ask, 'Does the established Jewish community want these Russians to become integrated with it?' And now we come to your question of whether there is discrimination within the Jewish community which resists any entity unwilling to become homogenized. Yes, probably [there is], because the established community has been here a long time and has a lot to lose. We have all clawed our way to the top and we don't want to make the ladder all wobbly again.

I think it has ever been thus. Think about all the Jews that have made it. The Germans looked down on the East Europeans; and they in turn looked down on the 'greenies' that came after World War Two. I think the explanation is that those who have been here, and have struggled, and have made it, to whatever degree, worry that the newcomers will somehow upset the applecart. It's part of the Jewish mentality of needing to be accepted. I think that established Jews, given their own struggles to integrate, worry that newcomers will somehow put in jeopardy their achievements. They [also] worry that their achievements will become more noticeable and their differences will become more highlighted again. We try to be publicly less different because the more different we have been, the more troubles we have had. So, I think that is an explanation or at least an element.

The thing we have forgotten is that they had their own culture. They were Russians, and they lived in a very closed society for a long time. But the younger ones have had a lot of exposure to western ideas and people. So when we hear 'Russians', and people [Toronto Jews] turn their noses up, they may be thinking of a whole class of people, who came in the 1970s, who were truly refugees, and had left before the Soviet Union really opened up to the West. But by the 1980s and certainly the 1990s, that was not the case. The code words [pejoratives] for Jews always included 'westernized'. The true Russian only

wants to be identified with Mother Russia. I think there is a real need to educate the established Jews here as to who we have in this migration. We are coming to grips with this at JIAS now.

Something else just occurred to me...and that is that the 1970s were the years of very strong activism in Toronto on behalf of Soviet Jews. So what happened to that "Soviet Jewry Rescue?" How did it translate itself as a welcome of Soviet Jews to this community? The thing is...they were supposed to go to Israel. We had hoped that Israel would have four million people because all the Russians would emigrate there. And many went and will remain there. But Canada is climate-wise much more familiar to them; and it is safe and clean. Israel is not for everybody and, of course, that is why we have a secondary migration.

There was a sort of communal disappointment that the Russians had the chance to go to Israel, and they didn't go; or they went and didn't stay. They came here instead. What you have to address in your thesis, in terms of trying to define why there hasn't been a real outpouring [of affection] from the established community...their money outpoured...the money went out...but in Canada it didn't include their *neshumah* [soul]. What has happened here is the community said, *Oh, they have abandoned Israel; they've used it as a stepping stone to get out!* I don't buy that...I don't buy any of that! They have free choice; just as we have the free choice to stay here. If the issue is the building up of Israel, we [Canadian Jews] are people who are established...we have everything...we can take it with us...wouldn't we be the ideal immigrants? But we aren't pushing ourselves [to Israel], and we are not pushing our kids!

Yes, the Russians do value friendships. They learned [in the Soviet Union] who they could rely on; and it was generally a small group for each individual. Jews would generally trust Jews more than other people, and friendships were very deep; so they find strange some of our superficial social interaction here. They are not accustomed to calling [first], just going. People drop in and they are welcomed. If you have problems, you put on a happy face. The ability to keep a stiff upper lip and bright facade, and show that you are okay is very important. Even among their own community, they don't complain. It's pride; and also not wanting others to think that they are doing better than themselves.

They don't call people in the community to ask for help. Networking is a foreign notion, as is making use of all your contacts. Generally, in the Soviet Union, it was a meritocracy. The cream rose to the top...and I am not talking about the political sphere. So they were not used to this [initiating and competing]. They thought their abilities would be recognized here. Now, I am not saying that connections don't matter in Russia, certainly they do; but culturally there are a lot of differences, and some are offensive to us, unless we are really willing to delve into them and try to understand where the Russians are coming from. And some of our attitudes are offensive to them.

I think that they feel safer among Russian Jews. They may interact with lots of non-Jews in

the workplace and so on, but my hunch is that they don't interact socially with the Russian-Christian immigrants because of the old fears.

The Russians who have received help from the Jewish community don't want to be offensive in any way. It is very hard for us [JIAS] to get decent evaluations of our programmes. They are almost without exception positive. The only thing we hear, time and time again, is that the Jewish community lets them down regarding getting jobs. What the solutions are to that problem, I am still not sure. But the community didn't rally. It didn't see getting jobs for Russian Jews as such a big deal and, of course, they started to arrive in large numbers when we [Ontario] went into a recession. Earlier they did get jobs...sometimes through Jewish community connections, sometimes not.

I think a study of the Toronto Jewish community and how they accept this group will really be unique because the Toronto Jewish community is unique. It is small and it was homogeneous...but that is changing now.

The Jewish community has made a big contribution to the resettlement of Russian Jewish immigrants in the last three decades. but I question your premise here that the established community is more experienced and more sensitive. It is more experienced, but sensitive...I don't know.

RABBI MICHAEL SKOBAC  
EDUCATION DIRECTOR  
JEWS FOR JUDAISM  
NOVEMBER 9, 1998

[Rabbi Michael Skobac] Yes, we are basically one organization with one name. Each branch operates independently in terms of their finances, but we co-operate on many projects. We share information...we assist each other...we fill in for each other...so we work together as a team (with other cities).

Jews for Judaism had been running here, for the first many years, out of the founding director's home as an informal project. It was not done full-time. Julius Ciss, who is the founding director of the Toronto branch had himself been part of the Jews for Jesus movement for about five and a half years. Soon after he got out, he ended up doing this kind of work informally: speaking about his experiences; speaking to individuals and groups; counselling people. Ultimately, it developed into an organization that was basically running out of his home, basically self-funded.

Slowly, it became more of an established organization and received some private funding. Then, in 1994, the Federation (Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto) granted two years of start-up funds to help move it into an office and get it off the ground as a full-time organization. I came on board, full-time, last April. I have lived in Toronto eight years (from New York). Previously, I had been working as a consultant to Jews for Judaism in my spare time. I had a full-time position working as the campus chaplain to Jewish university students. Last year we moved from a private and innocuous location in an office building to this very public storefront operation.

Well, it would depend on what they were coming in for (Russian Jews). Most of the people that we deal with are not people that come in off the street. I mean having a storefront operation in many cases is outside the mandate of what we really are here to do. But there aren't many Jewish organizations that have an operation right in the heart of where people are and, therefore, we get people coming in and asking us basic questions about Judaism.

They might want to buy a *mezuzah* (ritual doorpost marker); they might want to buy a Jewish book. People sometimes think we are a bookstore. People are asking us to do all sorts of things. Most of the work that we do is not with the walk-ins. We have been in Toronto since 1989 doing work throughout Canada; doing programming throughout Toronto. We do tremendous numbers of educational programmes, seminars, classes, speakers' bureau. We have an internet website...so most of what we are doing is really going to happen whether or not people are walking in.

We have a number of people that come in daily...usually about five to ten...there are a number of them who are Russian. We have, for example, one Russian person, who doesn't

speak any English, and one person who works here translates all of the government documents that he receives so that he can know how to get social services. Some Russian people come in here to tell us that they have had missionary literature given to them in their (apartment) building. Some come in asking where they can send their kids to Hebrew school. They ask for referrals within the community, so depending upon what they are asking for, we respond accordingly.

We have counter-missionary material available in Russian. We have translated some of our tapes, booklets and pamphlets into Russian. We actually have a taskforce now that is dealing with Russian-speaking people. We are now training a speaker to talk to groups in Russian. I am going to be doing a programme myself in a few weeks with a Russian group, but they are English-speaking Russians.

Soviet Jews are obviously a very needy group in Toronto and, where appropriate, we will refer them to Federation, Social Services, or other services available to them. We have had people come in who are Russians that want to help us. Some just came in recently, who immigrated to Canada after going from Russia to Israel, and actually getting baptized into a Christian church, and then leaving it after they realized that there were many problems there. They came back (to Judaism) and they are now integrated into the Jewish community. They want to help us because they are committed to helping other Russian people to not get into the same situation. So, the Russians are one part of the population that we are servicing.

You see, we do a number of things with the Russian Jews. First of all, you know, when the Jews were in the Soviet Union, it was very hard for Christian missionaries to access them: so there would be very, very underground and informal things done. They would bring in literature from Finland to the Soviet Union and underground churches would proselytize Jews there: and once in a while, when Jews trickled out from the Soviet Union, they would try to reach them, either in North America or Israel, wherever they were going. But, at the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet Union started to disintegrate, there was more opportunity for western missionary groups to come to the Soviet Union.

We actually went there; four of us from Jews for Judaism went there in 1989-1990, five months before there was the first blitz of missionary groups coming from North America. Essentially we went there to train educators there, and to speak to Jewish communities there, and to warn them that they were now going to be inundated with Christian missionaries, who would be wearing *yarmalkas* (skullcaps) and looking Jewish, who would be targeting them. Then I went back about five years ago to train people there to be more effective in dealing with the missionary threat.

A lot of Jews were accessed during the years when they couldn't come straight from the Soviet Union to the West. They would have to live in Italy for about a year, or in Vienna. So there were many Christian groups that set up shop in these transit centres to reach the Soviet Jews there. They would offer English As A Second Language classes there; they

would prepare them, and they would say, *Look when you end up in New York, here's the number of some friends. They can help you find an apartment and get a job.* And these are the Christian missionaries. Many Christians would sponsor Soviet Jews into citizenship in the United States, and that meant going from the Soviet Union to a transit centre, and ending up maybe in Florida, being part of a Baptist community because this is the community that is giving you your sponsorship.

Here in the West, the Russians are very heavily targeted. For example, in Toronto, just about a block south of here on Finch Avenue, there are two congregations just of Jewish people from the former Soviet Union, who believe in Jesus. Soviet Jews for Jesus, just a block south of us. Jews for Jesus hired a Russian-speaking fellow to be a full-time missionary to Soviet Jews. There is a tremendous amount [of proselytizing going on]. In Montreal...we just had a major problem there...where there was a deceptive Russian-Jewish concert that was being offered around *Shavuot* (Springtime Jewish religious holiday) where they advertised with Jewish stars and Israeli flags and they didn't indicate that it was Christian missionary programming...and they tried to invite all the Soviet Jews to come.

So this kind of thing goes on all over the place, frequently and regularly. Here, some of the Jews for Jesus congregations, who advertise with...you know...some of their writing is in Hebrew and English and Russian...so it is a group [Russian Jews] that is seen...if you read the missionary literature...they are seen as the most open Jewish people to the Christian message because they never received any antibodies, if you want to use such a crude term. They were never really inoculated against Christianity because they had no Jewish exposure at all in the Soviet Union -- so they are very open and vulnerable. Open because they haven't been given a Jewish education; and vulnerable because now that they are in a new country, they have to face the difficulties of getting a job and learning the language and integrating into the culture. It's a fact that people in general, who are in transition or who are undergoing a crisis, are always the most vulnerable people for conversionary efforts.

We were in Toronto first, but they [City of David Messianic Synagogue] were in this [shopping] plaza first. They first came to Toronto about three years ago. They were renting a room at the Barbara Frum Library at Bathurst Street and Lawrence Avenue. After two years, they had enough members to establish their own space. They came here in August of last summer, a little more than a year ago now, and it created a furor in the community. It was a tremendously contentious issue. The Jewish community was demanding that they be evicted from the plaza and they said, *We have a lease, we're staying.* And there was a business in this location that ended up losing a lot of customers because Jewish families didn't want to send their children to this yogurt store, next door to these missionaries, and the fellow [storeowner] really ended up having to leave.

There were a number of meetings where the synagogue leadership from this area and the Jewish community leadership felt that if Jews for Judaism would move into this location, it would provide some sense of balance to the Jewish people in the area, and at least prevent

them from operating without some kind of presence here to give the other point of view. So, we ended up moving here for a number of reasons. One of them was that we were asked to by the Jewish community and the landlord, a life insurance company, as a way of bringing some peace...because it was really a difficult situation...it was felt that this would be the best interim solution. Also, we were at a stage in our development where we were getting too big for the space we had, and we were ready to move anyway.

Yes, when we moved in they [City of David] were very upset. They were not happy; they are still not happy. We have a very different kind of relationship to them. Our posture is not to criticize them...we don't put them down...we don't antagonize them...we don't blame them. We really see them as victims of their own shallow Jewish upbringing and backgrounds. We are here to really be open to them, and to make ourselves available to those who want to seek us out and hear a Jewish perspective. Just this past Friday night...you know, we come here often on Friday nights when they are having their services...and one of the people from their congregation came out to leave and started speaking to Julius. Their pastor, their "rabbi" was alerted to this, and he came upstairs screaming at that person that. *You are not to speak to Julius Ciss and Jews for Judaism. I am leadership speaking and you are not allowed, you are forbidden!* They have a sort of cult-like perspective, which says that we will tell you that you are not allowed to speak to certain people. Our position is, *Look, think for yourself, use your own mind.* We are not here to antagonize them. We are here to present another point of view for them to consider.

We don't specifically try to reach Soviet Jews. They are just part of the community in Toronto. This fellow who we have now that is speaking to the Russian groups, he came to Toronto as a teenager and his aunt got him into Christianity, and he became part of one of these Jews for Jesus groups here. We were able to help get him out, and now he works closely with us.

Our understanding of the problem is not that Jewish people convert to Christianity or embrace Buddhism, or other religions, but that conversion is a symptom. The problem is that there is a vacuum of spirituality in the Jewish community. We really are trying to serve as a catalyst for a renaissance in the Jewish world, so that people won't want to leave the Jewish community. So that they will find that it is meaningful, powerful and spiritual. That's why we didn't name this organization Jews against anything...not Jews against Christianity but Jews for Judaism.

DR. ALBERT DE GOIAS  
CONSULTANT  
MANAGEMENT RESOURCES IN CORPORATE AND SOCIAL CHANGE  
DECEMBER 8, 1998

[Dr. De Goias] Regarding my background...I am a physician and I did my family medicine here in Toronto. Around 1976, I encountered a significant number of problems that were not specifically disease-related; that I found were initiated from stress-related problems. At that time, the field was just in its infancy, so I began my research and wrote some publications on my own. I started to get referrals from other physicians, so I closed down my medical practice and opened this [consultancy]. I have been in this for about twenty years. At first, it was just training people to deal with stress...then consulting...then dealing with people after the fact. People who had gotten into trouble with the law; people who had gotten into trouble in marital problems and also in business; and lastly, I have started to deal with the problems of drugs and alcohol. All of these basically being the symptoms that arise from peoples' inability to deal with stress.

My background was physics before medicine. I became interested in the role of change and chaos; sociological and economic change, and also change within family dynamics; the facts that precipitated the stresses that allow people to lose management perspective. You can have control, and then things around you change, and you have lost that control. I began researching change and the literature about change: and my physics background brought me to *chaos theory*, and that is what I use.

A lot of people don't realize it, but there are a lot of diseases that are purely initiated by stress. Immigration is a huge stressor. Back around 1976...it was around the time that the Parti Québécois came into power and the first Lévesque administration...and large companies were moving out of Quebec...and in my practice I had an influx of people who had to go through that type of immigrational change. Yes, just from Quebec to Ontario. You've got to remember that, although it was the same country, it was no different than moving from one small principality in Europe to another. Their friends would change...their whole environmental concerns. Their children were now exposed to new children, new schooling, new language, new neighbours. It was pretty traumatic!

Right now, people who are knowledgeable in computers...because computer technology is moving so fast...are actually pidgeon-holed into one small area. Even with a wide range of knowledge, no company will employ them and give them that much authority over such an important area. So now, even the well-trained technological mind gets slotted, no matter how much they know, and they find themselves in sort of a [technological] sweat-shop. They are sitting at computer terminals; they don't even have time to get up to use the bathroom because somebody is worrying and watching.

*So where do the Russian-Jewish immigrants fit into all this?*

They are very well-trained and educated people. It doesn't matter where they come from...from Moscow, from St. Petersburg, from smaller towns just outside Moldova, from near the Black Sea, from the little villages or the ski-resort towns...they are very highly educated. And they are not only educated in the professions; they are not all professionals, but they are highly-educated in terms of reading skills. They can pick up the English language very, very quickly. They are smart. They are street-smart, but they are also book-smart. You talk to a Russian Jew...because these are mainly the people that I have seen [in my practice] about reading matter, and they can talk to you about Chekhov, and Tolstoy, and O.Henry. When you talk to many Canadians about O.Henry, they have no idea....

I don't know that I have seen them exhibit that attitude [superiority], but I think that they could. They have every right to because they are well-educated. Unfortunately, what I do see among them is the need to get economically stabilized or secure as quickly as possible.

So we have two streams. The first stream is quickly establishing themselves in business. They are hardworking and, because of their intelligence, they are actually making it very quickly. The ones that I have seen are not coming over with money. They are getting some help from the Toronto Jewish community; but they have also been able to utilize their own community because they all tended to gather around the Bathurst, Yonge, Finch area. They support each others' businesses. Those who are business-minded are starting to do well. Almost like the Jewish immigration after the [First] World War, who got settled in the Spadina and Queen Street area, where they were the first ones to have money to move up to Forest Hill within a few years when Forest Hill became available [to Jews] through sheer hard work. At that time, they used to also split their expenses by sharing their houses in a ghetto type of concept, which I don't think is happening now. But they are at least pushing forward.

Then there is the second stream, which is the unfortunate stream. I think those are the Russian Jews that the Canadian Jews are a little bit reluctant to associate with; and these are the ones who are quite capable of using their intelligence to commit crimes. What I have noticed is that there is quite a connecting factor. Those who are in crime all know each other, and they are, again, intersupported. They are quite sophisticated in types of petty crimes...not big crimes...like shoplifting and break-and-enter. They are gathering quite a significant amount of merchandise and having no trouble fencing it off. And they keep going back into it [petty crime], and I don't know how they do it, but they have it well organized. [For example] Jewellery stores...they will go in and pose as a young couple...they have these little schemes...and clothing stores...and they all dress extremely well, particularly the young people. It is unfortunate that because of their intelligence they will also succeed too well in that area [crime] as they do in the other one [business], which creates problems.

None of those that I interviewed were involved in criminal activities before they came to Canada. No, this is not "Canadian grown," it's just the Canadian opportunity. I suppose

that their intelligence tells them, *Here is something ripe for the picking!* I saw a self-confessed Russian career criminal in my office. I did not want to continue with him and asked him not to come back. He was quoted in a Canadian newspaper that the Russian criminals who come here see Canada as such a laid-back country that it's easy to do whatever illegal activities...laundering money...doing whatever they can. To them, it's easy because what they have learned in Russia may not have been applicable there [because of controls], but Canada has this liberal open society. [They are] almost like university students going back to grade ten. Oh yes, the women are participating. They are an essential part.

Yes, the [Canadian] Jewish community does help in settling them through the immigration...and also helping those who need it get temporary or permanent social welfare. The Jewish agencies would assist in pointing them in that direction; but I have not heard of anyone who was helped specifically in a business venture or financially. No, they don't feel that they are here all alone because their community is extremely strong. They have a strong Russian community and I think they stay within their community because many of them have only been here a short time.

Most of the ones I have had experience with are the young adults who have finished school [in Russia] and are basically trying to establish themselves in some form of career. No, most of the ones I've seen are not coming here because of stress-related problems. Most have been referred to me because of criminal activity. They have been referred by criminal lawyers. They send them to me because...if it's a petty crime...if a person comes in [to court] and they [lawyers] can provide an assessment of the personality, and provide a redirection [plan], prior to the case being called, a negotiation can easily be done on behalf of that person with the court because they have attempted to get into some form of counselling.

Lots of family problems have come out also. Not so much among the Russian Jews as it has come out among Russian Jews marrying into non-Jewish Russian families where the woman would, at one point or another, call the police because of aggressive behaviour of the husband...or because...I have seen one case where a woman called the police because she was attempting to bring her child [from a previous marriage] from Russia and he [current husband] was not up to that, and she felt extremely rejected...quarrelled with him...and decided to call the police as a means of getting them to settle the family argument. She admitted later on that she was not calling to charge him; she was calling because being alone here, there was no one else to turn to. She had left the child behind when she emigrated from Russia. He had met her in Canada and left his wife and children for her; she was a younger woman.

This happens more often with Polish immigrants. They tend to see the police as a resource and the women call the police for help; not realizing that by doing so, the husband will be charged and thrown into jail. So that's how I come into the picture...to restore the family dynamics so that we can explain to the Court that it was not that this woman was in

danger, but there was a communication problem, which we have since done some work with. No, our police don't understand what is going on, and I don't think they have the time to find out either.

No, I really don't believe I can make a change in the young Russians who have been to see me. The reason that I am saying *definitely no* is that many of those who have chosen a life of crime are people who want a particular lifestyle, and have recognized that their [Russian] qualifications are not applicable here. Therefore, they cannot have the lifestyle. So if they cannot do it legitimately, they will do it illegitimately. You've got to remember that Canada has these rules about Canadian training, Canadian qualifications. And we don't really help them, so you have engineers and doctors driving taxicabs. Immigrants come here, especially the Russian-Jewish community come here, because they are looking for a better life. Some of them had pretty good lives in Russia. I did not see a wave of anti-Semitism [driving them out]. I just saw a group of people who felt there was a need to sort of "loosen the belt," but there was not any opportunity before [to leave], and now the opportunity presented itself, so they went for it. They come here expecting they are going to make it big and [then] they realize that they can't. So, the only way they can maintain it [the big lifestyle] is through crime. And once they get into that, it is almost impossible to get them off because their basic earning capability is too low.

The Russian Jews that I have met, who have come via Israel, are an older group. When I say older I mean in their thirties and forties versus the twenties that I was talking about. In Russia, many of them intermarried. They are not completely Jewish families and when they transferred to Israel, the non-Jewish spouse had no status. So they basically experienced tremendous new stresses they could not stand. In some of these cases, it actually destroyed the marriage while they were in Israel. Probably some of them came to Canada to get away from the religious issues, but I also think a great majority of the people just used Israel as a stepping stone. They had always intended to come to North America.

I haven't seen any of the older Russian Jews in my practice. I have only seen the younger ones...boys and girls in their twenties. I have seen the parents of some of these kids and, believe me, the parents are almost.... What is that movie about the Jewish immigrant mouse that moved to New York? You know, [they are] how the older traditional Jews were...into crafts and hard work...these are the parents. Very simple, not simple-minded, but simple in terms of needs...and hard working and deeply spiritual, though not necessarily religious. They just tolerate their children because they are not of the same mentality.

No, these young adults do not have disdain for these parents. They respect their parents. They see themselves as doing a job almost. Crime is their career and, if they are unlucky, they have trouble with the police. Yes, we may have imported a criminal element but, without being able to justify it, I have a feeling that the criminal element is not a self-generating element. It's a group of young kids, who are brought to a new environment and because they never went to school here, they don't have a fit in the social fabric, and because

their training allows them and they have this intelligence...[they become criminals]. It appears there is a string starting from way beyond these people, in other words, they are the pawns...but I don't know who are the bishops and the captains and the kings; and I don't believe it is the same group of people.

I thought you were going to ask, if once they "make it", they will be more themselves, tending to go into normal lifestyles. From the looks of it, at this stage, I would say that these kids are not criminals, but there are some.... I do recall one guy that I know, who likes the position that he has. He is a nice person. He is fully Jewish and he is from St. Petersburg...but he wears the long black jackets, and the black shades, and he likes the image. Almost like the young Italian mobster, who expects to be the future Godfather. Yes, there are one or two like that; but I think that most of the others are just making a living, and once they settle down, they could easily transfer it into legal enterprise -- like a tremendous number of legal enterprises may have started in the past [big laugh].

I find I like talking to the older Russians. I am a very spiritual person. When I say spiritual, I mean non-religious spirituality...more into the intellect of man. And to do that. I have gone through a tremendous amount of philosophical research, and I have studied almost all the religions. I was turned onto the cabala by Russian Jews. I find them quite interesting to talk to because I can talk with them at a level that I have very great trouble finding among Canadians.

They have similar [Jewish] ways to North American Jews. They receive the basic training at home, and they accept and recognize their Jewishness. but to take it beyond that, if they are not forced to go to the synagogue, they won't go there. They received some religious background from their Jewish parents. To some extent, I would consider they received a little more than most of the North American Jews I have talked to. The older Russians are like the old European Jews. No, religion didn't get squashed in the families. Of course, I am sure there are Russian Jews who have gone into more secular life and have become more communist than the communists, but I haven't seen that.

No, I haven't run into any physical illnesses over here caused by the stress of immigration...mostly behavioural problems.

I don't think the Jewish agencies are doing enough. I think the Jewish agencies could do something more to integrate the younger Russians. They are just left on their own. Yes, a centre would be good; [it would do]the job that the synagogue could, or should, or used to do in addition to providing religious instruction. Yes, the Orthodox do help them, but they are so overfocused on religion to the extreme that they are getting those that really want to be the "black hats." That's fine if the children are very young, but to get these twenty-year-olds, I think it's too severe. The young men and women wouldn't go to such a severe, radical change.

No, I don't speak Russian. Their English is very good. These are bright people, who are talking English after a short time in Canada. In the past three years, I have seen between twenty to thirty young Russians. Actually, more like forty, because someone who has come to my office because of criminal activity would refer somebody who was having a marriage problem, or somebody with a stress problem, or whatever.

I find they [young Russians] are also settling down much more readily than the North American Jews with non-Jewish boys and girls after they get to Canada. So the great fears of the traditional Jews are coming to pass! Well, my dear, you [the Jewish community] are getting diluted...except for the ones who are being streamed into Jewish Orthodoxy.

BEN PROSSIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ONTARIO REGION  
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND OF CANADA (JNF)  
DECEMBER 8, 1998

*There was a period in the 1980s when the Soviets were not letting any Jews out.*

In the 1970s, Brezhnev briefly opened the gates, and then shut them again.

*I believe a few came out in the early 1980s.*

We used to keep a record. I arrived here in 1987. I remember one year 150 [came out]...this was worldwide...97 another year...one year there were 1000...that was a big opening. They trickled out.

*Why do you think the Russians changed their minds about allowing Jews to leave?*

I think that Gorbachev made a decision that this was a medieval thing they were doing...and it had become a political headache...also, he wanted to establish a rapport with the West. This was a "chicken bone" choking the throat of [Russian] diplomacy. Gorbachev has since received medals from Jewish organizations in the United States. We cheered him here in Toronto when he came to visit. He's a hero in Israel. This is the guy who literally freed the Soviet Jews. He came into office...it took a year or so...he opened the gates...for whatever reason.

*How many Jews are left in the Former Soviet Union?*

Nobody knows the number...from one to two million...there is a basis for a minimal number...there are Jewish organizations there now...there is a Russian Jewish Congress and other organizations...we hear figures, but nobody knows.

*When you got involved with Soviet Jewry in 1987, were you lobbying the Canadian Federal government?*

We had unofficial assistance from some non-Jews in the Department of External Affairs, who dealt with the Soviet Union. At least, we were led to believe they were helpful; perhaps they were just being nice or polite. We would travel to Ottawa and be briefed by them, and we would brief them. We used to send people surreptitiously into the Soviet Union. When people from Toronto would travel to Russia, we would brief them beforehand if they were Jewish; some were non-Jewish. We would even give them names of people to meet...meeting Refuseniks to pass on messages. We would send drugs and food...there was

a professor who was ill and needed a certain medication; we had visitors bring in that medication.

*And the authorities didn't grab them when they came into the country?*

Oh, they tried. [The visitors] were searched sometimes. Especially [laughs], we used to send prayer books and *tallisim* [prayer shawls]. Some people would have twelve prayer books in their suitcase and several *tallisim*. These visitors would say that they were very religious people and these items were for personal use. Sometimes they were confiscated, sometimes not.

Two prominent lawyers chaired our "Visitors Committee." They would brief people going in: what to expect, what they would be asked at the borders, what was legal, what was illegal...that sort of thing. They were our local "briefers." Anyone travelling to the Soviet Union who wanted to help would get a briefing.

We always told people to be careful...not to do anything.... We might say, "this is technically illegal, but not really illegal." We didn't want them to break laws or participate in espionage...nothing like that.

*How long were you actually involved with Soviet Jewry?*

As a lay person for a few years. Then, as Director of the Committee [for Soviet Jewry] here from 1987 to 1990...four years. It was an interesting transition period; from the really rough stuff, to when we knew the gates were opening, until the gates were open.

*Do you think the gates will remain open?*

The current situation in Russia is so unpredictable. Who knows? Who will take over after Yeltsin? You are interested in current issues. We [UJA Federation] also provide substantial support for the Jewish Agency, whose primary task still is to get Jews out of places like the Former Soviet Union,.

*Is the money raised here in Toronto reaching outside of Canada all the way to Russia?*

The money goes to the Jewish Agency, which is an autonomous body based in Israel whose primary task is to get Jews out of distressed areas like the FSU.

*Where are they going to?*

Israel. Primarily Israel.

*And a small percentage leave Israel and wind up in Canada?*

Or other places.

*The Jewish population in Toronto is...how many?*

About 175,000.

*I have read in the Jewish press that Toronto's UJA Federation is expecting to raise 41 million dollars.*

Yes, for 1999...at least 41 million dollars.

*As compared to the Los Angeles Jewish population of 519,000?*

Yes, 519,000, and Los Angeles is expecting to raise about 42 million dollars. We have a much smaller community [in Toronto] so, per capita, this is one of the largest non-profit fund-raising campaigns in the world. I think there is a built-in sense of *tzedakah* [charity] here. There is a built-in sense of responsibility for other Jews that has been part of the character of Toronto's Jewish community since its inception. We have a long record of commitment to charity and collective responsibility and it's a record that goes back nearly a century. Toronto is recognized around the world as one of the most charitable Jewish communities.

I can only give you an opinion on what has been happening in Toronto [regarding Soviet Jews] in the last ten years. Although I was involved in the struggle to free Soviet Jews, I am not now involved in their resettlement programme.

*There aren't very many voices of immigrants heard in the available research; perhaps because they are not very often asked about their immigration experience?*

Well, a former Soviet immigrant, Robert Furman [1970s] is now on the Board of JIAS. He successfully integrated, became an accountant, married, has a family, and he was a Russian immigrant from the first wave. He became the President of JIAS, which is the bureaucracy handling the immigrants, which is very interesting. You should speak to him. He knows it from both sides; from the establishment side, of which he is now a part, and from the immigrants' side.

*It is important to document that some of the Russians evolve in this positive way because there is negative stereotyping [going on].*

It depends on who you talk to as to whether there is stereotyping.

*On the street and in the media, the story is that some current Russian immigrants are involved in criminal activities.*

Do you hear that from people in the Jewish community?

*In the non-Jewish community.*

Oh....

*I hear, "They are all a bunch of mafia."*

Well...there have been some problems.

*There is a criminal element in the Russian immigration; I am learning that in my research.*

They are also very hardworking as is every immigrant group...trying to send their kids to school....

*Absolutely. So I think it is important to address these stereotypes. Even the Toronto Jews, when I tell them I am doing research on Russian Jews, they say, "A bunch of crooks." This is what I am hearing from some Jews!*

Jews are human beings too. They can stereotype as well as anybody else.

*[This is] not unlike the Italian immigrants who also initially suffered from "mafia" stereotyping.*

No, not the Italians! We know that isn't true. But the Irish are all drunks, that we know [laughing]. Any group can be stereotyped.

*Every new group gets stereotyped.*

[Ben calls his secretary into his office] Can I see you for a second? [As an aside] She is Jewish. [To secretary] What do you think of the Russian immigrants who have come to Canada in the last ten years?

[Secretary] Don't ask me that question. I don't like it...because they are taking away jobs that my two sons can have...and they are taking away money that my sons should be getting, and they are not getting.

[Ben to secretary] What do you think of them personally...how are their characters?

[Secretary] I think they are very rude. They think they own the world. And you have to see them at garage sales...they are even worse!

[Ben] By the way. [secretary's] parents were immigrants to this country. She was born here. but she is only first generation.

[Secretary] They are not what my parents were when they came to Canada!

[Ben] No, because for seventy years the Communists cut them off from certain elements of their traditions!

[Thelma] *She is so typical. [To secretary] You are typical. I am a student looking at perceptions of the Russians by the established Jewish community of which you are a part.*

[Ben] [Secretary's name] is an average citizen, born in Toronto, and I thought you should hear what she has to say.

[Secretary] They dress to kill...they do...but they cry poverty. They go anywhere they can for money...and they get it!

[Ben] Don't you think they "dress to kill" because they feel the need to impress? They have been suppressed for so long in Russia.

[Secretary] But [when] you are coming into a foreign country, you should be thankful that you are here, and not in the country that you came from...and be very grateful for what you are getting! It's funny you should ask me [about this] because my daughter-in-law and I talked about it yesterday.

[Ben] She lives right here at Bathurst and Sheppard and her neighbourhood is full of Russian immigrants.

[Thelma] *So she lives in the middle of the Russian community.*

[Ben] Did you hear that [anger]?

*Yes, she is encountering the Russians on a day-in-and-day-out basis.*

I hope you didn't mind that I brought [secretary's name] into the interview?

*No, absolutely not. [What she said] is what I'm hearing elsewhere. It may all be absolutely true, which is also something that requires documentation [laughing]. I am not going to change the story if they are offensive and aggressive.*

Some people find them so; but I think they have to be recognized as individuals. Our security guard is very well educated and well spoken. We have had many conversations. He came from the Ukraine. Now, at his age, he doesn't want to start a new career. His children

are getting educated. He is happy to be retired. He is a really fine gentleman who I would say is a wonderful addition to the Canadian mosaic.

*Does all the money raised by Jewish National Fund go to Israel?*

Yes, our mandate is that our funds, except for what is required here for administrative needs, rent, salaries, go to Israel. We are not the United Jewish Appeal. UJA has a mandate for local social services as well as Israel. We deal primarily with environmental concerns in Israel...tourist sites, lakes, forests.

*So you are in no way supporting Soviet immigration in Israel?*

Oh, yes! JNF, as a matter of fact, has hired new immigrants in Israel to do manual labour...to get them adjusted...to give them a salary. Some have gone on to resume careers as professors and doctors, etc. They know that until they learn Hebrew they are not going to find work in their field. JNF helped in what was, I guess, a national effort in Israel to give them that sense of self-worth...that they were earning their own way. Many were not happy in Israel, of course. Now they have settled down. Many have adjusted well. JNF played a role by employing almost 3000 immigrants a year in the forests, etc., helping the local workforce.

*Do you have any opinions about the number of people who use Israel as a jumping-off spot to come to North America?*

Yes, I do. I am a Zionist and I work for Israel, but I am not as vehement [against Russian reemigration] as others. I think people should be allowed to be happy. If they feel unhappy on financial terms, or social terms, or cultural terms...especially people who have been suppressed for so long...and they're out...and they go to Israel...and it's a very tough life....

Some want to enlarge their universe. If a family decides they want to do that, I believe they should have freedom of choice. I have heard the argument, "but the Jewish community has spent money to free them and bring them to Israel." Well, that's true, but we had that obligation as Jews and as human beings.

I am not so rigid as to say, "If they don't go to live in Israel, don't give them a cent!" I think that what JIAS does here is good work. It settles families. There are children who need to go to school and old people who need to be cared for. I am not trying to say that it is all sweetness and light, but JIAS has helped in that [settlement] process along with other community agencies.

You know that in Israel there were agencies that didn't want agencies like JIAS to give any assistance to Soviet Jews because they knew Jews would come here instead of going to Israel.

*What about the argument that a lot of money was spent to get them out of the Former Soviet Union to Israel, and a lot of money was spent on helping them in Israel, therefore, if they choose to come to Canada....[they should receive no assistance]?*

Perhaps they should pay the money back [in Canada] when they can afford to...perhaps. In the 1930s, if we could have gotten the Jews out of Germany and Poland, and there was no Israel, would we have not brought them to Canada?

*We would have brought them to Canada.*

I am not suggesting that the Russian Jews were in that [terrible] situation. I am saying, if the Russians do manage to make it, and many of them will, maybe they should be asked to contribute back to the community. Here, I will take a strong stand. I don't believe as many as could do contribute to UJA and to JNF, to Jewish community organizations that helped to bring them to Israel and to Canada.

*Let's zero in on the Jews that you helped bring out. The ones who have been here over twenty years.*

Most of the Soviets that I helped bring out are in Israel. I was working with a group within the framework of Israel -- the Soviet Jewry Committee. Most of the people we worked with went to Israel and stayed there. Most of the 800,000 Soviet Jews who went to Israel are still there.

*The Russian Jews that have come to Toronto via Israel since 1989...is it your impression that they do not participate in Jewish charity efforts?*

Many are just getting established. They are in fact recipients. They are not in a position to give charity. However, I really feel that they could be more involved in community matters that don't require donations.

After Gorbachev opened the gates, some synagogues in Toronto offered special memberships...free memberships. They weren't interested. I understand that they weren't brought up in that tradition, but maybe they should have made more of an attempt. Maybe it should be a two-way street. Maybe we should have made more of an attempt at the synagogues in terms of "outreach." I believe some synagogues did but there was mostly indifference from the other side.

On the one hand, I am very liberal, and believe that the Russian Jews should be allowed to go where they want. On the other hand, they are here...they have children...[they should] start the process of introducing their children into the community.

RUSSELL MYERS  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
CANADIAN OFFICE  
**AISH HATORAH RUSSIAN PROGRAM**  
JANUARY 6, 1999

Our experience with Russian Jewry [in Toronto] is limited. Speak to Rabbi [Yoseph] Zaltzman at the Jewish-Russian synagogue. He is the source for information about the Toronto Russian Jews. He has a Lubavitcher organization. We have a respectful relationship with the *hasids*.<sup>1</sup> Their's is a more European, somewhat different style and approach.

Have you heard about our "Discovery" seminars? "Discovery" is the most attended Jewish seminar in the world to-day. It provides an intellectual grounding for belief in God and the Torah...that the Torah is not a man-made document. I recommend that you take it. It would probably give you a big insight into what Aish does. It's a wake-up call, a big eye-opener for many Jews, young and old alike. We ran this program in Toronto in Russian [Fall, 1998]. In most cases, it's a two-day event, a week-end-type program, but in this case we condensed it into one Sunday because they [the Russians] weren't going to come back and forth. And it was free. Over two hundred people came out to the program. I think some had to be turned away. It was held at the JCC [Jewish Community Centre]. It was a co-operative effort involving Aish, JIAS, and a donor-sponsor...a couple, he was a Canadian Jew and she was Russian.

A lot of supporters in this city help us financially with what we are trying to do here, as well as in the former Soviet Union and Israel. A large part of my job is trying to promote what we are doing, so that people will understand...there's a bit of background to what we do [provides an information kit]. Russia, as you know, is a very turbulent place right now. It's getting more and more turbulent every day. We hear all kinds of stories about situations.... A good friend of mine, who is in the program in Minsk, has been dealing with some problems with the authorities there. I won't go into details...but it's enough to say it's getting very, very precarious. There are fears of greater persecution, God forbid that should happen. It seems that there is a big wake-up call for Jews to leave again.

I visit Russia. Then, afterwards when I travel around people ask me, *Why don't they just leave?* They are offered a ticket...but sometimes you have to motivate people to want to leave. And secondly, you have to motivate people to feel that they are Jewish, because many times they don't feel it...and some didn't know until they were told [that they were Jewish]...it was on a passport, or whatever. Sometimes their parents hid it from them...so you have to motivate them to want to go to Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hasid*. A member of a sect founded in Poland in the 18th century by Israel Baal Shem-Tov. This sect is characterized by its emphasis on mysticism, prayer, religious zeal and joy.

Many of the Jews who went out on the first wave...there's a quote on a video...a Russian gentleman says, *The Russian Jews did not go to Israel, they left Russia*. They would have gone to China or wherever. Now, the fact is that, deep-inside, most of the Jews do have a love of Israel to some degree. There is a little spark there. They do cry, many of them, when they come in [to Israel]. But the problem is that there wasn't a real infrastructure for them when they came to Israel, and this is why you see so many here in Toronto, and so many lost throughout the world because they weren't given a grounding [in Judaism].

Our Russian Program at Aish HaTorah, by the way, is a totally separate entity to any other Aish program worldwide. We have a totally separate budget just for Russian Jewry...in Toronto, in Russia, and in Israel. There are not that many people working in this program. Rabbi Shalom Schwartz is the Director. He is from Toronto. He started the Village Shul [Eglinton Avenue] and Aish HaTorah in Toronto. Then he was asked to come to Jerusalem.

Essentially what happened is that they [Aish] decided to set up these centres...there is a great demand in Russia on the part of young Jews, village Jews, intellectuals. There are regional centres in Kiev, Minsk, Moscow and St. Petersburg; branches in Chernovitzky, Gomel, Mogilev, Samara, Slavuta and Vladikavkaz. Yes, they are coming. You see, they have been told that Judaism is all a bunch of fairy tales and made-up stories so they want to understand what is really happening.

Our programs like "Discovery," and other ones, were designed especially for the Russians who wanted an intellectual program. These people are coming out [of Russia] with degrees...nuclear physicists, scientists. Yes, they "ran into a wall" in Israel as well as Canada. That is why many of them left. Our program in Israel is designed to hold their hand, so to speak, so that when they get involved with Aish [in Russia] and make *aliyah*, they have a community in Israel to be part of...because they have to feel part of Israel. As our founder says, if we can turn the Russian population around, which is about a million Jews in Israel, it will change the whole country. Can you imagine, if they become an active, caring part of Israel with their children! It will make a big difference.

So we have to educate them in Jewish principles and ideals. Otherwise, they will just become floundering youths on drugs walking the streets of Israel, or leaving Israel when they can...and without any element of *Yiddishkeit* [Jewishness]. What we have found is, if we can reach them there [Russia], at the source, before they leave, we are able to give them something of substance that they can take with them to Israel...and no matter where they go, they will have something. They will understand what it means to light sabbath candles, so that if somebody invites them to a Hanukkah party or to a sabbath meal, they won't be so adverse to it...they will all have had a taste of it.

Yes, we have had situations where people have been involved in our programs in Russia, and then Israel, and then have decided to come here for whatever reason. It could be that they weren't getting the positions they wanted in Israel. Yes, there are some that are carrying it

on [their involvement with Aish] here.

Yes, we are aware that there is a problem [with Russian youth]. We haven't really dealt much with it. We don't have the Russian-speaking counsellors like other centres.

How do I see my responsibilities? They are administrative, public relations and fund-raising; trying to pull it all together.

Do we teach any Russian children in the *chader* [Hebrew school] here at Aish? That's a good question. I'm not sure. Again, we haven't had a great outreach in the Toronto community because of the language barrier. Well, at the Jewish-Russian Community Centre, Rabbi Zaltzman is a Russian Jew, and his whole staff are primarily Russian speaking. There is another organization run by Rabbi Gersh called Noam [Moan Noam Minyan], can't remember the name of the shul, an offshoot of that [JRCC], and they are also Russian speaking.

There are other people in the city who are doing outreach in Russian...various groups. I know there are some *chaders* and different things going on. At this point, it's still a little premature for us in Toronto. I can give you lots of information about what we are doing in Russia, which is feeding this whole thing anyway, and is probably important as a backdrop for your research.

What we tell our supporters is that the Russians have the free will to go wherever they want. We can't be so arrogant as to tell them to go only to Israel. Why aren't we in Israel? We can't tell them more than *us* to go to Israel. The fact is, we give them some religious grounding, some level of *Yiddishkeit*, so that if they do leave Russia, they will not completely disappear from the Jewish community.

Are the Russian Jews in Toronto who have "made it" helping out? Well, that's a good point you bring up. Look, the tradition that was lost in Russia is lost on these people too...in the sense that there is no word for *tzedakah* [charity] in Russian. Many [Toronto Russian Jews] who are not affiliated with anything are giving to this hospital, or that organization, or this cultural centre, or whatever...but they are not supporting to the same degree the Jewish things...and that's a shame. I have talked to several of them...we have had discussions. I have tried to get them to help us and it's a real battle. Sometimes they say, *Why don't they just leave [Russia]? I left with five dollars in my pocket!* It's a hard attitude in some cases, but not all. I don't want to generalize...but I found statistically for me to go out and fund raise [among them] was not an easy thing.

I think the question that you brought up before about the youth...it's a big problem obviously. No, they are not dropping in here. And again, they have been robbed of any kind of moral discipline that Judaism has to offer, so why would we expect them to be *mentchen* [decent human beings] when they don't even know what a *mentch* is? That doesn't imply that they

are blameless. They happen to be in this country and need to obey the laws...but they need a strong helping hand. They need to be brought in [to the community] in their own way. And it doesn't always work...let's say some religious organization will try to get them involved in religion and it's like, *please!* You have to attract them with other approaches..like karate, fun programs and concerts. You can do it that way...which the evangelical groups are doing. You have to get them excited. So hopefully that will happen.

RABBI LEVI JACOBSON  
 DIRECTOR  
 CENTRE FOR JUDAIC STUDIES  
 JEWISH RUSSIAN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
 JANUARY 7, 1999

[Rabbi Jacobson] They come here not only as blank pages [regarding Jewishness], but with negative feelings. They are very educated though, scientists, engineers. They know about religion, and they have questions...and that is how we try to get to them. No, it's not that we are "grabbing" at their hearts and souls. Every single one of them is Jewish, and every single one of them is precious. What we are trying to do is to help them to reveal the *neshomeh* [Jewish soul, spirit, divine element] that they all have...Americans...people from the West...and even those Eastern Europeans that have been repressed for so long...it comes out at one point or another. Their *Yiddishe Mamma* [Jewish mother] will know a few Yiddish words and she will teach them somehow or other to her Jewish children.

The Russians keep themselves away [from the religious community]. They keep themselves distant; that's why we are trying to help them. We do it with the wide range of programmes that we have. Whether it's *yom tov* [holiday] programmes, such as, *Hanukkah* or *Purim* programmes.... At *Hanukkah*, we had a concert [1998] with eleven hundred people packed in at the Ford Centre [for Performing Arts]. A lot of work was put into it...our Programme Director pushed it...and they all came. Yes, I would say 80 percent Russians came.

Yes, sure, some people just walk-in to my *shul* [synagogue] cold because they are curious. Those people that you heard at our synagogue [Sabbath services], these are Russian people that are educated here by us...I would say 90 percent of them. We have a Hebrew Academy, which is a full Hebrew day school where they obviously teach the regular maths and sciences, but they also teach three hours of Hebrew a day. It's not only the Hebrew language, it's Judaism, giving them the message of pride in being a Jew, so that they feel good about it. So that when they go to university, they have that Jewish pride. They have the basic commandments...the basic Jewish things that we are all supposed to do...they will remember...so first of all we have to do that. Also, we have the after-school class, which has 190 kids...and we have day care with something like 60 kids...young ones.

What I am here for is adult education. The Director of this organization, Rabbi Zaltzman, was doing everything. He was doing programmes, adult education, fund raising and so on. It became a little tough after a while so that's what I am here for...to educate the adults. Most of the people that you saw in *shul* are people that came from Russia totally unaffiliated. They came from Russia not knowing anything and somehow they bumped into this synagogue and the JRCC and, for whatever reason, because every person has his own story, they stayed; and that's who you saw in *shul*. And the children you saw are their children. They are going to our institutions. So we are building a Jewish Russian community.

My dream is to open a *yeshiva*, a college for adults, where you can come and take different courses in Judaism part-time or full-time. I am focusing on the Russians...if anybody else comes, that's perfectly fine. We have other lectures. We had some colleges come when we spoke about education and children. We've had other lecturers come since I arrived here, and I can say that most of the people who attended were Russians, but some were not.

Yes, basically everyone in the organization who deals with the people speaks Russian, except myself. Sure I am finding it difficult but...I travelled around a lot before I got married, and in any country that I went to there was always a certain [language] barrier, but when people see that you are sincere, that you are honest, that you have no ulterior motives, that you respect them.... On the first Shabbas [Sabbath] that I got up and spoke here, I spoke in English. One of the old Russians stood up and started screaming in Yiddish, '*EITHER RUSSIAN OR YIDDISH, DON'T SPEAK IN ENGLISH!*' Afterwards, I went over and spoke to him. I explained to him why I am speaking in English...that basically the older people who want to hear Russian and Yiddish know what its [the religion] all about, and they [the older Russian Jews] know its the younger people who need to be educated and the younger people need English. They want English...they respect English...they look up to people who speak English...that's the language they feel comfortable with. I can speak in Yiddish. I can't speak in Russian, but I can speak to the older ones in Yiddish. But that will defeat the purpose, because Judaism is not stopping after you live to 120. I asked this old man, 'Does your son speak Yiddish?' He said, 'No.' So I said, 'So how could I speak to your son? How will your son understand the message of *Shabbas* or the message of what I was talking about if I was speaking Yiddish?'

Oh, for sure [he got it]. To-day he's one of the strongest people...if there is anybody talking while I am talking, he gets up there and he shuts them up...even if he doesn't understand a word of what I am saying! So here you have an example of...there's a respect...he sees that I am sincere...he sees what my motivation is...that I am not standing up there [at the pulpit] just to put down Russian or to put down Yiddish. I am there with the message. I'm there, and I'm focused, and I think they respect that.

No, the person I was just talking to [telephone] I don't think is a professor. I haven't met him yet. I have heard about him...and some people told me that it would be a good idea if I met him. He basically does the Jewish Student Council at the universities of Toronto -- Humber, York, U of T -- all the campuses.<sup>1</sup> Yes, he said that York University has lots of Russian students. No, it's not always because of money or language [that they don't mix], it's just that they feel most comfortable with their own. After a while they will mix [with Canadians] but look...most of them have only been here for five years, that's not a long time. They still have their phobias. They were always looking up to Americans and westerners

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish Campus Services is a UJA/Federation funded umbrella organization that helps to coordinate and energize activities and programmes for the more than 15,000 post-secondary Jewish students in the Greater Toronto Area.

and, suddenly, they are here. It takes a lot of courage...you really have to be very strong and determined to want to connect with the Canadians because you are afraid of rejection.

[Regarding mixed-marriages generally] If I know a couple that are not yet married...boyfriend and girlfriend...Jew and non-Jew...I'll try to do whatever I can to discourage them from getting married. Once they are married, the approach is that...listen, this is the situation they are in...so involve them...get them motivated and as involved as possible. Hopefully the non-Jew will convert to Judaism. If you alienate the Jewish ones, they become totally assimilated. You are pushing them away from Judaism, and their children as well, and their children's children. Who knows how long that chain of loss will be.

My wife and I had supper with one of the [Russian] couples that we are pretty close with last night. We were drinking some wine together and had a toast, and the husband said something interesting. He said, 'We are all immigrants...your wife is from Montreal... you're from New York...I'm from Ukraine...my wife's from Odessa....' You know, so what? So I come from this city, and he comes from that city. We speak different languages, but that's not what we are and who we are. People have to grow out of that. What we are doing is trying to help the Russians move into where they feel more comfortable. Comfortable with who they are and what their real essence is. Not to be so worried about the way people look at them...or the way people don't look at them. They are very concerned about that. I see that [concern] as an American. I don't even know if the other people working over here see that...but as an American I do.

By bringing out their Judaism, it's not just making it possible that they will be doing another *mitzvah* [good deed], it will really bring out their personality. I am Jewish...and that's what I am...that's who I am! I happened to be born...my mother happened to give birth to me while she was still in Russia, but that doesn't really mean anything. So the hospital was in Russia and not in Canada or the United States, but that doesn't really make me who I am or shape my personality -- I am Jewish. And that's what our classes hopefully will do. We are moving [along]very well.

You see that newspaper that you have there...*Exodus*.<sup>2</sup> This goes to many people. It started off...I believe in 1986...when Rabbi Zaltzman, who used to meet so many people, needed some way to communicate with them. Up to last year it was being sent for free to eleven thousand homes. It was becoming a big [financial] burden on Rabbi Zaltzman, so he had to cut back. Now, if someone makes a donation over fifteen dollars, or contributes something else to the JRCC, they receive it for free. Otherwise, it is \$15.00 for a one-year subscription.

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the Russians read English, but they appreciate a Russian-language newspaper. There are approximately 12,000 subscribers to *Exodus* who annually receive the gift of a beautiful Jewish Calendar from the JRCC. Sonya Krutinsky, Managing Editor, *Exodus*. Telephone interviews 27 May 1999 and June 15, 2000.

MYRNA BORNSTEIN  
 ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) TEACHER  
 LINK (JIAS)  
 JANUARY 19, 1999

[Thelma] *You used to work for the North York Board of Education, which is now the Toronto District School Board. Who pays your salary?*

[Myrna] You are asking a difficult question right now, because I have a new employer, which is LINK. I no longer work for the School Board. Now I work for Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Toronto (JIAS). JIAS pays me and they get funding from LINK, which is the education arm of the federal government for immigrants. But up until this week I worked for the Toronto District School Board [laughs].

*How long have you been teaching the Russians?*

Ten years.

*How large are your classes?*

Average twenty.

*Any particular age group?*

Eighteen to fifty-eight...and then we have Senior programmes that go from fifty-eight to ninety.

*In the same location?*

No. Betel centre. [Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living] And some at the B'nai B'rith apartment buildings. There is one on Torresdale Avenue near the skating rink...there used to be classes in the Pride of Israel [synagoge] -- wherever we can find room.

*Are the classes for the Seniors also supported by the federal government?*

Yes, some funding.

*How long do the Russians normally attend classes? Let's start with the younger ones.*

Six months for the younger ones. Occasionally someone gets longer, but as a rule, it's six months.

*What does it cost the immigrant?*

Nothing. It's free.

*At the end of six months, do you think the students are speaking fairly fluently?*

Some are. They are fluent enough to get along in the English-speaking world, but not to go to university. If they came in with TOFEL level English, sure they finish...they just refine...but if I get an intermediate-level student, after six months they are not really ready.

*If you had a student who came in with very limited English, but was hard-working and diligent for six months, would he/she be able to work in a store?*

They could. They would learn the specific language [of the business]. Many of them do. Many of them go on to their professional courses. Usually, after the six months, they try to get into a co-op type of programme where they are taught job-search skills and then they also get a volunteer position that gives them a chance to practice.

*While they are doing all this, how are they supporting themselves financially; assuming they are not among the wealthier immigrants?*

Welfare...Federal.

*Can they stay on welfare as long as they want to?*

I don't know the answer to that.

*They learn basic English skills; do they then learn job searching skills?*

Yes, we teach them that...how to write resumés and cover-letters, interview skills...the higher levels, not the lower levels.

*Are you connected to Jewish Vocational Services in any way?*

Yes, for job search skills.

*Have you had many eighteen-year-old students?*

Not many. We really try to encourage them to go to high school. Some of them don't want to because they feel too old.

*They feel too old at eighteen?*

Yes, because they are going to get put back [in school].

*Have the eighteen-year-olds already had a high school education in Russia?*

Yes, most of them have even completed one or two years of their Institute.

*Do they resent having to start over in Canada?*

Some do.

*Have you ever had the situation where you have an entire family in your school?*

Yes...and they are usually at different levels. You know, you can't generalize about any of this stuff...it's totally individual.

*As a teacher it's quite a challenge because you are getting students -- correct me if I'm wrong -- not just from Russia but from other Soviet-block countries.*

Yes. The biggest percentage are from the Ukraine...Azerbaijan...Tashkent. People from the south-east are totally different from the people from Leningrad and Moscow. The people from the mountains are different from the people from the sea. We get them from Latvia...from Lithuania...Moldova.

*Do you teach them all with the same techniques, or do you use different approaches depending on their country of origin?*

All the same. No different approaches.

*Have you noticed any difference in the ability to learn English in people from different areas?*

The difference is the language level they arrive with. The ones from the bigger cities are more fluent...more well educated...professionals. The other folk are simple; but I have never had anyone who is illiterate. They are all well educated in their first language. I haven't met anybody in ten years that had not completed high school. Even the bus drivers, the chefs, the hairdressers...they all have a higher education. Cosmetology is a big thing in Russia and they are working at that here.

*Is it easier for the women to learn English than the men?*

If they come to school, it's easier. If they don't come to school, it is more difficult. Men who don't come to school get into the work force and learn more quickly than the women who don't come to school. When they do come to school, women learn more quickly.

*What if the women want to come to school but they have small children. Is there any*

*daycare available?*

Babysitting in their homes...or in the babysitter's home...through JIAS.

*JIAS will pay for babysitters while they go out?*

Only for attending school. JIAS also will pay for their transportation.

*JIAS pays for babysitting and transportation so they can come to your classes. Does JIAS pay for anything else to facilitate them going to school?*

Some of the families are subsidized by JIAS. Some families are totally supported by JIAS. I don't know the line....

*As a teacher do you notice any "attitude" on the part of the Russian immigrants?*

Yes. I do. They have expectations. They have disappointments. The ones making their second immigration have less "attitude" than those making their first immigration.

*Are the immigrants from Israel more cooperative?*

Yes. They understand what it is to give up things and try to keep their emotional stability. They have already left their families behind once. They went through that crisis in Israel. They are more realistic. One of my students was very, very interesting. He said that the first time he immigrated he didn't know the questions to ask. He didn't know what was important. He worried about the wrong things. This is his second immigration. Now he knows what's important.

*When you say "questions to ask," are the questions about the Canadian bureaucracy?*

Yes...what services are available...their entitlements...how to get around in the city.

*The immigrants that arrive directly from the former Soviet Union...are they in a crisis situation?*

They were...more emotional...depression after three months. It is so marked. For the first three months everybody is excited and hopeful, and then reality sets in.

*When the reality sets in, does their schoolwork suffer?*

Sometimes. They are distracted. They are depressed. They feel useless and hopeless.

*By the time the six months has come to an end do you notice any difference?*

Yes. They have regained confidence.

*They have a crisis in the first six months and some pull out of it?*

They level out. They learn to accept that they may not be able to start in their professional level jobs. They are disappointed that they won't realize their dreams. At the end of six months, they can accept the fact they might have to take an entry-level job. At three-months they are devastated.

*They had no idea this would be necessary when they left Russia?*

They don't have job-seeking skills. They don't know how to sell themselves. It was totally against their cultural grain to say, "I'm good...I'm the best...hire me because I'm the best."

*Why do you suppose that is?*

They were just more modest [than us.] They didn't like to talk about their [good] qualities.

*Do you think the reluctance to point out their own good qualities was because they were Jewish and did not wish to appear to be bragging...or was it just a Russian trait?*

A Russian thing about job search. They just don't build themselves up in somebody else's eyes. It is very interesting.

*Learning to write a resumé would be very important for these people.*

Very important. We give them the language skills. They are capable and competent but they just...they don't want to look like "big shots." They think that will turn off the interviewer. whereas here. the interviewer is looking for the "best."

*Do you know of any immigrants who were able to find work in their own field?*

Many of them. Computer analysts are being snapped up. They are being paid to go out of town for interviews. They are finding their jobs.

*Are some of them leaving Toronto and finding work in other communities?*

Yes. Whereas my doctors can't do it [qualify]. In most cases, they are not prepared to put in the money and the time to recertify, because most of them are in their forties and have families and responsibilities.

*Purely subjectively, do you think that if the federal government said to them, we will support you while you retrain and get your credentials in order for Canada, and in payment for that*

*"leg up" we want you to service an out-of-the-way community for a period of time...would they do that?*

How can you generalize? Some would. I had a marine engineer student. He was offered a job on a liner that would take him out of town for several months at a time. He refused because he didn't want to leave his family for long periods of time. And that job was in his field, exactly what he did before and what he wants to do in the future, but he doesn't want to be away for long periods of time. I had another student, also a marine engineer, who accepted this job. It was just a coincidence that I had two students who were offered the same job.

*Do the Russians ever discuss personal problems with their teachers? Will they, for example, seek you out after class to tell you they are having trouble with a child?*

Sometimes. Sometimes they ask me for advice.

*Do you find that as a language teacher you have to "wear different hats" with these people?*

Often we are their first Canadian connection. We teach a lot of life skills at JIAS. It is not purely a language school. That's why they like it.

*Do you think of yourself as working for JIAS or as an ESL teacher? Are you an integration teacher or a language teacher?*

Definitely an integration teacher. We are liaison and facilitators. Most of us spend a great deal of time teaching them survival skills. Skills they will need to get along in Toronto and Canada. To go to a supermarket or department store...their favourite store in the world is Canadian Tire.

The immigrants from Israel are not surprised by the abundance in our stores. Ten years ago, when I got my first group that came directly from Russia. When we tried to do a lesson, for example, on bread, they would say, 'In Russia we were happy to get bread. Here I have to worry about white bread, whole wheat bread, rye bread, pumpernickel bread, bagels and buns.' They were amazed when they went into a supermarket in January and customers were turning their noses up at the peaches. 'Peaches in January! And people are saying, oh, they're not good!'

*The Israeli Russians were more sophisticated. They had already had the experience of shopping in the excellent Israeli supermarkets.*

They are totally sophisticated. They know our banking systems. They know most things available in the western world.

*Are there Russian immigrants, who have come via Israel in your classes?*

Right now, most of them.

*If they have had western-style experience in Israel, what is it that you can help them with?*

[Laughs] Patience...they are used to a very aggressive society. We have to teach them to be polite...to wait their turn.

*Do the immigrants that arrive directly from the FSU have that problem?*

They know how to wait in line. But they are also aggressive and they like to use the word 'must'.

*Must...will they use that word with a teacher...you must...?*

They try. "You must teach me!"

*What if they are not doing their homework and you have to give them a bad mark or rebuke them? How do they take that?*

First of all, I teach adults. I don't rebuke them and I don't give them bad marks. I tell them they are learning for themselves. We have a slogan in our school. 'Every word is worth a dollar in your pocket.'

*So they are hungry to learn words?*

Yes.

*Do the Israeli-Russians calm down? Do they learn that in Canada they have to be more polite...a little more "British?" Do they get the message after a while?*

Absolutely! When they have a problem in their apartment, we teach them to say to their Superintendent...instead of... 'Fix it right now! You must fix it right now!'... We would appreciate if you would fix it as soon as possible, please.'

*Have they found that they get a better response when they do it your way? Have you discussed this with them?*

[Laughs] It depends upon to whom they are talking. It is very interesting to observe the transition.

*Do you think that when they leave school they take this with them...do they understand better how they ought to behave?*

They do. I think it is an important six months. We want them to fit in.

*But they don't really fit in with the established Jewish community.*

They are not accepted. What you do as a [volunteer] 'Telephone Language Companion' -- they are dying for that. They don't know how to meet Canadian families. They don't know how to make Canadian friends. They come here and they live within their own community. They feel cocooned, especially in this area [Bathurst and Sheppard]. They never have to speak English. There are Russian shops. The banks all have Russian interpreters. The pharmacy has a Russian interpreter. Their doctors are Russian. Their lawyers are Russian. They go to the library and they can borrow Russian-language books. Videos are available in Russian.

*They still have to eventually leave that cocoon and deal with people outside their community; certainly their children have to. Have you noticed any interaction between Canadian kids and Russian immigrant kids?*

Slowly. It depends on which schools they attend. If they go to Rockford Road, a Canadian is a minority. If they go to Northview, or Newtonbrook, or MacKenzie, there is a high percentage of Russians. When they get to York University, it's a little different.

*So university is their first real exposure?*

If they live in this corridor, yes. If they live in another corridor, no. I have a student who lives at Weston Road and Finch Avenue. Her child goes to Humber something-or-other and she is totally out of the loop. Totally assimilated. She has the odd Russian friend, but the majority of her friends are Canadian or other ethnicities.

*Do you ever discuss religious affiliation in your classes?*

Part of the mandate of JIAS is to teach Judaica, and it is part of our weekly curriculum. We teach life cycles: bris, bar mitzvah, chupa [circumcision, confirmation, wedding]. We teach alternative choices in Judaism: Lubavitch, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist. We teach them the Jewish holidays. All the immigrants from Israel know the holidays very well.

*If you compare the two groups, the immigrants from Israel may not be religious, but they are familiar with the Jewish calendar. The ones from the FSU really don't know anything.*

Nothing. Especially if they have come from a mixed home. I had one student last semester, a most darling 18-year-old young man...here by himself...living with an aunt. His brother came a few years ago, also by himself and lived with an aunt. The parents are still in the Ukraine, but they have sent their children. My student knew nothing. He was just a sponge about bris, bar mitzvah, the high holidays, Hanukkah. He said, 'I didn't know any of this...my family didn't live any of this.' He was so happy to learn. Now he wants to meet a Jewish girl.

*Do you think this would cause a problem in his family?*

I don't think so...because his brother is now living in this type of an environment as well.

*The parents have sent their children and they have found their way to Judaism through this programme.*

Partly through this programme. It is an introduction for them.

*Do you think that the traditional synagogues like Holy Blossom [Reform], Beth Tzedek [Conservative] take an interest in the Russian Jews?*

Well, one thing that eliminates the Russian Jews is that they sell tickets for the High Holidays. They would like to come to synagogue but they can't afford to come. Some of the synagogues offer to subsidize. We take our students to the Beth Tzedek synagoge every semester to show them around. The rabbi always talks with them. He always says, 'You are welcome at any time. If you need help, call'. I don't know if anybody does [call].

*Through the interviews, I learned the Russians feel economically disadvantaged. They can't dress like the people they see in the synagogue. They don't look like them. They feel second-class and uncomfortable.*

You are never going to make them religious. Maybe the next generation will feel welcome...if we hang on to them.

*Do you think organizations like Aish HaTorah and Lubavitch are impacting on your students?*

Some of them rebel against the Orthodox because its too extreme for them. These Jews believe that to be a good Jew you have to follow the religion's rules. To keep kosher is too expensive. We are trying to introduce them to Kolel [Center for Liberal Jewish Learning], which is Reform. I think they have a Russian rabbi now, or they get a visiting Russian rabbi from the United States.

*Does Kolel have an Outreach programme for the Russians?*

They held a "Shabbaton" last week-end. I think they had a visiting Russian rabbi. They are trying [to give the Russians some Jewish education.] They come into our school to promote their programmes.

*Have any of your students told you that they feel "pulled" in different directions?*

They have not verbalized that to me.

*Do you think they have too many [religious] choices?*

Yes. Sometimes they feel they have too many choices. They don't know what to do; so they don't make any [choices].

*Do some of your students have money? Have some arrived in good financial condition?*

Some of them have access to money.

*Is it obvious that they have money? Do they dress nicer than the other students?*

Yes. They walk around with cell phones. They drive newer cars. We have had some that wore designer clothes. Armani is a popular choice.

*Do they ever talk about how they got the money?*

Business.

*Is this business that they have done in Russia or here?*

Not here. Some of them are working on importing, but they are not making money yet.

*In your classes, do you talk about anti-Semitism in Russia? Does that come up? Are the students worried about their families these days?*

They say, "It's an old story."

*I believe we [North American Jews] are becoming concerned again about the safety of the Jews who are still in the former Soviet Union. Do you feel that our alarm is greater than that of your students?*

From what I have seen...from my experience...they are saying that they lived with this problem [anti-Semitism] all their lives, and sometimes it's more visible and sometimes it's less visible, and currently an important government person is endorsing anti-Semitism over

there. My students don't want to talk about Russia. Russia is their past. Israel is their past. Canada is to-day and their future.

*Do you think that your students are generally optimistic about their futures in Canada?*

Yes, they are. In all my [teaching] years, I have only experienced a handful of students who went back to Russia or Israel...even the teenagers, who are having the hardest time adjusting to the change because they have left their boy-friends and girl-friends...their peers...behind.

*Who gets the kids that are 13 to 18?*

They are in the public school system.

*Will they take a kid who is straight out of Moscow?*

Yes. they have ESL.

*Will an 18-year-old be put into a regular grade?*

No. he'll go down a couple of levels in the school system. but they have ESL support in the schools. It's like emersion -- sink or swim. But you know how quickly kids learn.

*Have you taught older Russians...over 58 years of age?*

No. I haven't.

*Have you talked to teachers to have?*

Yes. They love them. The older people are very interested in learning English. They are all educated people. This is not the *bubbie* [grandmother] who stayed in the kitchen. Many of them are professionals -- doctors and dentists.

*They don't really have very much chance of finding work in their field.*

They are not even aspiring to finding work. Older Seniors. seventy, seventy-five. are coming to English classes.

*Well, they want to learn English so that they can survive easier and read better.*

And watch television...and go to the theatre, if they have the money. Most of the older people are so happy to be at school that they come in the most severe weather. They are the ones that are *shlepping* [dragging themselves] over the snowbanks to come to school...with their canes...to learn English.

*Sometimes the old people are grandparents in an immigrant family.*

A lot of the grandparents are babysitters; but those that have the opportunity to come to school love it. I have a grandmother in my class. She has to take her grandchild to school every day because her kids are working. She attends my school every day. She is only 45-years-old and she is planning to do something with her life here...to get a job.

*Do you think the Russian Jews are a big financial burden to Canada?*

Medical.

*Would you say that Canada is a very generous country?*

I think so.

*Do you think that the Russians appreciate it?*

They think it's their right.

*Do the Israeli-Russians have the same attitude [regarding entitlements] as the Russians from the FSU? When they reemigrate to Canada, do they expect support from the Jewish community a second time?*

Oh sure. They know they are going to get their free medical, their welfare, their education.

*So they have these expectations...and they do get them. Do your students have any sense of connection to Canada yet?*

Not yet. Whenever we write about "What's your impression of Canada?" [they write] "It's clean." "There are a lot of parks."

*Do the Russians, who have reemigrated, ever mention that it's safer [here] as opposed to living in Israel?*

Yes. That's why they came here. They came here to leave terrorism behind. Not for money. Life was hard, but they all were working and managing. They came for safety.

*What do you think the Russians from the FSU were looking for [in Canada]?*

They were looking for freedom of religion; no persecution. They were looking for a better economic life. Some of them were content in the FSU. They didn't have to worry about where they were going to live. The government gave them their rooms, their jobs. They

knew that when they finished electrical engineering [degree], they went into an electrical engineering factory. There was no unemployment.

*Then why would they leave?*

Freedom.

*Do they talk about freedom with you? Do they feel a sense of freedom here? Have they found the freedom they were looking for?*

Over here they are working like horses [laughs]. But they are free to make choices.

*Were they frightened?*

In Israel they were frightened. In Russia they were suppressed...a different kind of fear.

*Do both groups feel that it is better here?*

In my experience, yes.

*Do you think that they will eventually be happy Canadian citizens?*

Not everybody.

*Have you had any personal experience with individuals who have gotten into trouble with the law?*

Yes.

*Any particular age group?*

One of our former students was convicted of first-degree murder and he is in jail. He was a young adult. None of my own students, that I know of, have been in serious trouble...scrapes, parking tickets, speeding tickets.

*Do they ever talk in class about being worried about their teenagers?*

Yes, they are worried about their teenagers. Very worried. It's different [here]. The parents don't have the same control. Kids don't have the same school ethics...homework ethics...motivation. The parents think the school system is too easy.

*Do they think the discipline in Canadian schools is lax?*

Yes. They also have a hard time adjusting to the fact that you can't use physical punishment in Canada. That's different for them. They don't understand our notion of abuse of a wife or a kid. It was first nature to them...not even second [nature].

*Do the parents feel that they are losing control of their teenagers?*

Somewhat. The kids want to dress differently. Some of them put their parents under financial pressure too.

*Do the fathers complain about the way their daughters look when they go to school? Have they ever talked about their daughters' clothes, makeup, the short skirt?*

It has come up in class, but it has not been anything more than a statement.

*Do the women talk about the immigration process causing stress and strain on their marriages?*

Sometimes, not openly, but we hear about it. I had two women students who were being physically abused by their husbands to the point where we got them into shelters. One hot-tempered husband was from Tashkent.

*The men would have trouble understanding what they can and can't do...the parameters here are different.*

I think even there, they knew they can't throw irons at their wives.

*That is not a good thing to do. Did the husbands go to jail?*

No, but both had restraining orders.

*Jewish Family and Child Service were very careful about what they said to me but they alluded that there is some abuse in Russian immigrant households.*

What about harrassment? We teach them about harrassment. Harrassment in the work world...being taken advantage of ...which they know.

*Do you find that they are being taken advantage of by some people in the Jewish community?*

Oh yes, employers.

*Jewish employers, or any employers?*

I can't be specific.

*Because they are immigrants?*

Yes, and because they are so anxious to work. Very not nice. Like being paid five dollars an hour cash.

*They don't complain because they want the work.*

They accept it. They understand that they are being taken advantage of, and they verbalize it.

*In a sense, these educated Russian immigrants are being taken advantage of in the same way as the less-educated Caribbean immigrants were several years ago.*

Or the Chinese to-day. They get into these factories.... They want to work.

*So all is not perfect in our perfect country. My point is that the Russians are not exempt from harrassment or being taken advantage of. They are immigrants like all other immigrants and they suffer the same hardships.*

That is my experience.

*One would think that being a sophisticated, educated person would exempt you from being harrassed and manipulated and taken advantage of, as opposed to an island personl with grade six education.*

If you are a dentist from Azerbaijan or Baku City or wherever, and you come to Canada and you have three children [to feed], you know you are being taken advantage of and you accept it because you have responsibilities.

*And they hope it will get better?*

The know it will get better. Towards the end of the six months they are hopeful.

*You observe this whole cycle of experience while they are coming to your school. You see them sometimes within days of arrival in Canada.*

Which is wonderful because it means they are not languishing in some little room, truly isolated. They are immediately connected to the agencies; they are placed in a class: they meet friends immediately; and they network.

*And it is JIAS that is responsible for this. If JIAS does nothing else for them, at least they introduce them to Canada and probably prevent them from committing suicide within the first few months they are in this strange country. If the immigrants can't recall that JIAS did anything for them [after they become established], we will know.*

Which is more than our parents' generation got when they came off the boat and ended up in some little sweathole. Nobody taught them anything. They had to learn how to speak English from their children.

They come to me and they say, 'Myrna, I feel like I am a baby. I come to this country and I have to learn everything.' I always say to them, 'I am the baby. I was born in this country. I have had no life experience. I have never emigrated. I have never left anything behind. I have never started over. I learn from you more than you learn from me. You know...and I mean this from my heart...I learn every day from these people: they give me strength.

*And you say you love them?*

I love them [tears in her eyes].

*As opposed to...?*

Many people in the Jewish community who find them aggressive, abrasive, pushy and ungrateful.

*Ungrateful for the all things the Jewish community is doing for them? Unappreciative? That's the perception out there among some Toronto Jews?*

Yes.

PERRY ROMBERG  
 DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
 ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY PLANNING & ALLOCATIONS  
 UJA FEDERATION  
 FEBRUARY 24, 1999

[Thelma] *My research is finding negative stereotyping of Soviet Jews by established Toronto Jewry. They are described as 'aggressive', 'pushy', 'criminals,' etc. When I ask, 'Have you met them?' [personally], the answer usually is, 'Well, no.'*

*This is a multicultural country. The federal government supports it [multiculturalism]. A lot of money has been directed to Heritage Canada. There are some problems, and there have been budget cut-backs, but, in the meantime, it's a Canadian fact. And yet the Canadian Jews seem to resent...I am hearing resentment on the part of Toronto Jews that the Russian Jews, and by that I mean all of the Soviet-block Jews, have an interest in maintaining their Russian culture.*

[Perry] They send their kids to Russian school [laughs].

*Well, it's okay if you are from Liberia to send your kids to Liberian school...I am just using that [group] as an exaggeration...but I am hearing that there is resentment in the community because instead of sending their kids to Jewish religious schools where they would learn to read Hebrew and study Jewish traditions and Jewish history, some immigrants prefer to send their children to Russian school, so that they can maintain their Russian language and their Russian culture.*

I have never heard that! I am wondering where you are hearing this?! That is one thing that I have never heard!

*But this is what I am finding out and, of course, it is on my recordings. On the other hand, because the Russian immigrants get so little respect from the Toronto Jewish community, they are having tremendous problems with their offspring because the kids want to discard their identification with things Russian and fit in. It has become a negative thing because of the way the established Jewish community is handling it.*

Do you really believe that?! [Laughs] I don't agree with you. That's giving the Canadian Jewish community a tremendous amount of power on the perception of Russian Jews about themselves and their kids. I wish we wielded that much influence to have that type of effect.

*You have no idea what an effect you have on this community! What I am hearing from many people is that they feel terribly isolated; they feel like second-class citizens. Part of the problem is that some Canadian Jews retain a Cold-War mentality. They think that these are*

*Soviets who have come here conditioned by statism and communism. And this is partly true. Because they have been maintained by the communist state, they have certain ideas that they have to discard over here in order to be successful...certain standards and certain ways of operating...along with their apartments, dachas, furniture and fur coats. And the Canadian Jews have to try to discard their notions about 'these Commies,' who are coming in here and forming a Russian ghetto within the Jewish community.*

I think it is really important to put your research into perspective and context. Yes, I am a spokesperson for the Jewish community given that as a bias, but I think there are some facts that have to go in there. This is certainly a very challenging immigrant group. Your notion that there is a ghetto within a ghetto being created...you are probably right...but I would challenge you and say that if you looked at the history of any immigrant group in Toronto, Jewish and non-Jews [you would find the same pattern] and that is part of the strength of our multi-ethnic community here...birds of a feather flock together.

If you look back at the history of the development of the Jewish community in Toronto, when the Polish and Russian Jews first came in the 1920s and 1930s, and there are some great books written about this, you see that all the *shtetls* [villages], and all the *landsmanshaftien* [social organizations based on village, town or city of origin in eastern Europe] stuck together. One *shtetl* helped the other. I have seen in the past where many people were concerned about ghettos and I, as one individual only, think that [ghettos] are not a terrible thing. What I have found in my personal life experience, and with working ten years at JIAS, is that the safety and comfort that comes from living within your own [group] helps the parents more; and it is usually their kids, kids like me, that take the first step out of the safety net and say, 'I am a Canadian; I can handle myself in public.' So the initially-arriving group, depending on their age and how long it takes to get acclimatized, are always at a disadvantage. I have found that being able to live in their own cluster has been to their advantage...it's a safety net.

Yes, the same thing has happened to the Soviet-Jewish community, no question about that. I see that partly as a strength. The challenge, the negative side is...you're right...how do you build the bridges? The Jewish community has poured millions and millions of dollars...and I know better than anyone since the second wave because I was right there at the front line when they started coming out here...about the basics of resettlement, about helping people get rent [money] and jobs, and topping-up the low incomes until they found a better job...millions of dollars since 1988 until now.

So we have the same challenge that you are trying to look at, in that there are people here at the Federation who have given good agencies like JIAS millions of dollars over the years. JIAS's budget now is 1.1 million dollars from us and half of that, about \$560,000 is money that goes directly into the hands of the Jewish-immigrant poor. To-day, when the immigrant gets off the proverbial ship or plane and can't find that first job, or needs to study English but doesn't have food for the table, they come to JIAS, and JIAS gives them dollars to

supplement either a low income, to make sure that they have enough to get by, or if they are on welfare, and that is not enough, to top-up the welfare.

I agree that on a functional level the community has really done a lot for this population, as it has for other groups. What always bogs us down, and I know there is a lot of anger [out] there, is once you have helped the person put some bread on the table or rent an apartment, etc., how do you then help him/her feel comfortable? If you can find an answer.... Every community in North America, it makes no difference the frozen north or the warm south, is struggling with this issue of integration. What is successful integration? What are successful integration programmes?

We have tried Passover saders, and 'Family-to-Family.' You can go through all the research and find the programmes are all temporal. They have a limited effect for a limited amount of time. So. at the end of the day, a generation later, do we have a lot of Soviet Jews connected to the organized Jewish community? The answer is [hesitates]...to some extent it's the same problem that we have with our local Jews as well. The struggle for Jewish identity is a struggle. You are right, that [Russian] immigrant group has come from a country that has taken them away from their traditions and Jewish values for seventy years...so they come here without that knowledge base...but it's just as much a struggle for us with our own Jews, who have allegedly grown up in a community that is rich in Jewish organizational life, education, the whole thing. And we are struggling with that [Jewish identity] as much as anybody else.

One of the things we have started to change our thinking about to-day at the Federation is...until now, we have been throwing a lot of money through agencies at things like Purim programmes and Hanukka...they are all what I call 'one shot' things. You know, someone comes to your home, and you serve them a nice meal, and you have a nice evening...but if you never call them again...but that's where a two-way street comes in...and this is the struggle.

*But they can't [reciprocate]. You see there is a difference between the group we are talking about and your family or my family. When I hear the word landsmanshaft, it rings a bell. The Russians don't have landsmanshaften; they don't even know what a landsmanshaft is. And they don't come from shtetls...some do...but most come from large cities. Maybe the difference between your grandfather or father, and certainly my father, is that they all wound up working in sweatshops and factories. [Most of] these people are educated professionals. You are talking about a different element. You can't treat them the same way you would have treated my father. My father was happy to come home with a rye bread under his arm, and if the boss at the factory said he had to work overtime, he was thrilled. He didn't think for himself; he made [suit] lapels and he went home. It's a terrible thing to find out when you are forty-years old that everything you have achieved in your life is worth absolutely nothing. And then your kids find out that you have no resources; and the Jewish*

*community that you were looking forward to meeting are treating you like you are nothing. Yes, they are throwing money at you, but they don't want to have anything to do with you.*

I know that to be true, but I guess what I am motively reacting to is that it seems harsh to say that the Jewish community doesn't want to have anything to do with them because [hesitates]...the problem is the newcomer community and the established community have not found a way to...like, if you are my neighbour, I see you, I begin to talk with you.... What we have been trying to do is very artificial.

*Money is important; I am not discounting that. These people bless you and they thank you...but they still feel very sad. There are suicide telephone calls...there is depression...we are paying a lot of money to doctors for treatment.*

This is right through all the immigrant communities. This is my own frustration. How do you create a social fabric between communities? How do you get people on an organized basis to talk to each other...to care? You say you are going to contact the *shuls* [synagogues]. Most *shuls* will tell you nothing. But if you dig deeper, you are going to find a lot of anger on the *shuls*' side saying, 'Do you know what we have tried to do for the last ten years? Or for the last two years when we tried to outreach and no one came?' And so on and so on. What I find is that the frustration does rise in both communities because the newcomer community feels it [the effort] has not been enough...and I am speaking in general: I am not talking moneywise...and the existing community feels what else do they want from me. Lord knows? And there are segments of the existing community who say, 'Well, when my parents came [to Canada they received no help]...we don't want to hear that [the complaining].

You are right: this is a different generation and a different element. On the other hand, and again it's the same question, how do you create social fabric or social interaction? We keep trying and stumbling. My own conclusion...my own personal conclusion at this point from the research I have been reading...is that to some extent it [the situation] is similar to our parents' [situation].

In the generation that comes directly, as with most immigrant communities, some will be more successful and some will be less successful; and some will integrate better than others. It's the kids...and what I have been trying to urge at the Federation, and even at JIAS, is that we should continue with all the 'feel good' programmes, and we should continue to subsidize the Jewish Community Centre, and whatever, but what we have got to put our efforts into is true community development which, in my opinion, should be directed at the next generation. It [the effort] should go to the youngsters who came with their parents, who are students. Not telling them 'Here's a Pesach programme,' and being very paternalistic about it, but saying, 'Guys, what do you want? You help us determine what is good for your community and yourselves. We then have an obligation to discuss it [the suggestion] with you; to plan it with you; and to try to help you find the funds.' It's a maturation process.

I recently had a conversation with some people at HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in the United States] in New York. I was asking similar questions. I told them, 'Lord, nothing has worked here and we are getting the same thing...they're angry and they're...and we keep throwing money...and to some extent it's money wasted.' So I asked, 'What's successful in the States?' Yes, I looked across the border, and basically they said that what they are finding in New York, where there are over a quarter million Soviet Jews, is that it's almost as if the community is growing out of its adolescence now, and they are starting to approach HIAS saying, 'This is what we want.' They are starting to see indigenous groups of Soviet Jews self-forming.

Whether it's the elderly for a chess club, or women on their own coming forth and saying, 'Very nice what the JCC [Jewish Community Centre] has done, but we want x, y, and z, and we want you to fund us.' As opposed to getting (you are right) our backs up about it, people are saying maybe this is the right way. It's the [Russian] kids that have learned the methods of North America and they are saying, 'Let us work the system.' And that is what I am beginning to have discussions about here at the Federation. Maybe we have to take some of the dollars that we have thrown at a very dependent [population], and instead of the attitude, 'We give you, and you have to say thank you somehow,' maybe we have to start saying, 'Here's a pot of money; who's out there that will help? Come and tell us what you need.' That's really much more of a community-development approach.

Now we are starting to see a little bit of that. We are starting to see some of the kids of the first wave, who are now twenty to thirty years of age and successful, become part of some of the committee structures.

We used to have a great programme here called 'Family-to-Family,' which has since died. Basically we advertised for local Jewish families to take in new Soviet families to meet each other. Pesach time it still works, but these are one-shot deals. As soon as the sexiness, and I say it openly, of the Soviet-Jewry movement became a reality...it was one thing to march with placards; like all of us did **LET THEM GO!**... but all of a sudden, what do you do when Doctor so-and-so comes to your doorstep and says, 'I was a doctor there, and here I am treated like nothing.' That's the reality...and that's where things have become very tough...and we feel...[worried].

*A question I often hear, and you've heard this too is, 'Why don't the Toronto Jews help us find a job? Why do they hire outsiders? Sure, we have a bit of an accent, but we've got PhD's. We'll learn!'*

*Why don't the established Jews give them a break?*

Okay...a little history...I don't have any great answers for that. When the first wave came in the 1970s, the community was getting them jobs left and right. First of all, the reality was there were a lot more Jewish factory owners at that time. Thelma, if you were the owner of

a high-tech computer company to-day, and I called you up, 'Thelma I need a favour. You were a donor to the [UJA Federation] campaign....' We do this.... You're not going to say, 'Send me three people.' You're going to say, 'Well, send me a resumé. I can't let just anybody sit at this two-million-dollar machine.' The fact is there are some very well-trained Soviets; and the fact is there are some extremely poorly-trained Soviets who you would not allow near your computer. You might start them at a data entry level. You could get a job easier in the 1970s when there were still a lot of [Jewish] factory owners...like it was when our parents and grandparents needed jobs.

Then [1970s] there was research that I read written by Donald Schwartz, who was very active...he was a professor at the University of Toronto then...still is.... One thing he began to see was that they [the Russians] took a job, then they left it because it wasn't for them. There were a lot of disgruntled employers because many of them at the factory level were used to our dads, who came [to work] and said, 'Thank you, I'll make the lapel.' My father was a sewing machine operator. He made dresses. He made a living, and that was the end of it. So there was a feeling that the match wasn't good.

But now, in the late nineties, when you look at the Jews who can help us, they're into high-tech industries. There are not a lot of factories here anymore...or the Jews are now professionals. So the ability to call up a Thelma Davidson, who used to own a factory and would say, 'Send me over three of my brothers and sisters,' isn't there any more. Now you have a vice-president in a bank, and do you think he is going to hire three [Russian] people that easily? The answer is no.

Yes, the Jewish Vocational Service [JVS] does have this type of a [job search] programme, but I must tell you that it's been very hard to find jobs for all these reasons.

*They [JVS] told me that a big part of the problem is that the Russians don't have enough information about the qualifications necessary to work in certain job areas in Canada; that they should upgrade over there [FSU] before they come in [to Canada] because they can pay for this upgrading with Russian rubles. Particularly in the computer field...they could easily afford to upgrade their qualifications there, instead of coming here and then having to borrow money to go to computer school...which many are doing.*

That's a problem. I was at a consultation this morning with Elinor Caplan [Minister of Immigration] about the new Immigration Act. Someone raised the question, 'Why can't we help people there...tell them what they really need to do is to upgrade?' The reality is that we need to do more of that as a government, not just for the Russians but for everybody. Another thing...having been working overseas...when a person wants to leave a country, he wants to go...and no matter what you tell him [he goes anyways]...that is a reality. If the Canadian government was willing to provide more money to train people overseas...but they are not going to.

*But over there the people are not impoverished. They could do it for themselves, independently. It wouldn't be a [Canadian] government expense. They just need to know they need to do it. They have the rubles, but as soon as they leave the country the rubles aren't worth anything. So it's much easier for them to upgrade there than in Israel or wherever.*

I agree that this is a complaint we have heard from day one...that good jobs are just not plentiful...and it is for all these reasons. There are, I am sure, some prejudices, and there are training issues. A lot of it boils down to the fact that most of our contacts now can only hire people at certain levels; and there are certain constraints because of the nature of the businesses the Jews are in to-day. A lot of the problem is that, like most newcomers, their expectations of what we can do for them and what they are able to do, are sometimes out of kilter...just not realistic.

*What about all these associations...the Medical Association, the Dental Association, the Law Association, the Accountancy Association? Is there anything that JIAS could do to push the immigrants into accreditation or retraining programmes...to help these people join the club, so to speak?*

They did in the late 1970s. That whole professional recertification thing is a big political problem. As you know, all the [professional] organizations have kept it small and tight. I remember I dealt with a group of Jewish veterinarians from Poland...wonderfully-trained guys...one guy was an inventor...and to get them into anything was impossible. This is a problem for the Province. We have not been more successful for two reasons...first of all, even though there are a lot of Jews involved in professional bodies, they don't control them...you know, they sit on Boards. For instance...take doctors...in the late 1970s, there were a lot of Russian doctors here in town, but at that time we were still accepting doctors and retraining them. Mount Sinai Hospital had a big programme...the Dental School...the whole thing. Then there was an oversupply of doctors in the country.

*Well, we still can't get enough doctors in remote areas. These Russians would go to the moon to get a job and practice their medicine.*

Evidently...what I am told is that there are a lot of doctors who now would take these smaller [community] positions. But how many doctors would you need out there? Twenty or thirty...fifty across the country...one hundred? There are hundreds of doctors, lined-up from across the world, who would take these positions. For instance, in my neighbourhood, there is a young doctor who came from Ireland...trained in Dublin! He took his first position in Corner Brook [Newfoundland], but it took him years to even get that far. And medically, I must tell you, I am told that unless you were trained in Russia at their best medical institutions...a lot of doctors, and nurses too, are not well trained.

*Their equipment is antiquated...and their drugs are not always up to date. The sad news is that over there they are told that they have the best [medical facilities]...they come here and it's a shock.*

Yes, it is. When I was at JIAS, tens of cases, versus hundreds of cases, of people who were really good...who stuck it through and managed to recertify...worked as health care aides for the longest time and [eventually] got back into their profession. But, like anything else in life, it is a small percentage of people who have either the wherewithall, or a little bit of *mazel* [good fortune]. You're right, a lot of the immigrants just come and have to switch...and that's the unfortunate story of many immigrants...and that's what the [Toronto Daily] Star has been writing about.

*Yes, it has been a very interesting and depressing series of articles. I have been following them very carefully. Obviously, it isn't just the Russians who are in this situation.*

*It seems to me that Canada, because of the economic situation here, and because of bureaucratic roadblocks, is creating a subclass of citizen immigrants, who potentially might have been at the top of the heap and are winding up at the bottom of the heap. Is there any hope for these people?*

Oh yes, definitely. But the later the age...you know that after age 44 you stop getting [immigration] points, and there is little chance of getting into this country under the point system. It is interesting when you think about it...on the one hand, Canada accepts huge numbers of people, a couple of hundred thousand a year, which is much more than many countries...I have never resolved this argument for myself...on the one hand, our generosity as a nation is well known...and if you ask any of the immigrants who are unhappy here...most of them are still glad to be in Canada. On the other hand, why do they have to start from scratch?

You know, I grew up in a family that was just always very realistic...to some extent, that's life. The hairs on the back of my neck go up a little bit to hear you say that we have created an underclass here. I think the Canadian government and the country has opened the door [to the Russians]. We have provided a lot of opportunities. We need to provide more, yes. But, on the other hand, we begin to see now the kids of a lot of Russian immigrants who are ...you go up and down Bathurst Street...and see the dental and law offices...you are going to see Russian names. It's their kids. So you know, Thelma, this is what my parents said to me, 'We came for you; we gave up [for ourselves], but we struggled for you.' To some extent this may all be sappy stuff, but maybe that's the story of newcomers. The first generation that comes...with the exception of a few very successful people...end up being very hard working folk who strive to build a future, and maybe they did give up [hope]. I don't know what else to say.

*So then their education and professional skills go "down the tubes" in Canada?*

That is a major point...that is a good point...we could capitalize [on their talents], but we haven't yet.

*Can Canada afford to bring in 200,000 educated, independent, "high-point" immigrants knowing they are going to be on welfare?*

That's a problem. Under the new Immigration Act they are trying to refashion...which looks good...it always looks better on paper...it will count for less that you were a computer operator in Russia. What is going to count more is your education, your language skills and transferable skills. So now, let's say you were a doctor, living in crazy Moscow to-day, where you couldn't earn a living as a doctor, but you were ingenious enough to say, 'But I can do some health care stuff on the side.' That type of creativity is now what the point system is going to consider.

They are going to say, 'That Thelma Davidson, maybe she won't be a doctor, but this lady has shown some creativity.' We know that when you get here the chances of you being a doctor are slim, but there is a chance that you will think of another way to use your medical training here because you have already shown that type of personality. That's who we want in this country.

*This is doubly difficult for an individual who was raised with a state-driven orientation.*

Then what's the answer? Is it better not to have them? Is the answer to say, 'Well, if we are going to have them (and there are people that say this) we had better make sure that if they were coming from Level III, they will come in, if not at level III, then level IV...whatever that means jobwise. How can you make that statement in a free market? Unless we become like them and say, 'We accept you Thelma; you worked as a lampshade specialist there and you are going to be a lampshade specialist here.' We don't have that sort of economy.

No, we don't. Then these people are in a state of "freefall" really, beyond what you can do for them to provide their basic survival needs.

That's the free market. That is the strength and weakness of capitalism.

TAMARA NOVIK  
EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLOR  
JEWISH VOCATIONAL SERVICE OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO [JVS]  
JANUARY 21, 1999

[Thelma] *Tamara, how long have you been an employment counsellor?*

[Tamara] Since 1991, about seven years. I came to Canada ten years ago...directly from Russia, not from Israel. You know, the reason why people go through Israel is because they have no choice. That is why they call them immigrants from Russia via Israel.

*I am interested in Soviet Jews who have been here a year or two or three and are still struggling to find work.*

Yes, I have prepared a file for you. I prefer you don't use the man's name. This gentleman, he has Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering. He has his Master's Degree in Mathematics. He has been here for almost three years. Now he is receiving welfare. This is something terrible. They [Welfare] sent him to us just to push him to get a job...to take anything. I am trying to explain to Welfare that a man who has a Ph.D. in Engineering and a Master's Degree in Mathematics...he can't clean the street...mentally he can't do that. At the same time, in Canada he can earn \$100,000 per year and pay big taxes...just give him a chance to do something additional.

He needs, for example, for electrical engineering, a special course. He doesn't have any money to take this course. Welfare<sup>1</sup> pays him every month a thousand-and-something to support his family. Instead of paying this thousand-and-something for a year, better provide him with this short course. He has great potential. He can work.

So, what can he do now? He is asking for computer programming course. As a computer programmer, he can find a job quickly, but they don't want to give him the course.

*Are you saying that the government won't pay for the course?*

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<sup>1</sup> Welfare: Financial assistance as well as programs and services are offered through the City of Toronto, Social Services Division of Community and Neighbourhood Services. Financial assistance is administered by the Social Services Division under the authority of the provincial Ontario Works (OW) Act and Regulations. Twenty percent of funding is provided by municipality (Toronto) and 80 percent of funding is provided by Province of Ontario. Marcia Gardner, City of Toronto, Social Services Division Client Service and Information Unit, Telephone interview, 4 March 1999.

Yes. This man is a good example of a person who has been here for more than two years and he finishes on welfare.

*Will the government keep him on welfare forever?*

You know...now they are playing games...like if you are not working, they will cut it off...but they can't cut it off...we talked to them...it is just talk.

When he requested the course, Welfare explained to him that they are giving the course to people who have no education. I am sorry; if there is a computer programming course, what is the reasoning to give it to somebody who never was educated? He will finish this course and never find a job. This gentleman, after a two-month course, I guarantee he will be working!

*Is there a Jewish agency that will pay for this [course]?*

Unfortunately, no. They only have Loan Casa.

*Will the Casa lend this man the money to take this course?*

Yes, this is what we will try to do, but he will be cut off welfare if Welfare knows that he is taking course.

*He will be cut off welfare if Welfare knows he is taking the course? Even if this course is paid for by money from a Jewish social service?*

Yes. I talked to Welfare and they explained that if somebody pays for the course, they consider it like his additional income this month. Because he is on welfare, he cannot take course.

Before it was the same with Employment Insurance recipients. They changed it so now Employment Insurance recipients can take whatever courses they want.

If somebody is on welfare it doesn't mean that he does not want to work! If he has some other way, so let him do it!

*It would make so much more sense for the federal government to retrain these intelligent people...these educated minds.*

They [the Russians] need to be flexible to some extent. But listen, he is a Ph.D. and he is not looking for a Ph.D. job. He is willing to be junior programmer...that is enough flexibility...but to be a gas station attendant, that is not for him. This is not a possibility!

I saw in the letter you sent me that you look into realistic expectations of people who came [from Russia]. I am sure that you have heard from people that you have interviewed that they are getting wrong messages from Canadian Consulates in Israel and Russia, and from private law firms. In Israel and Russia, there are lots of private law firms which help, and they provide you with quite positive information...and they charge a lot of money.

You know, when we came to this country...actually through Italy...we came as Refugees with the help of JIAS. We were supported by the Jewish community. In Italy we went to the Canadian Consulate...the Canadian Counsel asked my husband, who was an electronic engineer, 'Are you sure that you can work as an electronic engineer in Canada? Perhaps you should be prepared to change your occupation.' That was okay. We escaped from Russia. We didn't chose. You know, we just escaped from there, and when somebody asked, 'Where are you going?', We told them, 'It doesn't matter.' We were in a hurry to escape, and we came without expectations.

*Is that better?*

Yes. it is better. Without money and without expectations. Now they are given expectations! Can you imagine [the expectations] if they come to this Canadian government representative, and he tells them, 'Oh, your age is great. Your English is good enough. You are a civil engineer, that's great. Canada needs civil engineers. Welcome to Canada.'

Can you imagine the kind of expectations they have? Suddenly, they figure out, first of all, that in civil engineering there are not a lot of opportunities in Canada. Then second, even if Canada needed civil engineers, they need at least to have Autocad knowledge and experience (computer design and computer graphics) which most of them from Russia (not from Israel) don't have. So people were given [false] hope. You know, if they would get this information while still in Russia or Israel, they could prepare themselves for immigration. Number one, if they were told in order to be a civil engineer in Canada you have to have this-and-this knowledge, these-and-these skills; second, if you can't be an engineer at the beginning, you should be a draftperson, so you need to do this-and-this drafting in this-and-this time frame. So he could take courses there, before he leaves.

This is a most difficult and ridiculous situation!

*The women are also well-educated. Do you find a difference between the women and men?*

The women are more flexible. They are not so frustrated. You know, for the woman who used to be an engineer, who starts working as a salesperson or even dishwasher, it is much easier than for a man.

*Do you find that this is a big stressor on the marriages of the couples you work with? Are the men becoming depressed and angry?*

They are getting depressed. First of all, in most cases, for women it is much easier acquiring English skills. Then the woman is more independent and becomes head of the family. This is a big stressor.

*I suppose the children are effected. There's a domino effect. The father is upset...the mother is working.*

The relationships between children and parents are so different [here]. You know, I remember, even in our time, when we came with our daughter...within two years, she was our consultant on aspects of Canadian life.

It is a difficult time for everybody, but my main concern is that people not only don't have a chance to prepare themselves for immigration. they are getting wrong messages. They are misled even before they come to Canada.

*What is your caseload? Are there many employment counsellors like you?*

Two Russian-speaking employment counsellors, who are working specifically with the Russians. Together we have six hundred individuals per year.

*That must be very stressful, because you can't give them good news.*

Very stressful. About 500 of them are newcomers: they need time to adjust: they need time to understand; they need time to change. Now, more and more, they are ready to change their occupation.

Now we have this [new] computer field. I don't know if you are aware about software-testing occupation. This is something new. Two years ago, one of my clients, she is a Ph.D. in Mathematics and she was doing software testing in Russia. She opened a new school in Toronto for new immigrants.

*She opened up a school in Toronto for software testing!*

She was the first school [for software testing] in Toronto. I called up all the Toronto universities and colleges. They didn't have this course here. She opened this software testing course and she was doing miracles. I referred to her a few of my women engineers, who had never seen computer in their entire life. In three months, she taught them how to test existing software products. Just to test, not to write programmes. They just need to locate the problem, using automatic tools, whatever; then programmer will work [to solve] this problem.

In three months she taught them, and they found employment within a month after they finished her school, with a salary range between \$35,000 to \$45,000 per year. By now, she

has about 100 students who have found employment after finishing at her school. And she continues. It doesn't mean she has 100 percent success, but her success rate is about 85 percent. That's pretty high. And after this, more schools will open.

By the way, I introduced the school to our Executive Director at that time and suggested maybe JVS can do it [training]. First of all, she charges \$3000; it used to be \$2000.

*Three thousand dollars for a three-month course. That's a lot of money.*

But you are getting occupation! Where are they going to get [an occupation].... Maybe they can do course by getting money from Jewish Loan Casa...people can get loan...but, you know, they are partly government agency and this is very slow.

*Who supports the JVS?*

Partly the Jewish community, the Federation. And the government. Now we have lots of programmes together with government...the Province...Immigration.

By the way, we are getting salary for one-and-a-half persons for Russians from the Jewish Federation...my program...so they pay salary for myself and half of another person. You know, we have ten Employment Counsellors in our department, but each one is working for different programmes and sponsored by different sources.

It is complicated for our Accounting Department, not for us.

*That's interesting. The Jewish community is really subsidizing you; and you are helping the Russians exclusively.*

The other lady...the Jewish community pays for half of her salary, but she sees Russians and some others.

The community pays only me but, actually, my clients take workshops from the other Counsellors. I see them individually and then I am trying...if they can speak English, I send them to the workshops, job-skills workshops, clinics, general workshops.

*I interviewed a woman who is an ESL teacher. She accepts students who have only been in Canada 'five minutes.' They attend a six-month programme paid for by JIAS. Part of her work is teaching them English, and part of her work is teaching them integration skills, as well as how to write a resumé, etc. Do you find that immigrants you see, who have been through this programme have some [applicable] skills, or do you have to retrain them?*

I know this programme with JIAS. Unfortunately, especially if you are working with new immigrants, you shouldn't start with group sessions like how to write a resumé. This is one

more time when you can mislead the person. For example, if somebody comes and says, 'I am engineer,' and the teacher will teach him how to write engineering resumé, once more she will be giving him wrong information. For newcomers, this is especially dangerous.

At JVS, what we do is see them first individually. We decide together that if he can't be an engineer initially, he should be whatever...carpenter...because he has these skills...so I'll help him to develop resumé for carpenter.

Now we are discussing this with JIAS, 'Don't teach newcomers how to do that [write resumé] in general.' Even for Canadians -- my colleagues teach Canadians -- if a person can't do whatever he was doing, maybe he should change direction in his career, and then write resumé.

*Another reason for false expectation is that when they first arrive here, they are taught to do resúmes in their own field.*

Sometimes these people say, 'You know, I came here just to ask for your help. Help me with the resumé...just talk about resumé! For what?'

You know, they believe that a resumé is something [else]. I don't know if they told you that in Russia they used to have a book. It was called a "Job Book" [translation from Russian]. Each employer can look in the book to see what you did before. I hire you and put down my stamp that you are hired as an ESL teacher. Then you quit the job. I put down in the book left because you quit, or you are laid off, or you are fired, and I put down my stamp. So, next employer would never hire you until he sees this book. The immigrants assume that resumé is like this book, only in English. It takes time to explain them that resumé is progress history.

*Please confirm this for me. My teacher-interviewee told me that the Russians don't understand the concept of 'selling themselves' on a resumé. Perhaps that is because with this "Job Book" they didn't need to.*

Only reality [specific facts]. Nothing about personality. Nothing about your duties, your position. Only the reason you were fired, or laid off, or you quit...that's it. And this, they suppose, is their resumé.

*In Russia, when you were considering hiring somebody, you would look into this book. The individual wouldn't have to write a resumé. This book was his history...a work history. I can understand the confusion.*

And one more confusion. They were taught for seventy years in Russia that you never should say anything good about yourself. Let somebody else tell about yourself. And then [here]

they come forward [in class]. 'Should I say that I can do this good...and this is my strongpoint...how can I say this?'

*They have to learn to understand that an aspect of capitalism is selling yourself.*

For people from Israel, this is a little easier. Usually they have been in Israel for six, seven years.

*Do you think that the Russians who come to Canada via Israel find it easier to get work?*

Yes. First of all, they have more up-to-date skills and experience. If they were working in high-tech, it was more up-to-date. Also, this is their second immigration. They don't feel so frustrated as people who have come directly from Russia.

*Do they have more realistic expectations of what they will find in Canada?*

No, they don't have a more realistic idea. They are more self-confident, not more realistic. First of all, don't forget that people [Russians] from Israel...[almost] one hundred percent of my clients...were working in their field in Israel. I don't know if it was easier to get a job there. Maybe people who couldn't find their job in Israel...they can't leave...or they have no money so they can't pass the interview successfully...so I don't know...this is like [immigration] selection it seems to me. The people that came here told me that lots of people are not working in their field in Israel. Well, ninety-five percent of the immigrants that I see, who came from Israel were working in their particular field there.

*That's very important because when they come to Canada from Israel, they also experience shock because they have assumed they would be able to find a job in their field again, and they run into the same problem as the others.*

Of course. They have the same [job] problem, but because they are more up-to-date, it is easier for them; and usually their English skills are a little bit higher. Some of them were using English at their workplace in Israel. But they are still just a little step ahead [of the other job-seekers].

*Do you find there is a sense of competition between the two Russian groups looking for jobs in Toronto?*

No, I don't.

*Do you find much interaction between the two groups?*

If somebody stayed in Israel 15 years...20 years...and it happened that they decided to emigrate...they are very different people. They can't be friends with people who just came

from Russia. You know, it was ten years ago that I came directly from Russia. And there were people, who had lived in Israel for ten years that came to Toronto at that time. You know, Israel had been their original destination...it was their country...they lived there...they loved the country. They decided to reemigrate because of different reasons. You can't find very many Russian people here who immigrated to Israel in the 1970s. They don't like people who came directly from Russia. They have different way of life, relationships...totally different people.

These new immigrants, who lived in Israel for six, seven, eight years...they are still very close to the Russians because their country of destination was Canada from the very beginning. They had to come to Canada via Israel.

*So even though they have stayed in Israel for as long as six or seven years, they still always intended to come to Canada?*

And that is why they love Israel...but [they feel] it is not their country. They didn't get this feeling...that is why I don't personally feel that...we have been in groups, you know, they are running workshops for this...out of 10 to 12 people, we have always 6 from Israel, 5 from Russia.

*Have you had many clients who have come from Israel as refugees?*

No. We don't have them. What do you mean. 'refugees from Israel?'

*I interviewed a family from Kazakhstan, who went to Israel. Partly Jewish. The wife was Jewish-enough [for Law of Return] so that they could get into Israel. They immigrated there and were very unhappy because they felt tremendous pressure to convert and to live a Jewish way of life, which they did not want to do. They were only in Israel 14 months, and they simply got on an airplane and came here and declared themselves convention refugees. They waited six years, which is a very long time, and they finally got their Landed Immigrant status recently because...they were lucky...there was such a huge backlog of cases at the Refugee Board that anybody who had been on a waiting list for over three years and was working received their landed status. It was like an amnesty.*

Refugee status?! I hear this for the first time from you. I know that I saw at one time a few refugee claimants, but they never got it. I have heard of a few cases in Montreal. The ones I saw were either deported or it was suggested they apply for Landed Immigrant status; so they paid for their immigration...yes, it is possible. They entered from Buffalo. But, you know, after a few unsuccessful cases, people stopped doing that. Information spreads very quickly.

*Would it not be a more economically sound move if the government, instead of providing indefinite welfare, picked up the cost of a retraining programme that would really get them some work?*

Of course. First of all, they should be given information about necessary retraining in their home country because, believe me, 80 percent of them could afford to pay for their training.

*Do you think this is the federal government's fault, or do you think it's the immigration lawyers who are making money on these people?*

You know, lawyers who are preparing their cases give them information. The last step [in the immigration process] is that each immigrant meets face-to-face with a government representative. The lawyers prepare them for these immigration interviews. Do you know what these lawyers are doing? They ask people to learn by heart the script of their presentation. I saw a woman who doesn't speak a word of English...not 'hi,' not 'bye.' I asked her, 'Can you speak English?' and suddenly she started the *megillah* [story] about her education, what she was doing. I was shocked!

*The lawyer wrote the script and she memorized it?*

Yes. You can learn [the script] in Italian or whatever language. Learn a few pages of script and your life will be perfect in Canada. If your government representative would have put aside the script and asked her questions, he would have seen that this woman doesn't speak English. So she got her points because she speaks English.

*Do you think the immigration officers are naive enough to not understand what is going on?*

That is my question. Is he stupid? Is he naive? You know, one day, ask if he is getting money for each person he brings to Canada and that is why he is interested...because it's his business. I don't know...but it's really ridiculous!

I understand that people on welfare are supposed to be flexible. I have a couple of families on welfare, but listen, they have just ten grades of school and they are factory workers. Of course, I encourage them to be flexible. I would never ask the government to pay these people for programming courses.

*I think that the federal government has had little experience with...this is just a guess...I think that this is a very unusual group of immigrants. The only time Canada has imported such an educated and sophisticated, group of Jews was in 1933-1934 when the German Jews fled Germany to escape Hitler. I think that group found work very quickly. But these educated Russians have run into a different time, and different economic conditions.*

You know, majority of them, they will be employed, but if you see *how* they are employed. Sometimes it is a pity that they are not using their maximum potential. They can bring much more to this country. Russia paid for a pretty good education.

Only the young have opportunity. I brought my daughter when she was only fifteen years old. She finished only seven classes in her school in Russia. She started grade eleven in Canada. It was a piece of cake for her to get her high school diploma. She was not so talented; it was because her Russian-education background was so strong. After high school, she started York University. It was easy for her to study there because of the seven years in Russian school. She is a chartered accountant now and has finished her education.

You know, young people, nineteen, twenty, they have great success in Canada. First of all, their English is good. They learn English in a year. And because of their Russian-education background [they do well]. So, they [potential employers] can see if these young people have such a strong education background...[they should] try to use their parents [who are] in their forties. They can bring to Canada lots of good things. They have education plus they have experience.

These parents are coming in as Independent immigrants. How long can they stay independent bringing in family of four and eight thousand dollars? Four months? Five months? And that's it...they are destroyed. If, by the end of these five months, they are not employed, they are totally destroyed. They are looking for welfare like this gentleman. They are then getting welfare and it is much more difficult to push them...to do something with them...so do it at the very beginning.

*When a family like that goes on welfare, does the wife and husband each get an income so they can pool this income and survive?*

Welfare considers only a family unit. One head of the family and he/she gets welfare for the family.

*Can they survive on that?*

No. For the last two years it's not enough; but they are allowed to work something on top of welfare. So, if they are working and getting \$300 delivering pizza, it could be plus the welfare, and they don't get cut off. A family of four is receiving \$1000. It is not enough...not in Toronto.

Do any of these people ever talk about leaving Toronto and looking for work elsewhere in Canada?

No. No. Ninety-nine-percent no. Because there is a big Russian community here. Before you, I saw a client who lives in Etobicoke. They are crying. They just came [to Canada] and

their friend found for them an apartment in Etobicoke. They feel so isolated. They were sitting and crying. They were looking for a job here just in order to move. So it is very difficult for them to consider a move to Windsor or elsewhere.

There are Russian communities elsewhere, but they are so small. I talked to JVS in Winnipeg. They have a very small Russian community, and people are afraid. Especially when they have parents who are over sixty-five. Here, they have Bathurst and Steeles, a Russian community, they can go to the bank and talk Russian...they are independent.

*Have you heard anything about Vancouver?*

Yes. There is a JVS there. A client of mine got an excellent offer in Vancouver. He is working as a professional engineer now. They went away but they are missing their community in Toronto. He got an excellent job with B.C. Hydro with high salary. He is talented; he is educated; but he can't find a job here. He was working in a furniture factory here in Toronto getting \$6.50 per hour. Only for this great opportunity would they take this step, but to move to Vancouver just to look for something again; it is better for them to stay here in the community.

*Are you expecting a large outflow from Russia? We are reading about worsening conditions over there.*

I don't think so. For the last six months, we have less people than usual. So, I don't know. Maybe JIAS knows better.

My idea was to suggest to the government...can you send us to Russia and to Israel to do assessments and give information to people before they enter Canada. We have Canadian labour market information here, but it's too late to give it to them after they arrive here. They already have something in their mind.

*Have you had any response from the government?*

No. Here is an example. A civil engineer. To find a civil engineering job in Toronto was almost impossible. I spent a month talking to him, and he realized that he can be an excellent building superintendent. He can live in the apartment with his family. His wife is not working, so it is an excellent job for him. He is a very intelligent man with excellent English skills. He is on welfare. We found for him private school in Toronto. I talked to the owner of the school and she told me that after two weeks of training, she would guarantee him a job. He came to his welfare worker and told her, 'I am so happy; I found this school...only \$1000...I will pay. They will train me, and they will place me.'

She cut off his welfare. He couldn't support himself; he has a wife and two children. So, I called her. We discussed. We negotiated. Grab the logic...give him two more weeks. You

have been paying him welfare for six months...two more weeks! You can't imagine! We went through hell. So he didn't take the course, and they continued to pay him welfare. Then [later] he took that same course without telling Welfare. In three weeks, he got his job...an excellent condominium building, a free apartment and \$27,000 per year. He is happy now. but he went through hell.

**APPENDIX II****THE RUSSIAN INTERVIEWS****INTERVIEW WITH****ALINA [18]****FEBRUARY 7, 1999**

- [Thelma] You have been living in Toronto for how many years?
- [Alina] Five years now.
- [Thelma] You have no accent. You must have a fantastic ear for languages.
- [Alina] I speak Hebrew. Russian, and I know German and French.
- [Thelma] What do you remember about Israel?
- [Alina] I remember a lot actually. I go to Israel every other year. I am very connected to that country. I remember Russia. but I am not connected to Russia as much as I am to Israel.
- [Thelma] How old were you when you left Russia?
- [Alina] I was only ten.
- [Thelma] And how old were you when you left Israel?
- [Alina] Thirteen-and-a-half.
- [Thelma] How often have you been back to Israel?
- [Alina] Three times in the past five years.
- [Thelma] Do you have family there?
- [Alina] Yes, my grandma, my aunts, my uncles, my cousins, my friends.
- [Thelma] Lots of attachments there. Were you upset when your parents left Israel?
- [Alina] Personally? Yes. It wasn't my choice...let's put it that way.

- [Thelma] Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- [Alina] No.
- [Thelma] So, your parents left Israel and you came with them because you had to. If you could have remained in Israel, would you have?
- [Alina] At the time, yes.
- [Thelma] You were happy in Israel. You have good feelings about Israel. It was never a negative for you.
- [Alina] Yes....good feelings.
- [Thelma] As a student have you ever received any financial help from the province?
- [Alina] Oh yes. I am at university right now on OSAP.
- [Thelma] Do you remember ever personally receiving any financial help from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services. or any other Jewish agencies?
- [Alina] No.
- [Thelma] You state you like the architecture in Toronto.
- [Alina] Oh yes. very planned.
- [Thelma] And you don't like the cold. Do you like the warmer temperature of Israel?
- [Alina] Oh yes, I get sick a lot here, that's why I like it [there].
- [Thelma] You go to synagogue "sometimes".
- [Alina] I do.
- [Thelma] Where do you attend synagogue?
- [Alina] We used to go to the one on Rockford, now we go to the one beside my house...I think it's Rabbi Gersh....
- [Thelma] Is it a predominantly Russian synagogue?

- [Alina] Well, not really...the other one was. The other one was Rabbi Zaltzman. This one is mixed...some Canadians...some Russians...whoever lives in the area.
- [Thelma] Where is it?
- [Alina] Finch and Bathurst. Whoever lives in the area comes around.
- [Thelma] Which community centre do you belong to?
- [Alina] The JCC [Jewish Community Centre]. I go there for like four years now.
- [Thelma] Do you like it there?
- [Alina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you go to the health club there?
- [Alina] I go to the health club. I play soccer there. basketball. whatever ...sports...swimming.
- [Thelma] Have you made friends there?
- [Alina] People from my school go there. Like. I used to go to MacKenzie. so like ninety percent of MacKenzie is Jewish and everybody goes to that place...so it's kind of like connected.
- [Thelma] You say your friends are "Toronto Jews". Are these Canadian kids?
- [Alina] Some are Canadian...some are like Russians, who are here for a long time. I have friends now from different places. I have friends from Germany. from Trinidad. Toronto-Jews...I have all kinds of friends.
- [Thelma] You obviously have not restricted yourself to the Russian immigrant community.
- [Alina] I have a lot of friends from different backgrounds...different places ...different countries...I know a lot of people.
- [Thelma] Where do you go to university?
- [Alina] York University.

- [Thelma] What are you majoring in?
- [Alina] Political Science and International Relations.
- [Thelma] What year are you in?
- [Alina] First year.
- [Thelma] Do you like it?
- [Alina] Very much.
- [Thelma] Do you ever visit the Jewish Student Federation at York?
- [Alina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Have you made new friends at university or are they still the high school friends who have moved along with you?
- [Alina] A lot of my friends went to Western and Waterloo...like after high school everybody spreads out...different people, different programs. I keep in touch with everyone...I try my best.
- [Thelma] Do you ever go out to any of those Russian clubs for dancing?
- [Alina] I hate Russian clubs. I don't like places where one culture is concentrated.
- [Thelma] You're an ecumenical multicultural Canadian?
- [Alina] Very much so.
- [Thelma] You state in the questionnaire that you have experienced no antisemitism here. You have not responded regarding experiencing anti-Russian sentiment.
- [Alina] Oh, I didn't see that one.
- [Thelma] Have you had any trouble because you are originally Russian?
- [Alina] Do you mean here, or in Israel?
- [Thelma] Here.

- [Alina] Not really...you mean discriminated against? No.
- [Thelma] How about in Israel?
- [Alina] You see a lot of people say they have...and they know...and have heard...but for some reason where I was [living], there were not a lot of Russians in the area...and I was one of the only ones there...so I like kind of blended in.
- [Thelma] You just blended in in Israel. Okay. You say that social workers and volunteers in Toronto were "helpful". When did you interact with social workers and volunteers?
- {Alina} Well, it was like with my parents and stuff like that when they went to United Jewish Appeal [JF&CS] and the counsellors were there, and I was just sitting there. They helped my parents...the family...and I guess since they helped them, they helped me as well.
- [Thelma] You say you like television and you don't seek out Russian-language videos. You won't go over to Steeles and Bathurst and rent a Russian-language video?
- [Alina] I did a couple of times because these were movies that I remember [from] when I was little, and I used to like them, so I just kind of rented them...like I don't seek out new movies in Russian...but I am not against them...like if it's a good movie, if it critiques very well by the [Russian] community, like I'll watch it. I'm not limited by language because I watch movies in German and French, if they are good.
- [Thelma] You like our modern supermarkets. Well, you had nice supermarkets in Israel, so ours are not a big deal.
- [Alina] Not really. Just like...I like a supermarket!
- [Thelma] Do you ever shop at Loblaws?
- [Alina] Loblaws? No, I shop at Highland Farms.
- [Thelma] Oh, that's a fabulous store. You say "yes" you have been able to find work in your own field. What is your field?
- [Alina] Well, I used to work a lot in customer service. I've done a lot of work...I used to work for Bell Mobility...I worked for Canada Wonderland...I

worked for Four Seasons [Hotel] in customer relations.

[Thelma] You are working for Four Seasons now?

[Alina] I am working at the Front Desk...the Gift Shop...wherever they need me. It's a good job...I like it.

[Thelma] Do they pay well?

[Alina] Okay. I'm supposed to get a raise, and hopefully [I will].

[Thelma] How long have you worked for Four Seasons?

[Alina] I just started this year. I work part-time. It's all planned out...my classes and my work [schedule] is all arranged.

[Thelma] Have you got your Canadian citizenship yet?

[Alina] Yes.

[Thelma] If you went on a vacation to Club Med in Mexico and you met someone from Australia and they asked, who are you, what are you, how would you define yourself to-day?

[Alina] Wow, that's hard...because I have so many backgrounds. Well, I would say Canadian because I am from Canada. If you asked me what my nationality is then, yes, I am Canadian, but my background is...I would say I was Eastern European ...Russian...and then [I would say] I have lived in Israel...if you go into detail. Technically I am Canadian...I might not feel Canadian, but I am Canadian.

[Thelma] When do you think you will feel Canadian?

[Alina] There is no such thing as Canadian. Well, there is, but what there is I don't really like. I mean I have a lot of Canadian friends...you know, they are either really calm, laid-back people, some, the ones that I know...or they are just the opposite, completely neurotic and going insane. There is just like not a happy medium.

[Thelma] Do you think that the Canadian kids have a different value system than you do?

[Alina] Oh yes. Definitely. But it depends on what you are talking about. If you

talk about school, or work, or their relationship with other people. It all depends. Like school and work, I would say is almost the same [as me] because I did grow up here...so it's the way I think, but it depends on how you treat other people...this [question] is very difficult to answer.

[Thelma] Do you think you are more sophisticated in some ways and more generous in your approach to people. I don't mean generous with money, I mean generous with yourself...open. Are you more open than the kids who have never had a chance to live in a different society?

[Alina] Yes, very much. I think it affects you...because if you live in different places you are exposed to different things, and then you see different things around you. People that have lived here all their lives are very narrow-minded in some things.

[Thelma] Do you think that you will be able to take the life experiences that you have had and use them to do better in Canada than kids who have always lived here? Do you feel you have an advantage?

[Alina] If I stay in Canada, yes.

[Thelma] Are you thinking of going back to Israel?

[Alina] Not Israel...Europe.

[Thelma] You would like to live in Europe?

[Alina] I have always loved Europe...it is always summer there. I see Vienna in winter and that's where I want to live [laughing]. I like Canada...don't get me wrong...I really like it...it's a good country...it's done well.

[Thelma] But Canada might not be the last stop for you?

[Alina] For me, no. I don't like living in one place for a long time. I like travelling. That's why I'm doing International Relations. I want to work in different places. I want to see different things. I am going on an exchange [programme] next year, to either Australia or Scotland, I am not sure yet.

[Thelma] Will you go to school there for a few months?

[Alina] Yes.

- [Thelma] Well, that will be interesting.
- [Alina] That's one of my ideas as well.....
- [Thelma] So you are doing International and Political Studies because you can see yourself moving around with that kind of a career. How do your parents feel about that, since you are an only child?
- [Alina] Well, they are pretty much still in denial. They think that I am just going to find a job and stay here and stuff. They know what I am doing obviously, but....
- [Thelma] She'll meet a guy and she'll get married, and she won't go anywhere....
- [Alina] That won't be my goal for a long time. I am different...I want to have my career first.
- [Thelma] Do you think you will complete your education in Canada?
- [Alina] Oh, I am going to finish all my education in Canada. I am not going anywhere until I have done my school.
- [Thelma] Do you plan on doing more than a B.A?
- [Alina] Oh, yes.
- [Thelma] Going to go on to do an M.A?
- [Alina] Probably, either an M.A. or an LLD: it depends where they accept me.
- [Thelma] Good! Thank you.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**JANNA [47]**  
**FEBRUARY 7, 1999**

- [Janna] My grandfather in Kiev was a famous Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. He was also a very good surgeon. My father was a choreographer/dancer in Kiev. He was ten years with the Kirov. Also, for many years, he choreographed and produced ice ballets for figure skaters. He also works with "golden age" seniors in Israel, who love to sing and dance.
- [Thelma] It states on your questionnaire that you attended university. Was this actually a university or an institute?
- [Janna] I finished...in Russia it is the pedagogic university, the faculty of education.
- [Thelma] Are you a teacher?
- [Janna] I am teacher. I have two kinds of education. I have music education. I finished institute as music teacher and education as elementary school teacher.
- [Thelma] So, you are both a music and elementary school teacher. Why did you decide to leave Kiev in 1989?
- [Janna] I wanted to leave Kiev long time ago, when I was very young, because I hate Ukraine because of the very terrible anti-Semitism.
- [Thelma] You had a problem with anti-Semitism?
- [Janna] I always...I feel...because, you know, I look like Jewish...and I grew up in a family that educated me. I knew a lot about Jewish religion. My grandfather and grandmother spoke Yiddish, and my father also spoke Yiddish perfectly.
- [Thelma] Do you understand Yiddish?
- [Janna] I understand, but I don't speak. My father even finished in Kiev, before the Second [World] War, Jewish school. After Second War was closed all Jewish schools and [Jewish education was] finished. My mother, she doesn't know Yiddish because she younger than father, and she finished school after the war. She didn't know because all Jewish schools were finished. For me this was a very close problem. You know, I had a lot of friends who left for

Israel in the 1970s, twenty years ago, and I wanted [to go] but my family, my father, said no...my husband was from other kind of family, and I couldn't do that.

[Thelma] You couldn't leave for Israel in the 1970s because of family pressures.

[Janna] They convinced me it was better to stay and take a chance. So I stayed in Kiev, I studied, I worked, but I always felt like a stranger...very bad relationship with Ukrainian and Jewish people. So I wanted to leave...and [then] we had the possibilities...and my husband was agreed.

[Thelma] You state your first choice was the United States, but U.S. immigration was not co-operating. There was no other choice, so you decided to go to Israel in 1990. Did your whole immediate family go to Israel?

[Janna] Yes...and even now my family stays there...my mother, my sister with her husband and her son.

[Thelma] In Israel you say you worked as a ...what is an ECE teacher?

[Janna] In Israel I studied religion and Judaica, and I knew not bad Hebrew.

[Thelma] I asked what work did you do in Israel...what is ECE?

[Janna] ECE is like kindergarten teacher.

[Thelma] Oh, Early Childhood Education...okay, I got it...and music teacher in Israel. Where in Israel?

[Janna] We were [lived] in Natanya, but I worked close to Arab territories.

[Thelma] Natanya is very beautiful. Did you like Natanya?

[Janna] Oh yes, very liked it.

[Thelma] Did you feel more at home in Israel than in Ukraine?

[Janna] Do you ask if I missed Kiev?

[Thelma] No. Did you feel better in Israel personally?

[Janna] Israel than Kiev? Of course...I feel...you know...in Kiev, I have probably much [more] interesting job, because I work with my own language, that's

first of all. In Israel I feel more comfortable as a Jew. I had other pressures. like I had to build a new life, but I feel myself very confident...mentally much better [as if] with my family. I can compare -- if I see a beautiful house, but it's not my house and if I live in a little apartment, but it's mine.

[Thelma] Your Hebrew was good?

[Janna] Now it's worse because I don't use [it] a lot, but I knew very good Hebrew. I started to study Hebrew from beginning, and English from beginning here [Toronto] too, because in Russian university I studied French ...but Hebrew was much easier for me than English. English is very difficult. Hebrew was very fast...I caught [on] and I didn't have very big problems. I love Jewish songs...I studied in Israel a lot of Jewish songs ...they are very close to my heart.

[Thelma] You indicate that you were very worried about the war situation in Israel.

[Janna] It was very scary. When we were there, there was the war with Hussein...do you remember it? With the SCUD missiles, and I went to school with gas mask...big pressure. I saw almost everything and you know...It's no joke...if you live there...somebody is shooting terror bombs ...and you sit and have a gas mask and you don't know where this thing is coming down...on your house. or the house next door...nobody knows. It is very scary. It scared a lot of people [big sigh].

[Thelma] Do you remember any French?

[Janna] French language? Oh, I forgot it...a few words.

[Thelma] Did you receive any help from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services?

[Janna] Here? No. If I get something in Canada, it is only because of myself...nobody help me...nobody. You know, when I came here I very much wanted to work with Jews in a Jewish school...because it's like my little work...it's close to my heart. I knew Hebrew...I didn't know very good English. I worked as volunteer in a few Jewish schools...here [Russian-Jewish Community Centre]. Leo Baeck [Day School], and the Reena school [Jewish mentally challenged]. I worked with disabled children...I worked with volunteers ...and in time teachers saw how I work, and they saw my knowledge, my approach to children, and I stayed to work in one of those schools, and now I work in a Jewish school with disabled children.

[Thelma] Do you work for Reena?

[Janna] No. It's another school. Zareinu Educational Centre...for disabled children.

[Thelma] Do you love it?

[Janna] I love, yes. But nobody at JIAS helped me with job...just with language. I asked them for a language course...I was there...I studied there, that's it. They have big programme and I applied to JIAS and they have special English course.

[Thelma] So JIAS hooked you up to the LINC programme?

[Janna] Yes...actually it was JIAS. But you know, I think I don't need [JIAS]. What could they do for me? They can't help me.

[Thelma] JIAS did not help you find a job and they did not give you any money?

[Janna] No. no.

dc[Thelma] How about furniture or clothes at the beginning?

[Janna] No, no. I didn't ask! Believe me. I don't need clothes, I don't need anything. Probably for people who come and need it to start. it's okay. but for me it was important to get language. to get job, to study. I wasn't interested in this. so I didn't ask them.

[Thelma] You say you are pleased with your sense of personal security in Toronto. Is there anything about Toronto that you don't like?

[Janna] You know, when we came to Toronto, in Israel it was still very hot. We came close to winter, in November. The cold got to me so bad.

[Thelma] Did you have a nice warm coat?

[Janna] I had from Russia a nice coat...but you know in Israel there is so much sun and sea, and here it is so cold and gray. In Russia I had [experienced] cold, but I had forgotten about cold weather. About cold! About winter! In Ukraine we have the same climate like this...it reminded me...I forgot, but it came back to me.

I like Toronto. For me it's good because, you know, I am from big city. Kiev, very big, very nice city. I hate the government and political of this country, but Kiev is nice city. In Israel they have a lot of small, small

cities, and Natanya is like a village. Toronto is big city and for me it's very confusing.

[Thelma] Did you use the public transportation system in Toronto?

[Janna] Of course. I used the bus because I didn't have driver. My husband he drive very good. We have two cars now because I started to drive.

[Thelma] Did you drive in Israel?

[Janna] No. In Israel was small city and very good transportation. I had special transport from Ministry of Education. I worked in a kindergarten that belonged to Ministry of Education -- like here the Board of Education -- and there was special transport for teachers, and they brought us to every situation.

[Thelma] So you had transportation and didn't need a car. Here in Toronto you need a car.

[Janna] And you know, I am music teacher...I give private lessons...I work now a lot...and so I need to have car.

[Thelma] You are teaching music too? After work?

[Janna] After work.

[Thelma] You are a very busy lady.

[Janna] Yes. very busy lady.

[Thelma] Do you work every day of the week...seven days a week?

[Janna] Yes, every day...and I work from 8:30 am till 7:00 pm. A very long day because I am using all my skills in different places. Kindergarten teacher, music teacher, and I teach piano too.

[Thelma] Do you teach piano in your home, or do you go to your students' homes?

[Janna] I have them to my home too, and I also go to their homes.

[Thelma] You say you are interested in politics.

[Janna] Yes.

- [Thelma] You say you go to synagogue. Do you go to the Russian-Jewish Synagogue on Rockford Avenue?
- [Janna] When we came here. I attended that synagogue...but now, it's for me very far. You know, close to my [apartment] building, on Torresdale, there is another group. The Russian-Jewish synagogue was too far to walk to on Saturday. I didn't want to drive because this is against the Jewish Sabbath rules, so for me Torresdale was very much convenient.
- [Thelma] Are there a lot of Russian immigrants attending the Torresdale synagogue?
- [Janna] Yes. a lot of Russians because, you know, it's Rabbi Gersh. a very nice person. There are a lot of big [apartment] buildings near the synagogue with a lot of people living in them.
- [Thelma] You have a Russian doctor and a Russian dentist.
- [Janna] I started with Russians because it is very much convenient because I can explain [my problem]. and I am very happy with them.
- [Thelma] You have friends who are Russian-Jews from Israel and Russian-Jews from the former Soviet Union. but you don't have very many Toronto-Jewish friends.
- [Janna] You know, in our area, we have a lot of Israeli people, who want to be friendly with us. In our big building neighbours came to us and asked us to come to them [visit]. Canadian people live in their own houses and it's harder to meet them, and to have a relationship is very difficult. I had a lot of Israeli friends in Israel because I lived in a building with Israeli people around me, and they communicated with me. Here, Canadians they live in their own houses, and I live in building with just immigrant people.
- [Thelma] So you are living in a building that is full of immigrants and you don't have the opportunity to meet Canadian people.
- [Janna] Sometimes I meet people who live close to me. I have relationships with other people because we have in apartment [building] people from different countries.
- [Thelma] Do you make friends with them?

- [Janna] I speak with them but we can't be friends because, you know, they don't know very good English and my English is also poor and we don't have language [in common]. The Chinese speak very bad English and it is impossible to understand what about they are speaking, even Canadians who were born here cannot understand what they are talking about. We just say: "Hi, Hi" "How are you?" It is very difficult to have communication because of language.
- [Thelma] Would you like to have Canadian friends?
- [Janna] You know, for example. on my job I love....we have [a] few teachers and I have very good relationship with them. If I need something, they help me.
- [Thelma] But they don't invite you to their house?
- [Janna] No...it seems at home everybody close their doors. In Israel it's real people: different environment; they love to be in communication: they love to help everybody; and they are like one family. Like living in a village ...they know about each family everything...they help each other...even in Russia it was like that. People in small cities, small villages, they help, very, very [much]. My mother lived in small city, and everybody knew each other, and they helped her. I lived in Kiev, a big city...I lived in building sixteen stories...and so I knew some people...and other people I didn't know anything about.
- [Thelma] Would you say the people you have interacted with in Toronto are less friendly than the people you knew in Kiev?
- [Janna] I can't compare. It is very difficult because in Toronto I think probably sometimes they want to make with us communication...to be more close...but there is language barrier. You know, in Toronto [there are so any] different people [it is] impossible. In Kiev, we lived with just Ukrainian people and Jews. They lived in one culture, one mentality. A lot of Jews between [among] Ukrainian people, and they were same like Ukrainians, not much different. Here, it is much different. People are from everywhere. This person is from Germany...this person from China..all different... Impossible to compare.
- [Thelma] Impossible to compare because of our multicultural community?
- [Janna] Each person brings their culture...their relationship with each other...it is impossible, impossible to say [know] about everybody.
- [Thelma] Are you going to stay in Canada?

[Janna] Yes, I like it.

[Thelma] Overall?

[Janna] Yes. From beginning, after Israel, it was very difficult to adjust because [in Toronto] different people and different world. But now, you know. I was last summer in Israel...I love Israel...if I have financial [means] I would go to see [visit] her...but when I was [there] last time and I see such small cities, and everything so small, small, and so religious...I want to go [back] to Toronto...probably I got used to Toronto.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**VALERY [49]**  
**FEBRUARY 7, 1999**

- [Thelma] You were born in the city of Stanislov, Ukraine, which became Ivano-Frankivsk under the Communists.
- [Valery] When it was the first *Aliyah* [to Israel] from the Soviet Union, a lot of the Jews who left were from West Ukraine. They were from Chernivtsi, Kolomyia and Ivano-Frankivsk...these three cities. These Jews started immigrating in 1967, when [Leonid] Brezhnev gave permission for some Jews to immigrate to Israel.
- [Thelma] Your family was not interested in leaving then?
- [Valery] Not at this period. No.
- [Thelma] Where did you complete your education?
- [Valery] In Ivano-Frankivsk. At the institute. In Russia we called it institute, not university. All in the field of technology. There were universities, but they were directed in the field of writer or in the field of education.
- [Thelma] We call that the Humanities.
- [Valery] Humanities, yes, yes. Institute is more scientific.
- [Thelma] What kind of engineering did you study?
- [Valery] In the field of mechanical engineering. Specialize in machine building. Precision tools.
- [Thelma] Very expert work.
- [Valery] Yes, I can use here my profession. When I finished [at] this institute, I came to Kiev in 1975-1976, and in Kiev I worked...I married with my wife... and our daughter was born there. We have decided [to emigrate] when there were a lot of changes in Soviet Union and we got a powerful Gorbachev.
- [Thelma] *Perestroika* was not good for you?
- [Valery] When it started, *Perestroika*, I could see that the Communist system...not

Socialism...is not proper. This is the first reason...and the second reason...how can I explain it? The system makes pressure on each individual. When it started, *Perestroika*, we could see these negative changes, but previous time [before] we couldn't see it because it was in this area propaganda was prohibited. We didn't find out about it....

[Thelma] So you didn't really understand what was going on?

[Valery] Yes. When we get education in school, everywhere in the university, in the institute, we got information about Communist Party...like it is very powerful....

[Thelma] No bad news.

[Valery] No bad news! Only good news.

[Thelma] So when things opened up with *Perestroika*, your eyes opened up.

[Valery] Yes, opened up, yes.

[Thelma] What about the Jewish situation? Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

[Valery] Yes. Sometimes I feel this anti-Semitism.

[Thelma] Did you experience anti-Semitism after *Perestroika*?

[Valery] You know, before or after, it was always there.

[Thelma] After *Perestroika* was anti-Semitism more open?

[Valery] Yes, after *Perestroika* we can see more negatives, but our decision [to leave] was [because] we could see this country going down economically and this country will not have a future.

[Thelma] You saw big problems coming?

[Valery] We didn't understand that the Soviet Union is destroyed. Communist Party was a very powerful Party and included KGB, Army, everything ...was very powerful. I guess Gorbachev destroyed everything...very fast...is unbelievable. During four, five years destroyed the whole country. After this [Boris] Yeltsin, he will continue, but he will continue to do very bad...damage...not create...and so we could see that the Socialist

system is not bad. Communist system is bad, but Socialist system is not bad. Because when we lived in the Soviet Union, every guy, every kid can attend the musical school, sports school and .....

[Thelma] Were these activities free?

[Valery] Yes, it was free. For music school it was very, very cheap. Concerning sport, it cost nothing. Nothing to pay. Education free everywhere. Medicine as well. Transportation is very cheap. For example, you put for Metro five kopek, it's nothing ..like fifteen cents...and the same on the bus and the tram.

[Thelma] So life was pretty good under the Communists?

[Valery] Yes, but you know, when we decided we want to find out or clarify about what is this system, what is inside of system, bad or good...it is very complicated answer. In my opinion, the kids are the future of any country, but right now at least two or more million kids in Russia don't take education...not attend school...just went out...running around on the street...nothing to do...narcotics. The same thing was before social revolution in Russia in 1917. It is very complicated.

And the third decision was Chernobyl. You know, it is 90 km from Kiev, and this is very dangerous. It was equal decision to leave.

[Thelma] That's very important...that Chernobyl was one of the motivations for leaving Kiev...unhealthy environment.

[Valery] Yes, some of us got health problems. I feel not good. I get some disease one year after it happened, so it is catastrophic. I can explain you with lots of time what this is...I could see by my eyes what was happening. My friend died. He got cancer of liver because he work at nuclear station. That's my friend [shows picture]. I studied with him...he died in three years after Chernobyl. He was 37-38 years old. Lots of people got it.

[Thelma] So you were in Israel three-and-a-half years and you learned Hebrew quite well?

[Valery] Yes, but you know, right now it's a little bit lost because it's not mother language. My daughter doesn't lose it. She goes back, she improves her Hebrew speaking; fluent beautiful Hebrew. But now I am lost because it is very difficult to keep both languages.

- [Thelma] We have in English an expression: "If you don't use it, you lose it."
- [Valery] "If you don't use it, you lose it." It is depending on age...children remember.
- [Thelma] You liked the diversity of the population in Israel. You didn't like the constant threat of war.
- [Valery] Unfortunately, such problems. If there were not these problems, we couldn't leave Israel. I like it because culturally there are a lot of people like me... there is close family.
- [Thelma] Was it very hard to live in Israel?
- [Valery] Not hard. You know, at the beginning...I suppose for several months...it was difficult ...after that, if you want to understand this country, you have to learn about it. Because in Russia, we didn't have a lot of information about Israel, so when we came to Israel, we started to open our eyes and to look around. If from the beginning you wanted to like this country, love this country, you will find here much; much better than much, much worse. It depends upon you. If you don't feel you are like Jew, you will not be happy, and you will not understand this country.
- [Thelma] You have to have an interest in Judaism.
- [Valery] I have lot against other immigrants from Soviet Union which came here from Israel, and they told me: *That country is the worst country*. You know, I told them, from the beginning you didn't love this country. You just found the negative sides. When I came, I tried to find the positive sides.
- [Thelma] What about religion? In Kiev, there was no Jewish religion. Did you enjoy the religious part of Israel? Did you study about Judaism?
- [Valery] Yes...just to find out about Jewish history...because if you don't believe in a God inside, you can't start believing...it's too late. I have an intellectual interest in the religion. I noticed when I came to Israel that [good feelings about Israel] depended what is the [type of] people. If the people have a good education, a knowledge of history, and if people have some knowledge about another country, if they have insight and curiosity, they will want to find out more about Israel. But there are some people who were more simple...they were not interested to find out about this country. From the beginning...the day they came to Israel...they imagined that Israel

is like the United States. They were disappointed. They didn't want to accept the reality of what Israel is, and find out about that country...to understand more about it.

Right now, I am more interested about Israel than Russia...unbelievable...I changed my mind one hundred percent. It's amazing. Now I try to analyze by myself how I changed my mind about Israel...my thinking is very different than it was before.

[Thelma] Well, you really didn't have a clear understanding of what Israel was before you went there. How could you know? They didn't teach Zionism in the Communist schools.

When you decided to come to Canada, did you have much information? Did you read about Canada? Did you come with any expectations?

[Valery] No, not much. Not too clear. Cold [weather]. Very low crime, because for me it is very important to be secure and safe...for me and my family...it is one of the things that was uncomparable between the United States and Canada...and I preferred to chose Canada because of these things.

[Thelma] Did you have any relatives in Canada?

[Valery] No. When we came there was one friend, who I had relationship with from school in Russia, but he left Russia twenty years ago.

[Thelma] Did you write to him in Canada?

[Valery] No, just we met here in Canada once again.

[Thelma] So, when you arrived you had nobody in Toronto?

[Valery] Nothing...nobody...no relatives...nothing.

[Thelma] Did you come as an immigrant or as a refugee?

[Valery] We filled out application and applied to Ambassador in Tel Aviv...like specialist.

[Thelma] Did you use a Canadian immigration lawyer?

- [Valery] Yes, we used Canadian immigration lawyer, because at the beginning we didn't know about everything concerning immigration law, so we have decided to take a lawyer...but after we spend money...and we found out about things...finally we understood that we can make papers by ourselves. The Canadian lawyer was in Montreal, and his assistant was in Tel Aviv...like a branch office in Tel Aviv. Oh, lots of lawyers opened branches in Tel Aviv, Haifa, in the big cities, when started big immigration from Israel to Canada.
- [Thelma] Do you think the lawyers are important and helpful or are they taking lots of money for things that the immigrants could do on their own?
- [Valery] Now that I know a lot about immigration law, I can tell you that you can do these things by yourself but, you know, at the beginning you need some help.
- [Thelma] Do you go to synagogue?
- [Valery] In my area. Not lots of time...busy...sometimes we attend synagogue ...Rabbi Gersh or Rabbi Zaltzman on Rockford. At the beginning, when we came to Canada, we went more, but now it's busy, but my wife, sometimes she attends.
- [Thelma] Have you received financial help or social assistance from the federal or provincial governments?
- [Valery] What does this mean? At the beginning, we didn't get nothing...and we are starting to prepare our résumés and everything for looking for job...and attending school for English...ESL...LINC...and after four months we got Welfare assistance from Toronto for three months...and after that I found a job, and my wife as well.
- [Thelma] Did you ever get any social assistance from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services?
- [Valery] No...nothing...just we attend in the community and they gave us some advice.
- [Thelma] What about the English language school? Who paid for that?
- [Valery] The government paid. LINC programme.
- [Thelma] This had nothing to do with JIAS?

[Valery] No...no..no...no. Just we attend language school in a synagogue during one or two months. After that we took more high level from the LINC programme.

[Thelma] So the first level English was in space in a synagogue. Who paid for that?

[Valery] The government paid.

[Thelma] Never JIAS?

[Valery] No...no...no...no.

[Thelma] Did you every get any money from JIAS; did they ever help you with furniture. clothing...?

[Valery] No. no. nothing.

[Thelma] Is this because you did not ask?

[Valery] We did not ask about these things because they said we came out like immigrants, not like refugees. We worked in Israel... we earned money...we came with money.

[Thelma] So they didn't feel they had to help you. Did you actually talk to anybody at JIAS though? Did you talk to a social worker?

[Valery] Yes. yes...nice. nice...we had a social worker.

[Thelma] Just one time, or several times?

[Valery] A couple of times. She tried to help us, but you know....

[Thelma] Nothing came of it?

[Valery] In life sometimes we have to rescue ourselves.

[Thelma] So the significant help you got was from the Canadian social services as opposed to the Jewish social services?

[Valery] Just advice [laughing].

[Thelma] Did JIAS take you on a tour of the city? Did you get any books or pamphlets from JIAS about how to get around in the city?

- [Valery] Small, small...some guides...about telephone numbers where we have to go.
- [Thelma] Was this helpful?
- [Valery] Sometimes, yes...but in life you will find out things by yourself. My impression about this...if you don't want to swim with your problems, you can sink.
- [Thelma] You indicate that you don't socialize with Toronto Jews?
- [Valery] We met a couple of people, but in the future it doesn't look like we will make advances.
- [Thelma] So you are staying in your own community?
- [Valery] Because its nice from Jewish community...for Jewish holiday...like Pesach.
- Thelma] They invited you to their home?
- [Valery] Yes. Two Canadians...a couple of times.
- [Thelma] But you never saw them again?
- [Valery] They didn't call to us.
- [Thelma] They didn't call, so you never saw them again. When you went to their homes for the Sadars. did you feel like a guest, or did you feel like [you were receiving] charity? How did you feel?
- [Valery] I suppose between guest and charity.
- [Thelma] Half-and-half? *Chetzi chetzi?*
- [Valery] *Chetzi chetzi* [laughing]. It's like a formal.
- [Thelma] You state that you don't like your neighbourhood.
- [Valery] No. So we have decided to buy a house.
- [Thelma] Good. The mortgage interest rates are low now, so take advantage if you can.

- [Valery] Yes, we have decided to buy.
- [Thelma] How long did it take you to find a job in your profession?
- [Valery] Around seven months...because when we came to Canada it was 1993...it was a very *stagnation* economy in Canada during last fifteen years...not just in my profession, but also in field of programmer...we know a lot of people who can't find job.
- [Thelma] How did you find your job? Did somebody help you. or did you find it by yourself?
- [Valery] You know I tried to find job with my résumé...I spent a lot of time...I sent everywhere my résumé...it didn't work. So, I got one friend and he helped me ...he introduced me to the company, and they gave me one month probation period. and after that they gave me a permanent position.
- [Thelma] That was a happy day. Are you still working at the same place?
- [Valery] No. I changed the job.
- [Thelma] How often have you changed your job?
- [Valery] Twice.
- [Thelma] Are you happy now with your job?
- [Valery] Yes...because I am working for myself in my field.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**SERGEY [43]**  
**FEBRUARY 12, 1999**

[Sergey] I began to learn in *ulpan* [Hebrew language immersion centres in Israel] but finished after one month because I planned my financial future. I planned to take course in computer [programming] but [tuition] was little bit high... I rented apartment, and second I need to help my mother, who stayed in Russia with my sister. Mother did not want to leave my sister. My sister was married to Russian man, and he did not want to go to Israel, and this is why I finished *ulpan*. I needed to work.

[Thelma] Is your mother still in Russia?

[Sergey] Yes...and my sister.

[Thelma] Your family broke up.

[Sergey] Yes...I hope we will join soon as possible.

[Thelma] You hope to bring them to Canada?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Are you married?

[Sergey] Yes. I am married. and I have two daughters that were born in Israel.

[Thelma] So you have two Israeli children. You came to Toronto with your wife and two little girls. Just the four of you?

[Sergey] Yes...I have my friends that arrived in Toronto from Israel a year ago.

[Thelma] You had friends in Toronto before you arrived?

[Sergey] Yes. We have a little ring here of our friends.

[Thelma] Did you experience any anti-Russian sentiment while you were in Israel?

[Sergey] Yes, I had some problems. I did not pay attention at first; I did not think it will be a big problem in Israel because of my nature [identity]. For example... according to Israeli laws, I am Jewish because my mother is Jewish, but I had problem...my father...he was really my second father...and they wanted to hide this because my mother was married to my first [natural] father, who died

when I was about one year old.

[Thelma] Was your first father Russian [as opposed to Jewish]?

[Sergey] I didn't know exactly about nature [identity] of my father or [his] family, but I know this fact...they little bit correct [fudge] my papers because....

[Thelma] Who did that...the family?

[Sergey] Yes...my family...my mother and my second father. I know this, but I did not want to show this all time...and when this problem appeared, I did not want [to divulge]...at this time, my second father was alive...and I did not want to wake this problem. so it was a negative surprise for me in Israel.

[Thelma] You had to tell them about this in Israel?

[Sergey] In Israel I did not tell, because in my opinion, it was not a concern for persons that I tell about [my identity].

[Thelma] It was nobody's business.

[Sergey] And you know, the second [secondly], I am a person when somebody press for me [pressure me], I will be more [laughs] persistent [stubborn], so I finished with this problem, and I didn't confirm it [answer]...and I feel that sometime...because in my field, radio-electronic systems and integrated circuits, almost all workplaces was in military field...and I had some good reviews [interviews] in companies, but I felt when [the job] was close and they exactly asked about my nature [identity], and about whether I am Jewish or not Jewish, and they look at this [consider this], it was a problem...yes, I felt I did not pass [security] because of this.

[Thelma] This identity issue became a problem even though your mother was Jewish.

[Sergey] By the way, all immigrants from Russia, regardless whether they are Jewish or not Jewish, at first years of their arrival to Israel, felt this problem because it [Identity issue] was a little bit negative...prejudice....

[Thelma] Do you think that if your mother was Jewish and your father was Jewish, you would have had it easier in Israel?

[Sergey] Maybe a little bit...but I did not exaggerate the causes of this problem very big [much]...as I said, it was a problem for most Russian immigrants at first.

[Thelma] You feel because you were a Russian immigrant, you may not have got the job?

[Sergey] I do not want to exaggerate this so much, but I must be honest, it was a problem, at least a little... For example, there are people, they have mixed family...one person Russian...and it is a problem. It is clear our world is not idealic [perfect, ideal] and there is risk here of some problem regarding this, but when the responsible people from the high podium from Knesset talk about this in negative course [discourse], it is clear that it is not only something imagined...it is a common problem within the country. I understand good Israel...because Israel is in very specific condition, that is clear, but it is not so much suitable for me.

[Thelma] Did anybody put pressure on you to study the Jewish religion?

[Sergey] Yes. I had. There are some cases when during my life in Israel, some people tried to pressure me. Yes, to confirm my Judaism...something like this...it was, it was. And not exactly clear religion people. there are, you know, some people similar to Jews [*Messianics*] It is not, for example, all the time to go to synagogue, but they had some strong imagination about religion. I have friends in Israel, and they sometimes tried to...not so much pressure...it is difficult to imagine...to figure out...exactly...no, they tried to confirm for me [*convince me*] that it will be more easy for me like this, you see. And why? It's clear. It's all connected. Because these people feel this too, what I said to you before. So it is a problem. [*It appears that Sergey and fellow Russians were exposed to both Jewish and non-Jewish proselizing in Israel*].

[Thelma] I have spoken to other Russian immigrants from Israel, who were part-Jewish, and some of them felt tremendous pressure to convert [to Judaism], and they did not want to, so they left Israel.

[Sergey] Yes, I know these cases...some people converted...I know.

[Thelma] You stated in the questionnaire that you knew a lot about Canada before you arrived. Where did you learn about Canada?

[Sergey] In Russia and in Israel. I had some people that I knew for twenty years that had relatives here in Canada...yes...and I know from them about life in Canada...it is clear it is economical enough changes here but....[*the economy has changed in Canada since twenty years ago*].

[Thelma] Did you understand the job situation...did you know you might have problems

here finding work in your field?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] You knew this.

[Sergey] Yes. I knew this...and I was prepared for this problem because, for example, I must explain to you a little bit because, as I told you earlier, I changed my profession now because electronics is a very wide field, and I was at an opposite point because integrated circuits and electric power supply, it was difficult for me, and second, I know before in Israel that there is not a market here...I knew this...but you see from other side, I did not [earn] big salary at first in Israel...at last moment [*before emigrating to Canada*] not so much [money], but good enough...and I worked about twelve hours average every day...only last time [*towards the end*] I worked a little less, but [*even*] this did not allow me to learn English. You see, in Israel I all the time used Hebrew and Russian at work. I was prepared for this because sometimes my company had contracts from other countries and I communicated in English because I learned English before in institute in Russia...but I did not use English in Russia because I didn't need it. [*This is rather opaque, but I think Sergey meant that he was aware there was not much opportunity in his field in Canada: that the language of electronics in English is too complicated for him; that work conditions in his field had been difficult and wages not high: therefore he had been prepared to change his occupation in Canada and retrain.*]

[Thelma] Tell me, the girl that you married in Russia, was she from your city [Gudermes]?

[Sergey] No, no...she is from Leningrad. First I worked in Moscow; after this I worked in Leningrad where I met my wife.

[Thelma] Were you working with integrated circuits in Leningrad?

[Sergey] Yes...integrated circuits in data processing.

[Thelma] What was your wife's work?

[Sergey] She is physiotherapist... and it was [*laughs*]...all people have original stories...my wife worked as physiotherapist in Russia, but she has diploma of teacher of physical education...and this was a problem in Israel...because you need exactly confirmation of diploma in this field, and at this time there were so many people connected with medicine that it was a big problem. She

worked, but not exactly in these fields...approximately like physiotherapist...like assistant physiotherapist...sometimes like physiotherapist but without the certificate. [*She did not have proper credentials to work as a certified physiotherapist in Israel*].

[Thelma] Did you ever feel, when you were working twelve to fourteen hours a day, that the company that you worked for took advantage of you because you were an immigrant?

[Sergey] Do you mean do they profit from my work?

[Thelma] Of course, they profited from your work, but do you think that the Israelis were treated the same as you? Did the Israelis you worked with also work fourteen hours a day?

[Sergey] No. I did not remark about this problem, but this problem exists too. I think it is a common problem among countries with immigrants. For example, the laws and other things here [Canada] little bit regulate more clearly the employment regulations.

[Thelma] Do you feel you get treated better here in Toronto than you did in Israel?

[Sergey] It is difficult to express this clearly, because you know *officially* nobody can tell you about this...nobody!

[Thelma] I am just asking you if you felt that way sometimes. [*Aside to secretary of Association of Soviet Jews in Canada: "Ella, how do you say: Did they take advantage of you at work in Russian?" Ella translates*].

[Sergey] Yes, yes! I understand...I think like this about it, but I could not clarify it [*express myself*].

[Thelma] I just wanted to make sure, because it is important. Is your wife Jewish?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Were her mother and father Jewish?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Well, the Israelis must have been pleased about that.

[Sergey] But I also want to say you [tell you] that this is not so big problem in all

cases...sometimes only. For example, I had maybe a little bit original situation because my jobs mostly was in military field...and in military field they calculate all the items, you see, and these items important.

[Thelma] Potential employees of the military in Israel get a very comprehensive security check?

[Sergey] Yes, but as I said, this is there regardless...this is in connection with your immigrant status from Russia, and after this maybe at first time I was so much in doubt in this problem because I met this problem face-to-face with some people, and I think after this I understand this is not so big problem for me...but it did exist. [*Perhaps Sergey has, in retrospect, decided he may have been a little too defensive and secretive about his personal identity.*]

[Thelma] Did your wife want to come to Canada?

[Sergey] Yes, by the way, she initiated the idea of changing places.

[Thelma] Does she like it here in Toronto?

[Sergey] Yes, she like, and she has some friends also from Russia here.

[Thelma] Old friends from Russia in Toronto...very nice. How old are your girls now?

[Sergey] Six and four-and-half.

[Thelma] You stated that you didn't like the weather in Israel. Was it too hot?

[Sergey] Yes, weather very hot for me because I like forests, but I adapted to these conditions.

[Thelma] Is Toronto weather more comfortable?

[Sergey] The same like in Moscow...something like this.

[Thelma] Tell me about assistance from a Jewish organization? Which organization?

[Sergey] JIAS.

[Thelma] When you came to Toronto, did you telephone JIAS?

[Sergey] Yes...first of all, I know about JIAS also from Israel. I did not connect with JIAS in Israel, only here when I arrived I applied to JIAS, because I need some

help to look around. At first I had some assets...funds...with me when I arrived and I did not need financial help. I needed to look around...to see the situation in Toronto...because the private persons like, for example, my friends that arrived in Toronto a year or a half year ago...they did not work at this time also...and you know that even after some years I did not also meet the persons that had a good imagination and understanding about the existing market situation...plus in my specific field, for example. So I preferred to use the help of the officials in this field.

[Thelma] I think that was very wise. When you got in touch with JIAS here in Toronto did you talk to social workers?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Were they nice to you...were you happy with them?

[Sergey] Ummmmm.....

[Thelma] Be honest!

[Sergey] I will be honest. I don't think so much so...because... maybe it's a common problem of people...maybe that after some time when they did not have some pressure on them, they began to be sure about this place and did not improve their job. I think it in common with engineers too... *[Perhaps Sergey is saying that being a long time in their jobs, and taking these positions for granted, they have become overconfident and less than excellent].*

[Thelma] I am having trouble with this one....

[Sergey] I feel they didn't try to help me. Only very little. What they exactly must, that's all.

[Thelma] Did they give you information, books....?

[Sergey] What I said...a classical package. I needed first of all not automatician [automaton], because I understood the role of social worker in this process is like a bridge because they have recent mentality *[current information and knowledge]* in this field, and they have experience enough in this life here. But I didn't feel this bridge; I feel like only administrative relationship.

[Thelma] Although they spoke Russian, you did not feel that they really connected with you and your struggles as a new immigrant? They were just purely doing their job and not taking an interest?

[Sergey] Yes, like this...like this.

[Thelma] Did your wife go to JIAS also?

[Sergey] Yes...after some time, she also...because we change our supervising people of our children [children's caregivers].

[Thelma] Did JIAS help with the children...camp...school?

[Sergey] No...she help only with clothes.

[Thelma] Did they help you get some furniture?

[Sergey] Yes...I received little furniture...not big...like little bookshelf and a table and chairs for the kitchen...that's all...but it's okay...it's good...I did not compare [measure] the value of help...I mean...the first time [at the beginning] I did not need financial help, I needed only help in connection with our farther future because I did not have a professional enough introduction [résumé]...for example, job search and more professional help in this field. All answers I received were like "this and that" [vague]...to all questions I received standard answer like: "*I don't know this. This is not my business. I am afraid to confuse you in this...*" By the way, I am person with good enough experience in life and in specific field, and I am able to filter the information enough, and I am ready to receive some advice, but practical, good advise, not [grope for words]....

[Thelma] They were treating you like a child?

[Sergey] Yes, yes! Even if this advice is not in a specific professional direction or field, I think it is possible for this position [*it is possible for the social workers to provide more specific and helpful advice*].

[Thelma] Did JIAS try to help you find a job?

[Sergey] You see, I break my attempt to use JIAS for help in....ummmm

[Thelma] Integration?

[Sergey] No...integration is good because I meet with some...I communicate when I have a little time...I communicate with people within JIAS. JIAS is good from this position...good. What I mean is with looking for job, because I needed to try this mostly myself. I understand this and I plan it....

[Thelma] You planned your own strategy?

[Sergey] Yes, yes!

[Thelma] Did you go to the Jewish Vocational Service for help? Did you fill out a job application?

[Sergey] Yes, I applicate [*applied*] and, by the way, I received the same reaction about...I don't want to mark exactly the persons' names...I think it is not reasonable...but it was the same...I feel like a [*poor*] relation...they are more high person...to more lower position...by the way, this is what was negative surprise for me in Israel. Sometimes it's worse...it is clear this is a common attitude to immigrants from the people, from *Vaticeem*, [*establishment*]...you know this word, in Israel the people that have lived there many years, this makes....

[Thelma] Are you trying to say that the Israelis tended to treat the immigrants as second-class citizens?

[Sergey] Right, right...this is common.

[Thelma] Did you get the same feeling here from the social worker and from the vocational worker?

[Sergey] Yes, yes...but this was a negative surprise because, as I said, they must be like bridge. They have not been here in Canada so long...maybe, I don't know, seven, sometimes ten, years, I think it's not so long, but I feel this. In Israel, it is a little bit different...it is very difficult to figure it out, but there is a difference. [*Sergey was surprised that the professionals, who were also fairly recent immigrants from the Soviet Union would have a superior attitude*].

[Thelma] If you compared how you were treated by professional people...I mean social workers...immigrant workers...in Israel compared to Canada, where do you think you were treated with more consideration...not as an engineer...as a person...as a human being?

[Sergey] By professional do you mean responsible person in my profession?

[Thelma] Not in your profession, as a human being, a person, where were you treated nicer...in Israel or in Canada...or was the treatment the same?

[Sergey] It's a different situation, and I don't have a clear answer for this...but in Israel there are some different nuances...because this country connects to...I don't

know...to survival...in situations like surviving...because they tried to sometimes, and in many cases, to connect more closely with you. There is here a different situation, and in some situation, I think it's more better in Israel sometimes.

[Thelma] It's colder here? When I say colder, I mean cold in the heart?

[Sergey] Right! There is different situation in this country, you see...and this depends on the private [*personal*] situation, but sometimes in Israel I had better communication ...sometime good here...but for me it is not surprising.

[Thelma] You were not surprised...you expected to have problems. Okay...you went to English language classes in Toronto. Did you go through JIAS for English language instruction?

[Sergey] No...because at the time when I arrived in Toronto, the English classes had already begun, and I began to study in other ESL system.

[Thelma] North York?

[Sergey] Yes, North York ESL...because they were able to take me.

[Thelma] Did you have to pay for this ESL?

[Sergey] No, I did not pay this.

[Thelma] How long did you go to North York school?

[Sergey] About three months. After this I worked a little in Russian business ...like [burglar] alarm...to fit alarm systems...but I understood soon that there is no future, that it is the same way like in Israel. I lost time because there is no future. I understand that once more I need to exchange my field...but now serious and fundamental...my way...like computer programmer...something like this.

[Thelma] Did you go back to school to study computer programming?

[Sergey] Yes, I did this, but this not was soon, because at first I had big problem with language...I don't know why this is...I had average good abilities to study to learn language but it took a long time at first. I did not understand what people said. I could figure out what I need to say clearly, but what they said. I couldn't catch this.

[Thelma] We talked too fast for you.

[Sergey] Yes...and maybe this is because, you know, there is here big problem...and it is problem for most people that exchange their job to computer field because now computer field very wide and very difficult...this is a very specialized language...it is language within language, plus I had to learn...this was my problem...at first very slowly and without good understanding, I read books and materials...and only now I good understand but not so quickly originally.

[Thelma] It took longer than you thought.

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Did it cost you a lot of money to go to computer school?

[Sergey] Yes, but I did not undertake it soon after I quit my job in Russian business. I also little time spent to promote understanding English, because it was not reasonable to spend money on what I don't understand.

[Thelma] Your priority was improving your English before you started retraining.

[Sergey] Yes, but you see this is connected with psychology situation...you feel pressure...it depends on how responsible the person is...sometime I don't feel too good about myself...in a good colour....

[Thelma] Did you get depressed?

[Sergey] No, I did not have depression, but I felt a pressure...a pressure, you see...I have a strong psychology...strong constitution....

[Thelma] But sometimes it's hard.

[Sergey] Yes, it's hard sometimes.

[Thelma] How did you find an apartment...by yourself...or did JIAS help you?

[Sergey] By myself. In advertisement...in paper...and I had advice from my friends...but at first, you know, I did not have a clear understanding of where it is better to live...the place, the school....

[Thelma] When you first came to Toronto where did you live?

[Sergey] With my friends. Just the first week, we lived with them.

[Thelma] And how long did it take you to find an apartment?

[Sergey] This took one week.

[Thelma] Was Invermay Avenue your first place?

[Sergey] Yes...first place and last place. It is a private house. I rent...but not whole house...second floor.

[Thelma] You live upstairs in a flat with your family.

[Sergey] Separate floors. First floor separated from second.

[Thelma] Do you have enough privacy? Is it comfortable?

[Sergey] Yes, I comfortable enough...maybe at this time there is not enough place. but I think...I hope...when I change my apartment in the near future, I will take more big.

[Thelma] You will rent a bigger place. It says here that you don't go to the synagogue.

[Sergey] Sometimes I went in Israel, yes.

[Thelma] But not in Toronto?

[Sergey] No.

[Thelma] Not interested? No time?

[Sergey] As I said, when I feel a pressure from one side, I begin to be more persistent [stubborn] [laughing].

[Thelma] The pressure to make you a religious Jew works in reverse. What do you plan on doing with your little girls. Will you send them to religious school?

[Sergey] I think that's a good question. I don't have something against Jewish school here in some elements of religion, and there are some schools like this...but I don't have the time or money to pay for this. [*no money for parochial day school*]

[Thelma] Maybe to Sunday school?

[Sergey] Maybe Sunday school...maybe. But I prefer this fundamental

education. Sunday school, it's...I don't know....

[Thelma] Have you ever heard of the Orah School?

[Sergey] Yes I have. I listen about this. I don't think about this. First of all, I want something in fundamental education so at this moment I don't think about sending them to Sunday school.

[Thelma] Maybe in the future when they are older. Do you belong to a community centre?

[Sergey] Yes. In sport club at Jewish Community Centre.

[Thelma] Do you like it there?

[Sergey] Yes, I like. Maybe a little costly, but I like this.

[Thelma] Do you play sports...squash, handball? Do you swim?

[Sergey] Yes, play sports, and I swim a little, but mostly my children [laughing]. The children like the most. I don't have time.

[Thelma] You're busy, but your children go. Does your wife go to the Jewish Community Centre too?

[Sergey] Yes...she enjoys it. I busy also because when my children are at home I don't have a lot of abilities to study [laughing] my computers.

[Thelma] You send them to the JCC, and you study at home when it's quiet. I see from the questionnaire that you don't have friends in the Russian-Christian community.

[Sergey] No, I don't. I will be honest...I am not interested in Russian politics.

[Thelma] What about personal social life?

[Sergey] With Russian-Russian I had bad experience in relationships.

[Thelma] Did you experience anti-Semitism in Russia?

[Sergey] Yes, I did...I had...because, for example, I was able one time to go on long business trip in Germany from my job, but I did not get trip because when KGB began to check all my papers... [*he was refused*] I was the first [*best*]

candidate for this place. Also, I did not get promotion because I could not go to foreign country [catch 22].

[Thelma] And you think you did not get the business trip or promotion because of the Jewish thing?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Where did you go to high school?

[Sergey] In *Gudermes*...in this place I did not feel antisemitism...because it was a blend...a mixed place...where there are many different natives [*nationalities*]...Greeks. Armenians, Jews. Chechens...but this began to be a terrible place in the beginning of 1990. In the 1970s, when I studied there, it was a good, quiet, safe place...a place for technical professionals in the field of oil and gas. This place had big resources in oil and gas.

[Thelma] Because of the natural resources, foreign workers came from other countries and that is why you didn't have problems about being Jewish?

[Sergey] No, I didn't have.

[Thelma] What about at the institute?

[Sergey] Yes, I had problem...a little problem with that...but from other side [*on the other hand*] in our institute, regardless of anti-Semitism, about half of the students were Jewish [laughing].

[Thelma] This was not a big problem. In 1990, was anti-Semitism a reason for your decision to leave Russia?

[Sergey] At that time, I did not feel in my position practical anti-Semitism...because I had in Russia a good position...professional...but economic and political reasons...yes.

[Thelma] Have you made any friends in the Toronto-Jewish community?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Where did you meet these people?

[Sergey] One person we meet in JCC; one person my wife meet at school...her child went to same school with my child.

[Thelma] Did they become friends?

[Sergey] Yes, very close friends.

[Thelma] Do you go to their house sometimes?

[Sergey] Yes...we have a good connection.

[Thelma] Do you watch English-language television?

[Sergey] I watched television first two years...very difficult...now I break this business [*break this habit*] because I am very busy to promote the exactly special computer language...but I understand English much better now. I did not catch all details in the television conversation ongoing...I cannot catch...sometimes it's the slang is difficult...and pronunciation...but you see I know. I understand good the problem...that [*the medium of*] television doesn't try to teach and explain exactly what it means...they try to rescue some imagination...secondly...I don't worry about this because I understand that most people don't try to make conversation, then to imagine and figure out what they do exactly. They don't try. They don't want to spend energy for this...but when they are concerned and responsible, like face-to-face. I know now that I understand them and they take me more seriously and they understand me more clearly. It is not a good intention in American people...they express quickly and not clearly. That's what I think...[laughs].

[Thelma] Do you rent Russian videos sometimes?

[Sergey] Yes...only sometimes...it is costly.

[Thelma] You had nice supermarkets in Israel. Do you like our Toronto supermarkets?

[Sergey] By the way, I think in Israel they are a little bit better.

[Thelma] You are not the first one that has told me this.

[Sergey] Especially about the milk products...better.

[Thelma] What about fruits and vegetables? Are they better in Israel?

[Sergey] I think yes. Here they have more steps to process....

[Thelma] It takes longer to get to the store. The product is not as fresh as in Israel?

[Sergey] I feel this because I enjoy fresh.

[Thelma] Are you looking for a job right now?

[Sergey] Yes...I think about finishing my studies and then I...

[Thelma] How long have you been studying your computer courses?

[Sergey] Exactly in computer courses, I have spent five months...but it is not enough because maybe four and a half, I don't remember exactly...it was steps...I spent myself the most time.

[Thelma] You have a computer at home?

[Sergey] Yes. I have.

[Thelma] Are you hopeful that you will find work?

[Sergey] Yes. I think.

[Thelma] Is your wife working now?

[Sergey] Part-time because it is good additional to our fees from Welfare.

[Thelma] You are getting help from the City of Toronto now?

[Sergey] Yes.

[Thelma] Have you ever received money from JIAS?

[Sergey] No...nothing.

[Thelma] You enjoy our parks in Toronto. Do you go to Earl Bales park at Sheppard and Bathurst?

[Sergey] Yes. many times.

[Thelma] In the summertime? Do you have picnics with the children?

[Sergey] Yes, we have...we have had many picnics.

[Thelma] Do you ever go to the concerts at Earl Bales park?

- [Sergey] Yes...it's a good idea...it's very comfortable in Toronto from this position.
- [Thelma] Is there anything about Toronto that you don't like? Traffic? Do you drive?
- [Sergey] Traffic is okay...no, I don't have car...because of my position...but I intend to.
- [Thelma] Did you have a Driver's Licence in Israel?
- [Sergey] Yes, I had and my wife also..and we had car in Israel...but mostly my wife drove because, as I said, I was almost all time at job.
- [Thelma] You were always at work, so she had the car. You say on the questionnaire that you have a Russian doctor. No dentist!
- [Sergey] Sometimes I need [*dentist*] but...money.
- [Thelma] I know...too expensive. Are you still optimistic about your future in Canada?
- [Sergey] Yes. I still optimistic [laughing].
- [Thelma] It takes a long time to adjust, and the problem is you have to change your work. Was there nothing available here for an electronic engineer?
- [Sergey] You see I had opportunities to take job like this...but I understood that there will be no promotion in this field. I don't know...it is very difficult now to predict the situation...but I would prefer to play a more educated role...and from other side...you see I lose a good motion [*momentum*] in the field of integrated circuits and microprocessing because I spent time in a very specific field, like power supplies, electrical....
- [Thelma] Could you not use your Israel experience here in Toronto...with power supply and stuff...is there no work in this area?
- [Sergey] There is, but I did not want it for this reason...and this is a narrow field and I don't want to work in this field.
- [Thelma] You feel the future is the computer industry?
- [Sergey] It is interesting for me.
- [Thelma] Do you like it? Are you enjoying it?
- [Sergey] Yes, I like. Yes, I enjoy...and it is interesting for me...it is difficult because of

language...and maybe the first reason is I want to take the more predictable way. I know that this way they allow me to keep a good position up to pension...in this field I am sure.

[Thelma] You have more confidence in a better future in the computer industry?

[Sergey] It's not exactly computer...it's maybe in programming...it's a wide field and if you have good enough abilities and good fundamental knowledge, it is not very difficult to change from one direction to another...but in other fields it is very difficult.

[Thelma] You feel there is more variety of opportunities in the computer field.

[Sergey] This is why I decided to spend some time for this...there are some financial difficulties but...

[Thelma] You left Russia in 1990. What year did you come to Toronto?

[Sergey] 1995.

[Thelma] You have only been here three years. Are you starting to feel at home in Toronto?

[Sergey] Yes...yes. Good enough.

[Thelma] Do you think your wife will be a physiotherapist in Canada?

[Sergey] I think she will have to go back to maybe take additional courses, and she will be like physiotherapist.

[Thelma] After you are working, she will be able to do that.

[Sergey] Yes, yes...it's a connection.

[Thelma] Okay! Thank you so very much, Sergey.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**KARINE (20)**  
**FEBRUARY 4, 1999**

- [Thelma] You were very little when your parents immigrated to Toronto.
- [Karine] Yes, I was still very young, but in terms of learning English, I was spending all my time with my mother, and at home I heard mostly Russian with a little bit of Hebrew. When I started Kindergarten that was all I knew; I had no clue what English was all about. I had no friends there; I couldn't communicate, and the teachers couldn't communicate with me. My mother had trouble communicating with the teachers as well, so it was a very difficult time for me.
- [Thelma] Do you remember being upset?
- [Karine] All I remember is that I switched classes. I was so devastated by my first experience in my first kindergarten class that I actually switched classes because I felt that I just hadn't fit in.
- [Thelma] By what grade were you beginning to feel comfortable?
- [Karine] I never felt comfortable.
- [Thelma] You never felt comfortable in public school?
- [Karine] I went to Hebrew day school until grade five.
- [Thelma] Did you start at a Hebrew day school from the beginning?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] And even there you felt uncomfortable?
- [Karine] Yes. With the Hebrew it was okay; I had help from my parents...but with English I had no help...they didn't know anything...and it was a struggle for me...and also at Hebrew day school, a lot of the kids there come from, you know, Canadian Jewish families where there is...I mean I hate to say this...but there is some sort of sense of superiority, I would say, over immigrants...immigrant kids...and I was always left out.
- [Thelma] They didn't include you in the games and the parties?

- [Karine] No. I had one friend, who was also a child of Russian immigrants, but otherwise, I had no friends.
- [Thelma] Try to remember from Grade One to Grade Eight...did you ever make any close Canadian-Jewish friends?
- [Karine] Not until Grade Five. What happened in Grade Five is I moved to a public school...by then my English was fine and because I switched into a brand new environment, I was able to kind of abandon my immigrant identity...because nobody could really tell, unless I said: "Yes, my parents are Russian."
- [Thelma] It all had to do with language. I am sure your parents dressed you very beautifully.
- [Karine] Well, actually, that was a problem too, especially in my Hebrew day school, because all the kids were dressed in the styles [latest fashions] and my mother dressed me...and I was not dressed...I was far from the styles...as I look back at my photos all the kids were wearing stylish clothes.
- [Thelma] Did you see a difference in the way you were dressed?
- [Karine] Oh yes. I should have brought you a picture!
- [Thelma] This is important because the new immigrant kids are having the same problem.
- [Karine] Oh yes...my mother would make my hair in braids and all the kids would laugh...and I would beg my mother not to...and she wouldn't ...she would force me. She would say: "No, that's how a girl should dress."
- [Thelma] Would you say her thinking was Russian or Israeli, or French [K. born in Paris, 1978], or a conglomeration?
- [Karine] Mostly Russian and maybe a hint of Israeli, but not French at all.
- [Thelma] Did the teachers ever try to help you...try to make you feel more comfortable? Were the teachers aware that you were having these problems?
- [Karine] I was always on good terms with my teachers. I have always been a good student, but socially-speaking, I don't recall any of them reaching out. I do

remember that my Grade Two teacher, when she saw at lunch times I wasn't really playing with a lot of kids, she asked me to be her helper and I did stuff with her during lunch...but I am not sure if that was because she just liked me or because she wanted to help me out.

[Thelma] She didn't really make an effort to explain to the other children how difficult it was for you?

[Karine] No, no...nothing. And in terms of learning English, nobody gave me extra help.

[Thelma] You received no remedial English? You just struggled on your own?

[Karine] Yes. I caught on pretty fast...I was nervous about having an accent...and in Grades One, Two, Three, the kids would say stuff to me about certain words I would say...but with my actual English, I did pretty well.

[Thelma] Did they laugh at you?

[Karine] Yes. I was teased. Not often, I was very quiet so, you know....

[Thelma] Did they ever make you cry?

[Karine] I don't remember. I remember crying...but I don't remember them making me cry.

[Thelma] Did you tell your mother how isolated you felt?

[Karine] No...I never told my parents nothing.

[Thelma] You didn't want to upset them...you thought they wouldn't understand? Why do you think you didn't tell them?

[Karine] Well, I mean, I did in little ways. For example, I told my mother not to do my hair, and she got so mad and offended by this that I couldn't say anything more.

[Thelma] Did you ever say anything about your clothes to her?

[Karine] No. I knew that money was an issue and my parents bought what they thought was right for me.

[Thelma] Now that you are a grown lady, would you define the schools as having a

class system; in other words, did you feel like a poor person among wealthier kids? Were you aware of that as a child?

[Karine] Yes. I remember going to a birthday party at one girl's house and she lived in a mansion...and that was pretty normal for most of the kids in my class.

[Thelma] Where was your school geographically located?

[Karine] Associated Hebrew School at Finch and Bathurst. In Grade Five I went to public school and that was in Thornhill. We had moved houses by then.

[Thelma] Did you feel more comfortable in the public school system?

[Karin] What I did...I was so upset with my experience up until then in school. that I told myself I was going to make a huge change. and I did. It was a strong effort...I had to really force myself to do something about it.

[Thelma] It had to come from within you...nobody was reaching out to make it easier for you?

[Karine] No...in that way my parents were making it more difficult for me.

[Thelma] In what way do you mean?

[Karine] Because they were always very focussed on school. and up until then I hadn't really had much of a social life...what kind of a social life does a kid have anyway? But still. in terms of that. I hadn't had very much. and they were used to that. So in Grade Five when I started making all these friends. and I had more time for friends and not as much time for school because I was doing fine, they became very nervous.

[Thelma] They thought you were fooling around too much and not being serious enough about your schoolwork?

[Karine] Yes...but they also felt that the public school system, as opposed to private school, was a lot easier and they wanted me to do extra work because of that. Also, I had been playing piano since I was about four years old and they started wanting me to practice two or three hours a day. when I wanted that time to socialize.

[Thelma] So there was some conflict there.

[Karine] Major...major conflict.

- [Thelma] You are the older child. You have one brother. What is the age difference?
- [Karine] He is about three and a half years younger than me.
- [Thelma] Did he have the same experience as you?
- [Karine] No. I already spoke English to him, maybe not at the beginning, but as he started to learn, he had a good mix of everything.
- [Thelma] He started kindergarten knowing some English?
- [Karine] Yes. so he was better off. I would say. in some respects.
- [Thelma] Did he start at parochial school as well, or did he go right into the public school system?
- [Karine] He had problems as a child in school because he was gifted. What happened was...my parents put him in public school, and he was doing just fine, but the school wanted him to skip grades and my parents didn't want that at his age, so they put him into Bialik [Hebrew Day School], and he had social problems there too. He never got along with the kids there as well. I believe it was the same problem I had, but in a different sense. I think he also felt...just the whole attitude and mentality of the Canadian kids. I don't want to stereotype or generalize, but most of them carried this kind of a snobby type of attitude, and they would look for kids to pick on...look for kids to exploit...and my brother was one of them. I remember one time one kid beat up another kid and blamed it on my brother, and my brother got suspended for something he didn't do.
- [Thelma] Do you think the teachers were a little less sympathetic because your brother was a Russian kid?
- [Karine] I don't know. My mom ended up working in that school afterwards, so he had a little bit of help.
- [Thelma] By the time you got to high school were you just one of the kids?
- [Karine] This is the thing...after Grade Five I moved into a gifted program as well. It was a gifted program for academic work and also for the fine arts. Before I got into high school, I had a lot of Canadian-Jewish female friends and male friends...but once I entered high school I started feeling again that kind of sense....

- [Thelma] You felt different?
- [Karine] Yes...maybe it was just the particular kids I had been with in Grade Eight...in the Thornhill high school there was a larger number of Canadian-Jews and again I felt that kind of pressure...the snobbiness...I still didn't have the mentality, even after all that time.
- [Thelma] You didn't think like they did? A different value system perhaps?
- [Karine] Different value system...different way of treating one another...forming groups that don't socialize with these people...and we don't like those people...and classifying people according to what they wear...how they talk...how they did in school and what not. Between Grade Five and Grade Eight, it was okay. maybe it was the mix of kids that were in my classes...they were fine. In the Arts program. there was a large number of non-Jewish kids...it was about split...but in Grade Eight there was mostly Jewish kids and it was okay. Those kids were okay.
- [Thelma] Did you find that the non-Jewish kids were easier to cope with?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] Were they a little more friendly? Easier to get to know?
- [Karine] Yes...but I wasn't allowed to be friends with them. I had a few but my parents always made it difficult...they discouraged [non-Jewish friendships]...so I tried to avoid it.
- [Thelma] Did you have any non-Jewish friends in high school?
- [Karine] At the beginning of high school...for the most part no...not really.
- [Thelma] In high school did you find yourself socializing mostly with Russian kids?
- [Karine] Israelis...there weren't that many Russians. but with the ones that there were. yes, and then mostly Israelis. Israelis and Russians.
- [Thelma] Israeli immigrant kids?
- [Karine] Yes. My best friend was an Israeli girl.
- [Thelma] Did you date Israeli guys?

- [Karine] At the beginning of high school, yes.
- [Thelma] In early high school, did you date Canadian-Jewish boys?
- [Karine] No.
- [Thelma] Because you didn't want to or because they didn't ask you?
- [Karine] [Hesitates] Both, I guess...but at the end of Grade Nine I ended up starting a relationship with an Israeli guy and I went out with him for two years,so that took up most of the early part of my high school dating.
- [Thelma] Did your parents encourage you to socialize with Russian Jewish kids?
- [Karine] Oh, they loved it if I did! That was kind of their first choice...the second was Israelis...Canadian-Jews. okay fine...but non-Jews. they didn't want to hear about it.
- [Thelma] Both your parents are Jewish?
- [Karine] Yes, both of them.
- [Thelma] What about university? Let's follow this through. You've gone through high school...I'm getting the picture...what year university are you in currently?
- [Karine] Second year.
- [Thelma] You're at York University...there's a huge Jewish population here...who are your friends now? Is it the same pattern?
- [Karine] Yes. I have some Canadian friends that are Jewish, but most of them are from immigrant families. One of my girl friends has a Romanian background, a Romanian-Israeli. I have several Russian-Israeli friends, and I have two girl friends that are Canadian-Jewish, and then the rest of them are mostly Israeli.
- [Thelma] Have you ever participated with the Jewish Student Federation?
- [Karine] Yes. Last year actually I was quite active...I was the social co-ordinator They used to make these Jewish parties that they held every so often.
- [Thelma] Did any Russian kids come out?
- [Karine] The majority of kids that came out to those parties were Canadian Jews.

- [Thelma] Are there any exceptions that you know of personally?
- [Karine] No. The ones that have been here longer and have had a chance to have friends from outside their Russian circle, I would say might join in those kind of activities...might have mixed...but otherwise, no. The less time they have been here, the more likely they are going to stick to their own.
- [Thelma] One would think, if things were fair, that they would make a special effort to ensure these new Canadians feel comfortable, but that doesn't happen?
- [Karine] No...I mean, generally speaking, the people who hang out at the JSF are quite nice...they're okay...but in terms of there being special programs, or people making an effort to know them...to make them friends and stuff...it doesn't happen very often.
- [Thelma] They don't have a Russian evening where the Russian kids can play their music for the Canadian kids to give them a sense of ....?
- [Karine] No. I think what else is happening is that in York actually there is a Russian Student Federation as well.
- [Thelma] There is a Russian Student Federation at York?
- [Karine] Yes. I think they usually end up joining that, but that one is not Jewish.
- [Thelma] Would there be a mixed bunch of kids...would there be Russian-Christians and Russian-Jews in the RSF?
- [Karine] I would say there are probably some Jewish Russians there for sure.
- [Thelma] What's that group called again?
- [Karine] Russian Student Federation, I guess. It's at the student centre...we can go up and see. I have seen signs before for *Russian Disco Night* and whatever. They have parties.
- [Thelma] Would you go to something like that? Would your parents approve of you going to something like that?
- [Karine] No, my parents would not approve.
- [Thelma] Is that because there would be non-Jewish Russians there?

- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] So even in Canada the separation continues?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] You didn't all become one-big-happy-family because you shared a similar immigration experience?
- [Karine] No. The religious issue has been the major problem of my life with my parents. My parents have always been very strict adhering to Jewish customs. Jewish traditions.
- [Thelma] Would you say they are observant?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] You go "sometimes" to the synagogue?
- [Karine] I only go on High Holidays...and now I only go because my parents would feel very terrible if I didn't...not because I want to.
- [Thelma] Where do you go when you go with them? The Russian shul?
- [Karine] A Conservative congregation.
- [Thelma] So they go to synagogue with Canadian-Jews...and they are comfortable there...not looking for a Russian congregation?
- [Karine] Yes. They have many friends that are Canadian Jews. Their closest friends are actually Canadian Jews...but not the kind of Canadian Jews that have been here for generations...I mean those Canadian Jews were born, I think in Poland, and came here really young, so they still have some sort of European mentality...there is some sort of common background there. I mean they did have a lot of Russian-Jewish friends and have, I would say, a majority of Russian-Israeli friends...which makes sense. In terms of my experience with religion, it was very difficult...I mean towards the end of high school, I was dating non-Jews.
- [Thelma] And this was probably a great source of conflict at home.
- [Karine] Yes, and it still remains a conflict.

- [Thelma] Probably the biggest tragedy that could happen to your parents is if you fell in love with a Canadian, who is not Jewish.  
in love with a Canadian who is not Jewish.
- [Karine] No...my parents...a bigger tragedy...I mean I have had two serious...I have been involved with someone for over a year, who is not Jewish.
- [Thelma] A Canadian?
- [Karine] No.
- [Thelma] Where is he from?
- [Karine] He is from Central America.
- [Thelma] Did you meet him here at the university?
- [Karine] No. I met him...I do a lot of ballroom dancing...and I met him at a dance.
- [Thelma] Is he a good dancer?
- [Karine] Very, yes.
- [Thelma] Have you ever brought him home?
- [Karine] Yes, and it was catastrophic.
- [Thelma] Difficult situation. Canada is such a multicultural place. Toronto is such a multicultural city. Your situation is not unusual, but that doesn't make it easier for your parents.
- [Karine] No, they are having a really hard time. At the end of high school, after I had finished with my Israeli boyfriend, I had another serious relationship, also with someone from Central America, because I was involved with dancing.
- [Thelma] I am surprised that your parents let you go to dance clubs.
- [Karine] They don't...they never did...but I went anyway because it is a passion of mine.
- [Thelma] You love to dance?

- [Karine] Yes, I love it.
- [Thelma] Let's talk about Judaism for a couple more minutes. When you think about yourself...who you are to-day...a grown-up beautiful lady...half-way through university...how do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a Canadian-Jew? Do you see yourself as a Russian-Canadian-Jew? Do you see yourself as an Israeli-Canadian-Jew? Or do you just see yourself as a Canadian? If you were on vacation in the Caribbean and someone asked *What are you?*, how would you respond?
- [Karine] It is very interesting that you ask me this question, because my boyfriend actually laughs when people ask me this...especially in front of him... because I never know what to say. I was born in France, but I am not French. I have a strong Russian influence, but I don't feel that I am Russian, not anymore. I have lots of ties to Israel: I would say that's my country, so to speak...but I'm not Israeli...I have lots of Israeli friends, but I am not Israeli myself...but I'm not Canadian either. I don't feel like a Canadian.
- [Thelma] Do you think you ever will?
- [Karine] No, I don't feel Canadian, and I don't think I ever will...I don't really feel anything...I just feel that I am myself...this is the place where I live now...who knows what will happen later.
- [Thelma] Would you say that you have a fragmented sense of identity?
- [Karine] Yes, in terms of identifying myself with a certain background, I don't have any.
- [Thelma] Do you think that is an advantage...that you can be more flexible in your approach to living? More open to other people?
- [Karine] Yes...definitely.
- [Thelma] This gives you a sort of freedom that perhaps the Canadian-Jewish kids who socialize only with their own community don't have...which would make you different.
- [Karine] Definitely...because I have no real strong ties to any one place, or want them...and in many ways that allows me to identify myself with my own personal qualities...my own personal passions and talents...rather than where I come from and who my parents are, and what my background says

about me stereotypically or non-stereotypically...because nobody can stereotype me. I mean, I am a Jew, so if anybody wants to stereotype Jews in a very general sense - they must be ignorant to do so anyway - but they can because I am Jewish. But in other terms, I can't be stereotyped, and that's why I can't go along with these kind of expectations.

[Thelma] And this approach would put you in conflict with your parents, no doubt.

[Karine] Yes...and even as a Jew, I can't define myself...I don't feel Jewish, so to speak, either. I know the traditions, you know...I have some sort of tie to Israel, I respect it...but I mean if I would have been born something else...I think I would feel comfortable as well...like I don't feel...especially since the pressures my parents have put on me... religion has been kind of back-away-from-it much more.

[Thelma] You are musically gifted...do you belong to a music group? Do you still play the piano?  
the piano?

[Karine] No [group]. Yes [plays the piano]. I write my own music, but I do it alone. not in a group.

[Thelma] What's your major here at York?

[Karine] Psychology based on the sciences like Psychology. Neuroscience...that kind of thing.

[Thelma] That doesn't sound like someone who is a music aficionado and dancer.

[Karine] always  
No, because my parents have always forced academia on me, and I've been good at it...and I don't mind sciences...I like it...it's not something that I would run away from.

[Thelma] If you could have done anything you wanted to, would you have gone into the Fine Arts Department here at York?

[Karine] I wish I could tell you. Unfortunately, I allowed myself to be pressured so much by my parents. They told me what was right and what was wrong, and I didn't really leave a lot of room for myself to really ask myself what do I feel...what would I love to do...so I just did what they told me, and they told me sciences.

- [Thelma] And because you were good in the sciences, it wasn't really a big problem.
- [Karine] Yes, I was okay with that...but I didn't allow myself to really feel what I wanted. So, I can't tell you...maybe I would have liked to [go into Fine Arts]. I mean when I was in the Fine Arts Program in elementary school. I loved it. I had a really great time.
- [Thelma] Would your parents have discouraged that because it wasn't practical?
- [Karine] Yes. In some ways I thank them because science is really practical these days in terms of finding a job...so I am glad for that.
- [Thelma] So you pursue these other loves on your own time...when you have time.
- [Karine] Yes...against my parents' wishes.
- [Thelma] Even in your spare time, they would prefer you to not to be involved with an artistic community.
- [Karine] Yes, they are not crazy about that. I love painting and drawing...that kind of thing too...I actually do a lot of that. It's funny because when I was a child my parents encouraged it and I went to art classes...I went to gymnastic classes...I went to dance classes...then when I was older...maybe because of the stereotype of those kind of people, you know.
- [Thelma] Would you say your parents are affluent now?
- [Karine] Upper middle class.
- [Thelma] Parents want their children to be financially independent and they know there are a lot of "starving" dancers and painters and writers in this society...this is not Russia, or at least what it used to be.
- [Karine] Yes, yes. My parents have adopted that kind of mentality.
- [Thelma] You have a Canadian doctor...a Canadian dentist...are they both Jewish?
- [Karine] Yes. As a child I had Russian doctors.
- [Thelma] Do your parents have Russian doctors?
- [Karine] No, they are both Canadian.

- [Thelma] Your parents are integrating...they are becoming part of the Canadian community.
- [Karine] Oh, they really integrated! My father works at the [blank] Bank. He is a Manager of Systems Integration, and he also runs his own business...he has a math school.
- [Thelma] He is quite an entrepreneur.
- [Karine] Yes, he is doing rather well actually. My mother teaches at [Blank]. She is actually a Teaching Assistant in kindergarten.
- [Thelma] They are busy people. You have just the one brother. What kind of friends does he have, ethnically speaking...does he have a bigger mix than you?
- [Karine] He has had a very interesting experience because once he finished Bialik...he didn't have very good...he had one good friend in Bialik...he was actually a Canadian-Jew and he is still in contact with him...and I don't think there were any Russian Jewish kids in Bialik...and if there were, he wasn't friends with them.
- In Grade Seven, they moved him to the University of Toronto School because he was gifted. There were barely any Jewish kids there...I guess mostly Orientals...and a little bit of everything...so he for a while he didn't have any Jewish friends. He had a really good Chinese friend, an Indian friend...my parents were okay with that.
- [Thelma] Because he is a boy.
- [Karine] Yes...and also he had always been very interested in Judaism...he kept things more than my parents did. He kept Shabbat...he kept Kosher...he was really big on those holidays...everything...even as a child...and now still at sixteen, almost seventeen. In the last few years, he has been involved with BBYO [B'nai Brith Youth Organization], and now he has only Canadian-Jewish friends, and he loves them. He doesn't have Russian-Jewish friends. In fact, I run a Russian-Jewish youth group, and part of the purpose of the youth group is integrating them into Canadian society...so I asked him [brother] if I could bring some of my older members to his BBYO group. He proposed that idea to his group, and they said: "Russians, in our thing, never!"
- [Thelma] Can I quote that?

- [Karine] Sure.
- [Thelma] I asked B'Nai Brith if they had any Russian kids, and the lady that I spoke to said they had had a Russian group for a short period of time, but when they tried to split them up and integrate them into different regular B'nai Brith chapters, they didn't want that.
- [Karine] These kids [Canadian] are very much against having outsiders.
- [Thelma] What she inferred was that the Russian kids didn't want to join in with the Canadians.
- [Karine] But why...because the Canadian kids won't accept them. Because they would get the cold shoulder. My brother has really abandoned any Russian identity in order to be accepted by them.
- [Thelma] In order to be accepted into the Canadian Jewish community, he has had to give up any of his Russian identity...he doesn't talk about being Russian?
- [Karine] No, I don't think so. He has one female friend who is also of the same Russian background...she is also in B'nai Brith...but both of them have been pretty much either born...my brother was born here, I am not sure about her.. both have lived here long enough to know how to get around that kind of thing.
- [Thelma] Your brother was born in Canada. If you asked him what his identity was, would he say Canadian-Jew?
- [Karine] Yes...he would say he has a strong tie to Israel because he is traditional...he also is somewhat Zionist.
- [Thelma] Would you describe yourself as somewhat Zionist to-day?
- [Karine] Kind of.
- [Thelma] Do you still have a warm feeling for Israel...an interest in it?
- [Karine] Yes...it's been soured by my parents, but it's okay.
- [Thelma] Do you like where you are living?
- [Karine] Oh yes, it's very nice! The neighbourhood I live in is swell.

- [Thelma] You live in a nice house. You are optimistic about your future in Canada. You are tired of Canadian winters.
- [Karine] I really can't stand these winters. The cold and the grey both bother me. I actually have like real problems with it. I just feel the difference when there is sunshine.
- [Thelma] Do you ever think about what you will do when you graduate?
- [Karine] Yes. Originally I planned to do something where I would be in school for a while...I would have loved to go into research, to stay in the field of biopsychology. maybe become a professor...stay in academia...but I can't and I'll tell you why in a minute. I also wanted to go to medical school, pharmacy. all of these careers that take a really long time to get there: but because I have such conflicts with my parents, realistically speaking, I don't want to and I can't live under their roof much longer.
- [Thelma] It's getting that tense?
- [Karine] Oh, yes! So I need a way out. I need to have my education done. I need to be able to start work soon...and a way that I've been making money all these years and also something that I love doing is tutoring and working with youth...so I've been doing private tutoring.
- [Thelma] What are you tutoring?
- [Karine] Math and sciences and English...both public and high school students ...help new Russian immigrants with their English...but mostly I do math and science.
- [Thelma] Are you dealing mostly with the Russian immigrant community?
- [Karine] No, I deal mostly with Canadian-Jewish kids. They know about me through word of mouth. Usually I have kids in three different high schools, and it just spreads. They have brothers and sisters, and I just get lots and lots of referrals. Some come to my home; some I go to their home. Depends on how they like it.
- [Thelma] Do you drive?
- [Karine] Sometimes...I don't have a car of my own. When my parents decide to be nice I get it, and when they don't, I take the bus.

- [Thelma] Can you see yourself living at home for another two-and-a-half years; until you graduate with your four-year degree?
- [Karine] Not really. No. Hopefully I can move out this summer. I moved out last summer, but I moved back home because financially I couldn't get along.
- [Thelma] Would your parents support you if you moved out?
- [Karine] No, they wouldn't give me anything...but that's okay. I decided a long time ago.
- [Thelma] Do your parents know this?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] Will you move in with your boyfriend? Is he a student?
- [Karine] Both...working and studying...he's a part-time student.
- [Thelma] Say you settle down with this fellow. I can ask these questions because I don't know you. he comes from Central America...does he come from an impoverished background?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] Your parents know this.
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] You're dealing with poverty. student-loan debt. religious differences ...they are worried about you.
- [Karine] Yes, understandably so.
- [Thelma] You understand that. Does he understand that?
- [Karine] Yes.
- [Thelma] Is he angry at your parents for their attitudes?
- [Karine] I wouldn't say he is angry, just disappointed. He would like for them to accept him for the person that he is. He is a good person.

- [Thelma] Does he encourage you to leave home?
- [Karine] No...just the opposite...he wants me to stay with him obviously...but he tells me many times that being with him means that I lose a lot.
- [Thelma] Right now you lose their support. It's a big step.
- [Karine] Even if I wasn't with him, you know, I have always had conflicts with my parents regarding these kinds of issues, so I would have probably wanted to move out on my own anyways.
- [Thelma] Could you move to the university residence?
- [Karine] It is more expensive than living off campus. I mean if I wanted to have a roommate, who I don't know, and live in a tiny hole, yes, it is less expensive, but I don't want that...especially coming from where I am used to having luxury...it's kind of hard...I don't know...it's really difficult.
- [Thelma] Would your parents let you finish off at a different university?
- [Karine] If I asked then now? Oh yes! They would love for me to get out of here. Now they would. I told you that before they didn't want me to go away...now they regret it.
- [Thelma] If you said you wanted to go to McGill, for example?
- [Karine] Well, I think they would want me to go study in Tel Aviv...actually I know they would want me to.
- [Thelma] They would want you to go to Israel to complete your education, which would take you away from your boyfriend and all these influences.
- If this young man was not in the picture, could you tolerate staying at home for another two-and-a-half years?
- [Karine] Maybe, maybe not...depends on how much money I have.
- [Thelma] If you move out would you have to borrow education money from OSAP?
- [Karine] They would pay for my education. Part of it is already paid for because I have a scholarship fund; and I had a scholarship coming into university as well, because of my high-school marks.

- [Thelma] So basically it's room and board you need in a less luxurious environment.
- [Karine] Just day-to-day-life kind of thing.
- [Thelma] How old are you now?
- [Karine] Twenty.
- [Thelma] Your parents are Russians, Israelis, who moved to Canada in the 1970s. Obviously they have become well-established economically...they are secure. Do they do anything to help the new Russian newcomers?. Do they do any charity work or volunteer work? Do they do anything at all to make it easier for the post-1989 group of immigrants? From your personal experience, do they talk about what they can do to make it easier for these new people that are having such a tough time. Do they help them find jobs, which is the most important issue for them. Or are they saying, well we survived, they'll survive?
- [Karine] I would say yes and no. It depends which parent you are talking about. I would say both my parents together have been helping extensively all this time people that they know. For example, if my parents have friends who have family coming in from Russia, they would help them. Even today, there is this one woman and her son... I teach him English actually...they just moved here a few months ago...friends of a family that we are friends with...they came and so my parents have helped them out.
- [Thelma] What do you mean by "helped them out"?
- [Karine] Clothes...looking...my mom takes the woman shopping...she shows her where the best places are to buy stuff...she drives her because the woman doesn't have a car...explains how transportation works...goes to visit her because she is lonely, she doesn't have a husband...things like that. But I haven't seen my mother do anything to help people she doesn't know ...doing community work...or that kind of thing...if it's somebody she knows...a friend of a friend...or a family member of a friend...fine. My father, on the other hand, I have only seen him helping people in terms of finding jobs...even people he didn't really know well when he heard they were Russian...I think, but don't quote me on this one...especially Jewish Russians looking for jobs...he helped so many people write résumés...he has handed their résumés in...he has got them jobs within [blank] Bank. and he has a lot of connections elsewhere, and he has been pretty much able to help a lot of people find employment.

- [Thelma] Do you think your parents' approach is typical?
- [Karine] I don't know. One uncle and a great aunt immigrated from Russia four or five years ago...and another uncle about ten years ago. They all have jobs...I wouldn't say anything like what they were doing in Russia, far from it, but they are getting along. My aunt came from Israel, and she is also employed, but I haven't seen any of them helping other people really. I think they are pretty much involved with taking care of themselves.
- [Thelma] How about financial giving...like to the Jewish Federation....?
- [Karine] Yes, my parents make donations.
- [Thelma] Tell me about your youth group. First of all, what ages are they?
- [Karine] The youth group right now is for kids between the ages of 12 and 17. So that's a wide variety of ages, which I am trying, and the agency [JIAS] is trying....
- [Thelma] You are working with JIAS. Are you a volunteer or do they pay you?
- [Karin] It's a paid position...just a little bit...it's half-and-half...I do some volunteer work, and I also do paid work.
- [Thelma] Is this part of their Integration Program?
- [Karine] Yes...Youth Integration Program. So we are trying there to be two groups; so that we have a 12-to-15 group, and a 15-to-17 group, which will work a lot better. Twelve and seventeen-year-olds don't have much in common but, unfortunately, we haven't had such a great number of kids in order to do that yet.
- [Thelma] How many kids have you got altogether?
- [Karine] It's very difficult right now...I'll tell you the truth...because I have a calling list...I have about forty names...and for one reason or another...we have had really great programs...and the maximum number of kids that have turned out to a program was about seventeen...and now especially when there is exams going on...you know, bad weather...sometimes we only get about 6 or 7 kids out to a program...which discourages those kids from coming back because they don't see a large turnout.
- [Thelma] Where are those meetings held?

- [Karine] So far I've taken them roller blading at a rink...we've had an Israeli Day at the Jewish Community Centre, where we made fallafel sandwiches ...we've gone to the movies...we had a Hannukah dance party in conjunction with United Synagogue Youth at Adath Israel Synagogue.
- [Thelma] So you mixed up the Canadian-Jewish kids with these....?
- [Karine] Yes, because it's an integration program, so what they want is that eventually these kids will want to join Canadian youth groups and not to stick with themselves as much. I find that a lot of the kids that I have have come through Israel, so they are Russian-Israeli-now-Canadian youth...but it has been very difficult. Right now I am really struggling with outreach...trying to get more kids in to this program so that we have a larger turnout. This week we had a Jewish holiday celebration and because it was really bad weather that night only a few people showed up. And it is disappointing, so then those kids [say]: "Well, not a lot of people are coming out, so I don't want to come," so the numbers decrease.
- [Thelma] Do they have to pay to come to these programs?
- [Karine] Yes. there is a membership fee...each program costs maximum two dollars...sometimes they are free...and that's just to cover whatever....
- [Thelma] Do you ever telephone their parents to explain what you are doing?
- [Karine] Always...I always call them to let them know what the next program is going to be. I have a volunteer who helps me as well. but most of the time I do the calling and usually I speak to the child and/or the parent...but often the parent wants to speak to me as well.
- [Thelma] Do you speak to these people in Russian?
- [Karine] Most of the kids I can speak to in English with some Russian but the parents I speak to in Russian only.
- [Thelma] Are the parents of these children enthusiastic when they talk to you? Do they appreciate you calling and what you are trying to do?
- [Karine] You know, it's really interesting, I have some parents: "Yes, thank you so much...I really want my kids involved," then, for some reason or other, the kids don't show. Sometimes...sometimes not...and when I ask the kids what happened: "Well, my parents didn't want to drive me and I didn't want to take the bus" or "I had too much school work." When this

program was running in the summertime, and the kids had nothing to do, and the parents wanted them to have something to do, the program had about 30 kids at a time showing up, which was great! Because of school and one thing or another, it is very difficult. It is not a high priority with them...especially when they come and they see there is only a few other kids...what are they going to do? We have had some programs that have had large groups of kids...when we had a dance party there was about 15 kids...large I mean in comparison.

[Thelma] There has been no bonding of these kids with each other to form a sense of a social group?

[Karine] That's what we wanted but each time we get different kids. There has been a few kids that have been the core...about five of them that always come ...thankfully...but they know each other from school.

[Thelma] They have a commonality...and you haven't been able to create a group that the kids feel is theirs....

[Karine] That's what I'm trying to do, and it is still in process...unfortunately with the agency...we have been trying to do outreach work together, and it has been taking a very long time...it is a slow process what is going on.

[Thelma] When you say outreach work....?

[Karine] It means finding kids for the program...like I've gone to different high schools...posted posters...talked to guidance counsellors.

[Thelma] Is this for just the Russian-Jewish kids... what if an Iranian-Jewish kid called you?

[Karine] See that's the thing. Personally, I think it should be for all Jewish immigrant kids.

[Thelma] It would be more interesting.

[Karine] Yes, I think it would be great...but unfortunately, or fortunately, I am not sure...it's not only up to me...but the agency's money is coming for Russian Jewish kids.

[Thelma] Who do you answer to?

[Karine] She is just leaving the Agency, but up until now, it has been Sharon Zeiler.

She only worked there about two years, and somebody is replacing her.

[Thelma] Do you think you will stay on for a while? Are you getting discouraged?

[Karine] I hope so...I'm not getting discouraged...I want to really make this work, so I am putting all my efforts into it...putting in a lot of time and a lot of effort.

[Thelma] Have you had any kids who are Russian-Jewish except one parent is Christian, and there is no observance of Judaism going on in the home...so their sense of Jewish identity is very minimal?

[Karine] Yes, probably, but it hasn't really been expressed through the program. I have a few kids who I suspect that's the case, but we haven't really had a chance to discuss our backgrounds enough...some of the kids I have extensive conversations with...they just call me and talk to me about their day-to-day life...what not...it's really nice...I've established kind of a big-sister relationship with them...but there are a lot of kids I just haven't had a chance to do that with...so that's the thing. I am doing a lot of the outreach work now, so that as the weather clears up and their schools close down, hopefully there will be a lot more who turn out at these programs.

[Thelma] Do you think that some of them might not be coming because they don't want to be involved with a *Jewish* organization, even though they are Jewish? Perhaps their parents aren't encouraging them to socialize at a Jewish organization?

[Karine] I am not sure because these are very recent immigrants. Some of these kids have just moved here a few months ago...a year ago...some of them have been here a few years. From what I understand, most of the telephone numbers that I received at the beginning...not just from my outreach work...were people who went through the agency [JIAS]...and those people, who went through that agency, were Jewish and had some interest in Judaism, and probably expressed that to their social worker, who then put their kids names and numbers into my list.

[Thelma] Is anybody helping you?

[Karine] I have a volunteer...she is younger than me...she helps supervise when we have large groups. She helps with the phoning a little, but I like to do it myself, personally.

[Thelma] How did you get this job?

- [Karine] I saw a posting for it at the Jewish Student's Federation here at York...that they needed someone to work with youth who spoke English, Hebrew and Russian ...well that's me...and I was looking for a job on top of the tutoring that I was doing, so it sounded really good.
- [Thelma] You are a very busy lady. You are tutoring. You are working with JIAS. You are doing academic work. You are dating. You are dancing. You are making music. You don't have much spare time.
- [Karine] No.
- [Thelma] Well, I really appreciate you coming to talk to me, and I thank you very much!

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ALEXANDER [25]**  
**FEBRUARY 4, 1999**

- [Thelma] If it was an option in 1990, do you think your father would have preferred immigrating to Canada or the United States, rather than Israel?
- [Alex] Probably yes, because he had some friends and family that went to the States; a cousin, now in Los Angeles, was living in Cleveland in 1990. He had the same occupation as my father, and he was doing very well. We didn't have enough information about Israel in Kiev, but the information that we did have unfortunately wasn't so positive towards finding jobs. The country is very small and the amount of people coming in is very large...too many engineers...so while the United States was able to deal with this number, Israel just physically wasn't able to employ all those people. If my father had a choice, he probably would have gone to the States.
- [Thelma] Your father is an engineer?
- [Alex] Yes, a mechanical engineer.
- [Thelma] Did any brothers or sisters emigrate with you?
- [Alex] Yes, my sister and her husband came to Israel a few months before we did. At that time, she had no children.
- [Thelma] Your sister and her husband went to Israel first, and then your mother and father followed with you?
- [Alex] No. Me, my father and my grandmother, my father's mother. My mother had passed away before we left.
- [Thelma] Did you make lots of friends in Israel?
- [Alex] Yes. Mostly I made friends with people like myself from Russia. I was dating someone who was Israeli, but her parents came from Russia, so she knew some Russian.
- [Thelma] Were you comfortable socializing with Israelis, or did you stay within the safety of your Russian community?
- [Alex] It's very hard to generalize. My experience was that the first school that I attended in Israel, the people who went to that school, were from middle-class or lower-class Israeli society, and they weren't so happy with the fact that Russians were coming and taking

over their jobs...their apartments...making everything expensive...so those people were somewhat difficult to socialize with...again, I am generalizing.

The second school that I attended was a school called Leo Beck, which was a private school, and the kids who went there were from affluent families where they didn't have such a negative view of Russian immigrants...so I found it easier to socialize at Leo Beck than at the previous school.

[Thelma]      How many years did you attend Leo Beck?

[Alex]         One year...it was high school...and then I left.

Israel has very strong cultural identities, and that's a good thing, in a way, because you can enrich yourself with both cultures; the Israeli culture and the culture that you came from. It also can be bad because you have some sort of a superiority complex; that people who come from your culture are somewhat superior to people from other cultures. That happens and, you know, the Russian community was doing it too, just like any other community. That's what bothered me...especially coming from the Soviet Union where Jews were treated differently just because they were Jews...and it bothered me in Israel that people were treated differently because of their countries of origin, or their religious affiliation or non-affiliation. I was expecting something else...more brotherly love.

[Thelma]      You say you knew a "little" about Canada before you arrived. Did you learn this "little" in Israel?

[Alex]         Yes, mostly in Israel, and also a little in Russia...you know... maybe the name of the Prime Minister and the capital of the country...very minimal stuff.

[Thelma]      When you decided to come to Canada from Israel did you have any realistic information about the job situation here?

[Alex]         At that time I was only seventeen...and I was coming to Canada at my aunt's invitation. I was going to stay with her and go to high school and maybe university, so I didn't have a career at that time. I had something in mind that I would want to do, but I had to get my education first.

[Thelma]      Are you still living with your aunt?

[Alex]         No, I have my own place.

[Thelma]      How long did you live with her?

- [Alex]            Actually, I lived with her only for a few weeks because we had a confrontation and I had to move out.
- [Thelma]        Did you receive social assistance to help you survive?
- [Alex]            When I had to leave my aunt I couldn't survive, so I had to apply for social assistance while I was going to high school. I started working and I didn't receive the full benefits, but my income was supplemented by Metro Toronto Social Services. Once I graduated from high school, I was working full-time until three years ago, when I started university.
- [Thelma]        When you worked full-time did you manage on your own income?
- [Alex]            Yes, sure.
- [Thelma]        You never asked the Jewish community for financial assistance ...you never contacted JIAS?
- [Alex]            No.
- [Thelma]        Do you know what JIAS is?
- [Alex]            Yes.
- [Thelma]        You never felt that the social workers there could help you?
- [Alex]            Well, they wouldn't help me for one reason that I came from Israel and I can understand that...I don't blame them for that...they are set up to help the Jews from the Soviet Union.
- [Thelma]        You didn't think they would help somebody that is coming from the Soviet Union through Israel?
- [Alex]            My perception, from talking to other people, was that they had a limited amount of resources and UJA gets funding for Soviet Jews that come to Israel, and they get funding for Soviet Jews that come to Canada, so once you go to Israel...you know.
- [Thelma]        You were thinking you were not entitled...that they are reluctant to help twice...with two immigrations.
- [Alex]            Yes. Also, I felt they probably would have liked people to stay in Israel and they didn't want to encourage this trend. If I did get help from JIAS and then told my friends [in Israel] *you can come here and get help from*

*Jewish organizations*, they would be more willing to come...so they didn't want to encourage this.

[Thelma] Did you ever once call to ask?

[Alex] No, I felt that whatever I was receiving from social assistance and from working part-time was enough, and I didn't need more.

[Thelma] You state that you attended English language classes. Were they ESL classes?

[Alex] Yes. I am getting it in the framework of high school. Because there was such an influx of immigrants, they had instead of regular English classes, they had ESL classes for those who couldn't do English.

[Thelma] Were the ESL classes part of your regular nine to three curriculum or were they after school?

[Alex] Yes, it was part of it. The first school I went to was in west Toronto, it was called West Toronto Collegiate, and then the second school I went to was actually at CHAT, which is a private Hebrew school, the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, and then I went to MacKenzie for my OACs, which is Grade 13. Now for OACs, at that level, at that time already, I didn't need any ESL classes...I had caught up...but at West Toronto Collegiate and in CHAT I did take ESL classes as a replacement for my English classes.

[Thelma] Were the classes very crowded?

[Alex] No. I did find them adequate and well-organized.

[Thelma] You state that you attend synagogue regularly. Where?

[Alex] Near my house. Near where I live.

[Thelma] Is this Reform....?

[Alex] Orthodox.

[Thelma] Is it part of the Russian congregation?

[Alex] No. It's Canadian.

[Thelma] You go every Shabbat?

[Alex] Yes.

[Thelma] Would you consider yourself observant?

[Alex] To a certain extent.

[Thelma] Did you learn what you know about Judaism in Israel?

[Alex] No, here. Israel was a very negative experience for Judaism, and, in fact, the Russian community as a whole is very negative toward the religious community and towards religion because of the Soviet atheism that was in them forever...so that's why while you were in this Russian environment in Israel, you weren't really associating with Orthodox Jews or religious tradition.

[Thelma] How did you find your way to the synagogue in Toronto? Did somebody take you, or did you go alone?

[Alex] What happened was I rented an apartment from an Orthodox family...that was just a coincidence. They introduced me to Judaism by inviting me, being welcoming, inviting me for Shabbat, suggesting that I attend classes in Judaism, lectures in Judaism, and I enjoyed that. A lot of things that I heard made a lot of sense to me, you know, and the rationale of why I should be observant, why I should keep Shabbat and the mitzvot was very clear, and I just didn't see any other choice...like I explored other things.

[Thelma] Did you feel "at home"?

[Alex] Not so much at home because I wasn't used to this environment, but I felt it was the right thing to do. Later, of course, I got used to it and I began to feel at home.

[Thelma] Did you make friends in that observant community?

[Alex] Yes, I believe I did.

[Thelma] You state that you are interested in politics, Canadian, Israeli, international, and you have a Canadian doctor and a Canadian dentist.

[Alex]] I wasn't seeking out a Canadian doctor or a Russian doctor, I was recommended to this doctor and that's why I went...I was recommended to this dentist, that's why I went there.

[Thelma] It wasn't a necessity that they be Russian-speaking?

- [Alex] Absolutely not...but if they were Russian, I wouldn't care either.
- [Thelma] You haven't made any friends in the Christian community?
- [Alex] Not among Russians.
- [Thelma] Have you made any friends in the Canadian Christian community?
- [Alex] I had originally made some friends...I had that experience...but later on, I guess the fact that I was becoming religious and Jewish...and they were hoping that I would become Christian.
- [Thelma] They wanted to convert you?
- [Alex] People like "Jews for Jesus".
- [Thelma] You had some experience with "Jews for Jesus"?
- [Alex] Yes. I did.
- [Thelma] You have made some friends of Toronto Jews?
- [Alex] Yes.
- [Thelma] Are they from the religious community that you are involved with now?
- [Alex] Not necessarily. Majority, I would say yes from the religious community, but I do have a large number of friends who aren't religious.
- [Thelma] The people who invite you to their homes, are they mostly from within the Jewish community.
- [Alex] Mostly from the Jewish community. For Shabbat or a Jewish holiday.
- [Thelma] So the Canadian-Jews don't necessarily say "come over" to their home except for these special occasions?
- [Alex] No....no...not...you know, I don't say "come over to my home" either, unless I am making a party or a gathering for some purpose...this is a Canadian reality...people are busy and, you know, you have time to socialize on Shabbat...this is the time for family gathering, for friends, and that's when you come over...that's socialization...but not outside that.

- [Thelma] You don't think it's because you're an immigrant, or they are just unfriendly?
- [Alex] Absolutely not, they would invite just as much somebody who is not an immigrant.
- [Thelma] You don't rent Russian language videos?
- [Alex] Out of my mentality at this point. I am tuned in to the English language and American films.
- [Thelma] Do you like our fancy supermarkets?
- [Alex] Yah, you know, it's Canadian. I don't see anything wrong with them. I have seen nice supermarkets in Israel.
- [Thelma] To my question *Have you been able to find work in your own field?* you answer "yes." What work is that?
- [Alex] Well, as I said, I had an idea when I came here of what I wanted to do, and that was videography, video productions, and I found work as an assistant to a videographer, and then three years later I opened my own business doing just that.
- [Thelma] Good for you! Are you doing social events?
- [Alex] Weddings, bar mitzvahs, lectures, corporate events. I used to do editing, but now I have editors that work for me.
- [Thelma] How many hours a week do you spent on your videographing?
- [Alex] On average per year maybe about ten to twelve hours a week.
- [Thelma] Do you do any other work, or just the videography and your studies?
- [Alex] Last summer I had a full-time job. I worked for a company as an assistant manager...it was where I used to work before I started university. I was working full-time for a textile wholesaler as an assistant manager, and that's another work that I have that they always welcome me there whenever I need work. They used to be on Spadina Avenue, but they are now near Yorkdale.
- [Thelma] You're a busy fellow. Do you miss Russia? *No.* Do you miss Israel? *Yes.* If you had the money and the time, would you go back to visit Israel?

- [Alex] Yes. I have my sister still there. Unfortunately my father passed away two years ago after living five years in Israel.
- [Thelma] Ahh, you don't have *mazel* [luck] with your parents. That's too bad.
- [Alex] I did! I had *mazel* -- when they were alive.
- [Thelma] Was your father happy in Israel?
- [Alex] All in all, he was happy.
- [Thelma] Do you talk about your sister coming to Canada?
- [Alex] No. She is happy there. The only reason that she might come to Canada is to join me, but that would be silly...she's happy there, I don't think that's a good enough reason. She has come to visit me here in Canada. She has a child now.
- [Thelma] So that's your family.
- [Alex] That's pretty much it.
- [Thelma] Do you like where you are living?
- [Alex] Yes. I am renting a basement apartment at Bathurst Street and Wilson Avenue.
- [Thelma] I am finding that the Russian Jews are a target for proselytical religions. Do you agree?
- [Alex] Well, the Jews for Jesus specifically target the Jews for conversion. The reason, I feel, is that they are easy targets, unfortunately.
- [Thelma] Because they are looking for a sense of community?
- [Alex] Not necessarily. They have no knowledge of Judaism. They have no Jewish background. If I knew then what I know now about Judaism, I would never succumb to Jews for Jesus, never get involved what I got involved in...and that's a problem...and, yes, they are looking for a sense of community and a sense of belonging ...and Jews for Jesus sometimes conceivably gives it to them.
- [Thelma] This is my question...do you feel that your attraction to them was the result

of deceit...in the sense that you felt that you were dealing with a Jewish community?  
And some people once they are there, they stay?

[Alex] Absolutely!

[Thelma] Even though they realize that they are....

[Alex] I don't know that they realize...they may never realize...that's why  
Jews for Judaism exists.

[Thelma] Did you realize because you met another person who was involved with  
the more authentic....?.

[Alex] Yes.

[Thelma] And that person influenced you away...?.

[Alex] Yes. and directed me to Jews for Judaism.

[Thelma] So you actually met and talked with Rabbi Michael Skobac?

[Alex] Yes. They deprogrammed me.

[Thelma] Julius Ciss and Rabbi Skobac. Were they helpful?

[Alex] Absolutely. I owe them a lot.

[Thelma] Here at York University, you are a part-time student. You are young,  
twenty-five years old. Do you participate in anything to do with the Jewish Student's  
Federation? Are you aware of the JSF?

[Alex] Yes, I am. Unfortunately, not that much now, because I don't want to  
participate because of lack of time. A few times I did participate. I went, they had  
organized Shabbatons, which is a gathering for Shabbat of Jewish students. So yes,  
whenever I had an opportunity...very nice stuff.

[Thelma] Were there Canadian-Jewish students there?

[Alex] Yes. mostly Canadian. very few non-Canadian Jews.

[Thelma] Do you find that the Canadian-Jewish students that you interact with are  
friendly to you?

[Alex] Yes.

[Thelma] Do you feel excluded sometimes?

[Alex] No, not at all, not at this point.

[Thelma] Have you made any non-Jewish student friends?

[Alex] The thing is that I haven't made time for any non-Jewish or Jewish friends here at university...and I'll tell you why...because I'm somewhat older than most of the kids here, and being older there are not too many things that are in common...and so I see university, and unfortunately maybe that's a problem, that I see university as a step for me to get my education and not as a social place...not as somewhere to socialize. When I happen to speak to someone, I am very friendly and they are friendly to me...but unfortunately, just because I already had my friends before I started university, and I already have my own surroundings and my own environment and community, not necessarily Jewish, but people that I knew before. I am not looking for new friends or new connections. If I find a new one, and it happens to be...well....you know, that's good...but I am not looking to socialize and I don't participate at university, except maybe JSL. I don't participate in university events.

[Thelma] Are you aware that there is a Russian Club here at York University? Did you know about that?

[Alex] I have seen the ads actually...I have seen the flyers posted.

[Thelma] Where did you see the flyers...do you remember?

[Alex] I think it was the Computer Science building here. I had some classes there...I am not in computer science, but I had some classes and I wasn't doing anything, and I saw the flyers. I don't know where they are or who they are...unfortunately, I did not [take notice] because it was a time thing.

[Thelma] It's too bad they [Russian students] wouldn't feel comfortable enough to want to join the mainstream Jewish Student's Federation...that they would have to form their own student group. Probably a language thing?

[Alex] I don't think it's language...it's cultural. Second, the Russians who are here are not necessarily Jews...there are a lot of Russians and a large percentage of them are not Jewish...so why would they want to go to a Jewish Student's Federation?

[Thelma] I wasn't thinking...you're absolutely right. So a lot of the kids that belong to the Russian Club would be Russians as opposed to Russian-Jews.

[Alex] Yes...but there might be some Jews there. Now I don't know how successful they were...whether a lot of people have shown up to their meetings. Unfortunately, the problem with Russian Jews, including me, I am not criticizing everybody, is that sometimes we are very apathetic...you know...we never want to be in the community...we want to keep to ourselves ...we are not necessarily altruistic people...and so that's why while the intention is good to organize a club, many people felt they didn't need that...they have enough of things going on in their life, and that groups of friends never need to go to social clubs to socialize, not at that age.

[Thelma] I have heard in my interviews that the Russian concept of personal friendship has a much larger meaning than it has here in Canada...that friendship in Russia means commitment...that for your friends you will do anything...for your friends you are always available. If your friend asks "how are you," he wants to really know. He doesn't want you to just say "fine" and keep walking. Do you feel the same way?

[Alex] I don't see such a big difference. I do have a number of very close friends that are Canadian that do feel committed...and I do feel they would do anything...and they do say how they are in reality.

[Thelma] So you feel that they are good friends?

[Alex] Yes, definitely.

[Thelma] You are twenty-five years old. What do you want out of your life in Canada? If you are lucky and things go well, what would you like to achieve?

[Alex] I want to have a job where I have enough time for my family. I hope in time to have a family. You know, I want to be happy, just like anybody, with my family...and I want the person I am with to be happy with me...and possibly a house...I don't want to live extravagantly...I just want to have a normal life where I don't have to struggle for survival, but have enough for myself and my family.

[Thelma] When you get married, will you have a traditional Jewish home?

[Alex] I hope so, yes.

[Thelma] And raise your children in the Jewish tradition?

[Alex] Absolutely, yes. Even if I wasn't traditional, I would want my kids to go to Jewish school and to be educated in Jewish values and traditions, so that they will grow up to be good people. Not to say that children who go to public school don't grow up good, but I am thinking of statistics, and I am thinking of percentages of things like drug addiction and

promiscuity and things like that, that come out of the public schools, compared to Jewish schools. It is important to me that my children will grow up to be people with ethics and morals. This can happen through the public schools too because the parents are the most important thing that influences the kids...but the school influences the children too...they are there eight hours a day or whatever.

[Thelma] I am hearing that Russian fathers coming from the Former Soviet Union have a great deal of problems with their teenage kids when they go to the public schools here.

[Alex] Teenage girls?

[Thelma] The girls...they go off to school at 14 or 15 years of age with lots of makeup, ragged jeans, or short-short miniskirts...and the fathers are looking at these girls, because in Russia they wore uniforms, and here they look like young hookers, and the fathers are upset and the daughters are arguing that this is what the other girls are wearing.

[Alex] It is difficult for the older Russian men to reconcile themselves to this.

[Thelma] I am hearing that we have an element of young Russian immigrants from 25 to 35 that come over here expecting an immediate grand lifestyle and when they run into the realities.... Have you had any personal experience with young adults who are taking illegal shortcuts?

[Alex] Not personally.

[Thelma] Are you aware of them?

[Alex] I would assume that happens. I don't think the Russian community should be singled out as the community where it happens. People are people and there are bad apples. Yes, unfortunately, the Russian community is more of a problem maybe because they grew up with lack of any morals, any religion, any values...so for them there is no issue whether to steal is wrong or not wrong. Whatever makes them rich or wealthier...you see they don't have the moral judgment that Canadians or other cultures might have. So that's why you are having problems with Russians, and that's why there is a huge thing about a Russian mafia that it is much more brutal than Italian mafia were. So you do have that. If you want to avoid it, you can avoid it. You just don't associate with people like this. Myself I never encountered it, and hopefully I will never encounter it.

[Thelma] Do you think there is the danger of stereotyping going on here?

[Alex] Oh definitely it is going on. In the circles that I am around, there aren't too many Russians...these people make mean jokes...they make jokes about the fact that there

is such thing as Russian mafia...but I never was affected by it in terms of not getting a job because somebody might think I am from Russian mafia... but I believe there is stereotyping... especially among, you know, this neighborhood, Finch and Bathurst, Steeles and Bathurst...but again there are more than 35,000 Russian Jews here, of course there will be a criminal element.

[Thelma] And the criminal element is not necessarily just Russian Jews either....

[Alex] Yes. Russians and Russian-Jews.

[Thelma] From your observations, is there any social crossing over between the Russians and the Russian-Jews in Canada?

[Alex] Well, there are a number of mixed-marriages that arrived here, where, of course, there is a cross-over. What I'll tell you...the more recently you came here, the more recently you are an immigrant, there are more chances for cultural cross-over than with someone who came twenty years ago, when the separation was much greater. The Russian-Jews who came many years ago, they don't associate with Russians as much as people who came recently.

[Thelma] It's freer and easier to interact and mix it up over there, so they come here with different social values. I have interviewed some of these families.

[Alex] It is not an issue for them, of course.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ARKADI [43]**  
**FEBRUARY 7, 1999**

- [Thelma] You immigrated directly to Canada from Kishinev, Moldova?
- [Arkadi] Yes.
- [Thelma] Were your mother and father both Jewish?
- [Arkadi] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did you marry a Jewish woman?
- [Arkadi] Yes. I met my wife at a Jewish wedding in Kishinev; my friend was getting married, and he invited me, and she was from the other side [bride's side].
- [Thelma] You came to Canada in 1990.
- [Arkadi] My brother here twenty years; he is my sponsor. He sponsored whole family including parents.
- [Thelma] How many children?
- [Arkadi] Two children...daughter and son.
- [Thelma] You have been here approximately eight years.
- [Arkadi] Yes, because we come in last week in December, 1990.
- [Thelma] You say you knew a little about Canada. Did you read about Canada?
- [Arkadi] No...because my brother was here and he write letters to me...he told me about Canada...what is good about Canada...what is difficult in Canada.
- [Thelma] Do you think he gave you an accurate picture of what your problems would be when you came here...were you expecting it to be easy?
- [Arkadi] No, I not expect so easy...I knew it will be difficult, but I understand it will be better than what is going on there [Moldova]...because better material problem than physical problem. Over there you every day afraid about children...you are scared to go to street...you don't know your future or your children's future. Better this problem than war problem and antisemitism problem.

- [Thelma] Did you notice more antisemitism in your country after Perestroika?
- [Arkadi] It's more open than before because, before, people think same what now, but scared [to] say because we can go and complain somewhere; after Perestroika they are nothing afraid...they say everything what they want.
- [Thelma] What about in the media...newspapers, radio and television...did you notice more antisemitism in the media?
- [Arkadi] In special paper, yes. And government not close this thing...not stop this thing...people was in street and offer everyone paper without money...free...special propaganda...about Jewish...about Russia...about Moldova...everything what Hitler did before in Germany.
- [Thelma] The government and the police did nothing to stop this hatemongering?
- [Arkadi] Nothing...we couldn't complain because same people was in government ...same people was in everywhere.
- [Thelma] You started to get nervous?
- [Arkadi] Yes, nervous because we had two children.
- [Thelma] How old were your children when you came to Canada?
- [Arkadi] When we come in Canada, son eight years old and daughter three years old.
- [Thelma] Three and eight...still very young. Did you receive any financial aid from social services in Toronto?
- [Arkadi] No, because brother sponsored. We even not try because big immigration come in Canada, and we know many people ask help; we find job and start working.
- [Thelma] You indicated that you received help from a Jewish organization. Which organization?
- [Arkadi] Bathurst Jewish Community Centre...they have special group who help people who come in Canada...they help us.
- [Thelma] Are you talking about JIAS?
- [Arkadi] JIAS, right.

- [Thelma] How did you find out about JIAS?
- [Arkadi] Because one people they talk to other people...people know from each other this...we went...we put our name...we did appointment...after, when we get appointment, we ask how they can help us. They help a lot, I think, a lot.
- [Thelma] What did they do?
- [Arkadi] They did English school without money for three, four, five months.
- [Thelma] Your wife also?
- [Arkadi] Yes, we both go. Every evening after work we went to evening course, English. They loaned us money without percent [interest free], but we gave cheques two years ahead...and this helped too much. They paid two months rent for our apartment. They offered us to go to special store: we chose what we want; we chose few tables, few chairs.
- [Thelma] Where was your first home in Toronto?
- [Arkadi] It's apartment.
- [Thelma] Where?
- [Arkadi] It's [blanked out], at Steeles and Bathurst.
- [Thelma] So you were in the Russian community?
- [Arkadi] Yes, because my brother meet me in airport; he help find this apartment where he brought us. I didn't know if this is Russian community or not Russian community....
- [Thelma] He could have left you in Scarborough and you wouldn't have known the difference.
- [Arkadi] He brought us to this place.
- [Thelma] He was already in Canada 20 years. Was he a Refusenik?
- [Arkadi] No, he not Refusenik, he lucky he get permission...because one year after is door closed. In 1979, he left Russia. He was in Italy five, six months...after he got into Canada.
- [Thelma] ...from Italy to Canada.

- [Arkadi] In 1979, most people go to United States, Australia, Canada because in Israel was difficult situation, and many, many people...and they thought that they can go in Israel anytime.
- [Thelma] Is your brother happy in Canada?
- [Arkadi] Yes...he is happy...because when he left, no one know what happen in the future...now he know he did good thing...he did right thing...because who came twenty years ago much better [off] than who come five years ago, eight years ago, because big immigration...twenty years ago not too big immigration. When we came eight years ago, we couldn't find apartment. We spent a lot of time for find apartment. We couldn't [find]...full...full...full...waiting period...waiting period...waiting period. Money price go up very fast...we pay \$1 100.00 for three bedroom apartment...we have son and daughter and my parents.
- [Thelma] I forgot you mentioned that your brother sponsored three generations of your family.
- [Arkadi] He support us...but my brother told me when he come in Canada, same apartment owner offer him three months free, five months free...just take!
- [Thelma] Just take...everything changed. Life is all timing isn't it? You state that your happiest surprise in Toronto was a lot of synagogues. This made you happy?
- [Arkadi] Because Russian people never saw [synagogue] because it was closed...if we saw something in newspaper or from TV, we wonder, we call each other "*Look in movie!...There is synagogue!*" Kishinev have small, small synagogue in centre. but it's small, small street, and many Jewish don't know where is synagogue ...just old people.
- [Thelma] Did you go to the synagogue as a young man?
- [Arkadi] A few times.
- [Thelma] Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?
- [Arkadi] No...because it was illegal. If school find out you had bar mitzvah: "*You no have to be in this country. You are enemy!*" Yes, because people no have idea about this...not just Jewish, it's other people...if you go to church...if you do in church thing...it's no good too.
- [Thelma] So religious practice was forbidden.
- [Arkadi] Yes.

- [Thelma] Before you left, did you think of yourself as a Russian living in Moldova?
- [Arkadi] No...I feel Jewish...because I had grandparents when I was small...I knew many, many things about Jewish history...and I feel I am Jewish because I have trouble in army; I have trouble everywhere...the people remind me every time...[that is] the reason I couldn't forget who I am.
- [Thelma] It took me time to understand how you can live in a country but not feel that you are a part of that country...one hundred percent Russian, or Moldovan...that being Jewish changes everything.
- [Arkadi] I feel good Jewish...I like the Jewish books...Jewish tradition...but also I very like Russian books, Russian actors in Russian movies too, because it's my culture...I grew up around this...and this I don't regret. I try my children like very famous Russian writers too; I brought lots of books. Russian books, and my son continues....
- [Thelma] Is your son studying Russian?
- [Arkadi] He finish one year in school in Russia, and here he continues.
- [Thelma] Are you teaching him the Russian language?
- [Arkadi] Yes...he write down, he reads, he speak. he understand. Now he like Pushkin. he read Pushkin...yes, he read Dostoevsky.
- [Thelma] In Russian? I can't read it in English! And what about your little daughter? Is she learning the Russian language?
- [Arkadi] She speak...she understand...but very difficult writing and read because not have enough experience. She is all day in English school. All day English...it is very difficult.
- [Thelma] Do you plan on sending her to after-school Russian language school?
- [Arkadi] No. We will keep this at home. Because if she will like and ask us teach more than we will be teach, but I don't want force.
- [Thelma] Is she eleven years old now?
- [Arkadi] Eleven years old...and maybe...I know many children later get interested.
- [Thelma] Are you a Canadian citizen yet?

- [Arkadi] Yes.
- [Thelma] How do you think of yourself? If you went to China on a vacation and somebody asked: "What are you?" or "Who are you?", would you say: "I am a Canadian Jew"? Would you say: "I am a Moldovan Jew living in Canada" or "I am a Russian"?
- [Arkadi] I am Canadian. Very fast people start to discard and appreciate...not everyone, its understand...different people, different temper...everyone have different history, different life...but everyone have to understand this because Canadian give lots us...lots.
- [Thelma] Canada is a generous country. Your children think of themselves as Canadians, I am sure.
- [Arkadi] Oh...children like Canadian more than everything because if sometime I joke and ask "Let's go back" [they say] *"No, you are not going, we won't let you go!"*...because they like...love Canada very much...it's very patriotic.
- [Thelma] They are patriotic children.
- [Arkadi] Sometime if I watch hockey between Russia and Canadian. I happy if Russia win score...my daughter [says] *"How you can do this? Canadian we have to support!"*
- [Thelma] You have to cheer for the Canadians!
- [Arkadi] I used...I used [to cheering for Russia]. She don't understand how I can...if Canadian play, Canadian have to won, that's it!
- [Thelma] You say you go to the synagogue "sometimes". What is sometimes ...high holidays?
- [Arkadi] Big holidays like Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah...but not every time because we not used this...we start to understand here about religion, but we always respect religion...now too...we don't become religious...we respect religion.
- [Thelma] Then you wouldn't describe yourself as "Orthodox".
- [Arkadi] No...I even not understand difference between Orthodox and others, and I even don't want know why because everyone have their own [interpretation]. I read books...I know lots about this... but I feel respect to all traditions.
- [Thelma] Are your children attending Hebrew school?
- [Arkadi] They are not because when we come here my brother sponsor, and he couldn't afford

everything. Brother recommend...help us put children to public school...they start public school, and continue in public school to now...because later change very difficult.

[Thelma] How old is your son now?

[Arkadi] He is sixteen.

[Thelma] Did he have a Bar Mitzvah?

[Arkadi] Yes. He asked us. In [his] public school lots of Jewish boys, 70-80 percent Jewish children go to [his] public school because not every parents who come from Russia could afford Hebrew school. One friend invite him to Bar Mitzvah. other friend he ask him if he want go [to his Bar Mitzvah] too.

[Thelma] Where did he study?

[Arkadi] He study with rabbi in Russian Synagogue...rabbi taught him.

[Thelma] At 18 Rockford Road...the Russian Jewish Community Centre...they taught him his Bar Mitzvah portion there?

[Arkadi] Yes, he prepared him very fast...three, four months...Rabbi Shlomo Vorovitch...very nice rabbi...he taught him Hebrew and prepared him [for] everything...my son accept [learn] very fast because he good chess player. Good chess player accept very fast these things because good memory.

[Thelma] He has a good memory, and he learned the Hebrew quickly. Were you proud of him at his Bar Mitzvah?

[Arkadi] I proud because it is very good tradition. By the way, I saw how he become grow up after this...how he respects himself after this. And now we are going to do for our daughter Bat Mitzvah too. She prepares....

[Thelma] Is she going to the same place to learn?

[Arkadi] She not learn like my son...she learn a little, but not like my son...because for my son we did properly, properly, properly everything...because he is boy. She is learning to light the candles and so on.

[Thelma] And then she will have a Bat Mitzvah?

[Arkadi] Yes...she like. She like because my near friend did too, and she want do to...she very

excited about this.

[Thelma] That's wonderful. You state here you belong to a community centre. Which community centre?

[Arkadi] Jewish Community Centre.

[Thelma] You belong to a health club, a chess club...you're a chess teacher...and a synagogue. Which synagogue?

[Arkadi] The Jewish-Russian Synagogue. I belong to club here [Association of Soviet-Jewry in Canada] and club at Jewish Russian school at 18 Rockford Road.

[Thelma] So you are very involved with the Jewish Russian community?

[Arkadi] Yes, because they help us too much.

[Thelma] Have you made any close friends with Toronto-Jews?

[Arkadi] Yes, we have both in Toronto... Canadian-Jewish and Canadian people, not Jewish. Yes, different people. but I saw respect from these people...they were not Jewish. but I saw respect. It was nice surprise because in Russia if someone asked me my nation I was afraid tell who I am. Here, people. it doesn't matter who you are, they respect every one.

[Thelma] Have you made friends with Christian-Canadians and gone to their homes here?

[Arkadi] Not too close. Not too close, but we very friendly. When we meet each other at work...when we go to park or somewhere else...but not go to dinner.

[Thelma] Your children will.

[Arkadi] Yes, children will.

[Thelma] Did it take you a long time to find a job when you came?

[Arkadi] I agreed to any work and I find after one month...because I not need language...I work in plant...I stay beside machine. They not even ask me or check my English.

[Thelma] Because you are a machine worker, language was not an issue. That was good. Is your wife working?

[Arkadi] Yes. She spent about one year until she find job, because she went just for engineer

work.

[Thelma] She is an engineer?

[Arkadi] Yes, and she needs English very well...it took long time to find job.

[Thelma] Is she working right now as a engineer?

[Arkadi] Quality control in waterbed factory.

[Thelma] Good! That's important because we don't want water all over the bedroom. Are you living in a house?

[Arkadi] Now, yes, semi-detached house. We bought it...we took [borrowed] money, and mortgage and bought, because now rent and mortgage the same price.

[Thelma] Smart. How long have you been in your house.

[Arkadi] Two years.

[Thelma] When I ask "Have the social workers and volunteers of the Jewish social services been helpful", you answer "sometimes". This means not always.

[Arkadi] No. Because we not ask everytime. When we want job, we went to Unemployment and they help us...and give special course to my wife.

[Thelma] Okay, so you are not meaning that sometimes they helped and sometimes they didn't help: you are saying that only sometimes you asked for help.

[Arkadi] No, no, sometimes I asked and sometimes they not help too, because is dependent how many people they had...how busy they was...if they are not too busy, they help us. If they are too busy, they are refusing or tell wait and wait. If I want I wait, if I not want, I don't wait.

[Thelma] Did you ever feel angry with the social services staff? Did you think they could have helped you more?

[Arkadi] No, I not feel angry because I understand it is not easy work with people...you have to understand [the problems].

[Thelma] You watch TV in English. Do you go to the movies?

[Arkadi] Yes, sometimes go...whole family...one time my mother invite whole family for

dinner and movie and the children very, very [often they will] think and remember their whole life this day.

[Thelma] Oh yes, they will. You rent Russian-language videos sometimes?

[Arkadi] Sometimes...if someone recommend me is good movie...good culture.

[Thelma] Where do you rent your movies...at Steeles and Bathurst?

[Arkadi] No, it's English place because close to us...because I like walk, I not like drive.

[Thelma] They have Russian-language videos where you live?

[Arkadi] Oh no, it's English...if it's Russian, we go to special store in Russian community...you are right...at Bathurst and Steeles.

[Thelma] I was in there and I saw so many Russian videos and I thought, oh, this is the place to be.

[Arkadi] But it's not good because many people who don't know English stay with these cassettes and they never get English...this reason is very important. I watch both...I like both...but Russian, just if someone recommend me, or I hear about it...but not every time.

[Thelma] You don't miss Russia...you don't miss Kishinev. You are not lonely for Kishinev?

[Arkadi] I not miss because all relative left Russia. I have many cousins in Israel...in United States...all my family in Canada now.

[Thelma] Do you write to each other?

[Arkadi] We phone.

[Thelma] The relatives in Israel....?

[Arkadi] They come here and visit us. Because they left [Russia] twenty-five years ago, twenty-three years ago...it's easy [for them] to come to us. We hope maybe after a few years, we are going to Israel for a vacation.

[Thelma] Did any of these relatives suggest you immigrate to Israel or the United States [instead of Canada]?

[Arkadi] No, they knew my brother here...it's the reason they told me everyone has his choice.

They can't invite us to Israel because no one can promise good life, no way, is dependent from you. Just from your personality.

[Thelma] There are a lot of Russian Jews coming to Toronto from Israel; they are not happy in Israel...different problems.

[Arkadi] No one know what happen one-hundred percent. Immigration difficult, difficult...doesn't matter where you go...Israel or Canada or United States...it is very difficult. You start from beginning, from nothing.

[Thelma] This is very difficult for people who had important jobs, apartments, dachas.

[Arkadi] Listen. many people get depression...but my own opinion, we can't think about what happen before...who you was before...because you can't be same person there too...you have to remember about this...why you left...because you lost everything there, not because you come here.

[Thelma] Yes, their problems were not caused by Canada.

[Arkadi] Sure, if you could have continuous same life what you had before. you not have to change. But if you leave, it because big reason...very big reason. That is why you have to remember what was [the reason].

[Thelma] And the dangers of staying. Are your children good in school?

[Arkadi] Yes, good students.

[Thelma] Do they both play chess?

[Arkadi] They both play chess and very good in chess playing. My daughter represent Canada in world championship in Paris last year.

[Thelma] Yes! Well, let's talk about that...I think that's important. When did you learn to play chess...as a child?

[Arkadi] When I was child in school, in club, because in Russian culture, music, chess, violin. everything its culture. Some people like art, some people like drama, some people like chess, but everyone likes something. I grew up around me many chess clubs was...I saw people play chess and I learned this game too.

[Thelma] Is this volunteer work that you are doing here [Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada] with these children, or are they paying you?

- [Arkadi] I start like volunteer and later the parents saw how it's helpful for children...saw how children become better in school...how they discipline, organize, improved logic thinking, improved memory, improved concentration. They understand very important. It's reason I start open my own school.
- [Thelma] You have your own chess school now?
- [Arkadi] Yes, now I have my own school.
- [Thelma] What do you call your school?
- [Arkadi] The Chess Club.
- [Thelma] Do you call it Arkadi's Chess Club?
- [Arkadi] No, because it's not my job number one...it's my hobby, plus I do what I like.
- [Thelma] Do you only teach here?
- [Arkadi] No. I teach in Associated Hebrew School after-school programme...at the Russian Community Centre Chess School...and the Russians opened two schools... Sunday Hebrew school and every-day Hebrew school.
- [Thelma] Where are those schools?
- [Arkadi] Inside synagogue in Clarke and Bathurst...in big, beautiful synagogue. I teach Sunday Hebrew school inside this synagogue. Until noon children learn Hebrew, Hebrew tradition, everything...and after noon, after lunch... art, sport, and chess, like after-school program.
- [Thelma] And that's on Sunday?
- [Arkadi] Yes, Sunday Hebrew school just for children who going to public school, who not have Jewish tradition, who not know Jewish tradition...special opened for these children who go to public school.
- [Thelma] And you teach the children that go to parochial school too?
- [Arkadi] Yes.
- [Thelma] When do you teach them?
- [Arkadi] After-school program. Principal gave me good room. I have one time a week.

- [Thelma] How many kids do you teach?
- [Arkadi] Many, many children. One group ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty children. Different school, different groups. But parents saw how chess change children.
- [Thelma] I noticed how your class was very serious and concentrating, but once they were outside they were starting to act like children.
- [Arkadi] Because these children spend more than one hour in same place...thinking...concentrating...after they want to run a little...to jump a little...because they are children...lots of energy.
- [Thelma] You're are a busy man. Working at your regular job as a machine worker, and the rest of the time you are teaching chess. Do you get tired?
- [Arkadi] When I do regular job I tired, but when I teach chess, I not tired because I do what I like. I enjoy this.
- [Thelma] Okay...so the day job...really you don't use your mind.
- [Arkadi] I work [at] this because I have to [make a living].
- [Thelma] The chess is what you love.
- [Arkadi] Chess is my hobby... I like children...I saw how my hobby help. How they play computer...they call me sometimes and told me I play through Internet with boy from Israel...with girl from England...with boy from Denmark. Because chess on Internet now it's very big opportunity...special address, you can play to whole world from home. You go to your room...you put to Internet special address...you have choice play with Denmark, Holland, Israel, Australia, Japan...any country. You can play ten-minute game, five-minute game...different, different things.
- [Thelma] Is Russia on the Internet? Or are only the rich on the Internet?
- [Arkadi] Not only rich. People who work as computer programmers...because computer programming engineer is good job and [these] people can afford this.
- [Thelma] You state it took four or five years [until you felt at home in Toronto].
- [Arkadi] Until you understand...it's very important thing...because before this it's too difficult...difficult even if you have job...even you have everything fine...because you feel not normal...because you big man and you start new life. It took four, five years

until you feel comfortable...a little more comfortable.

[Thelma] Now are you comfortable?

[Arkadi] Sometimes...not all time...like all people...not every day same...everything change. But we have to understand what is real problem and what is not real problem. That's important.

[Thelma] Thank you. Arkadi.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**GENNADY BENTHAN [54]**  
**JANUARY 23, 1999**

- [Gennady] Canada is a very rich country for mineral resources...and me as a mining engineer...it opened great possibilities to looking for a job and using my experience here...and I was right. Unfortunately, not permanently, but from time to time,I have good contract with the Canadian mining companies, and I am working.
- [Thelma] Are you working right now?
- [Gennady] Now I am preparing a contract for a job.
- [Thelma] For a Canadian company?
- [Gennady] Yes, Canadian company...in Toronto.
- [Thelma] How did you make the contact?
- [Gennady] Yes, I can explain you. I found my first job here, and I had a success, and my employers were satisfied of my job...and despite my contract finished in this company, they after some period can recommend me to another company which are looking for engineer...and now I have good references from many companies.
- [Thelma] Are you optimistic about finding work?
- [Gennady] Yes, I am optimistic but unfortunately now last period it does not depend on me. Now all mining industry in North America slowed down. It's a consequence of world-wide crisis. Now price for precious metals and base metals very, very low, and in North America approximately half of the mines and open-pits closed operations ...and there are many people unemployed I think you understand why...because salary rate in North America very high and payment for services very high too. Now Canadian and United States companies looking for success in the overseas, in the countries where labour is cheaper and resources richer...and domestic mining business is dying.
- [Thelma] Canadian domestic mining business is dying.
- [Gennady] Yes. It is very bad because Canadian mining business have a very great and good tradition and it's an old business...it was basis for whole Canadian economy, and now I don't think it's good for Canadians.

- [Thelma] It's bad for Canadians. Do you think that in the future Canada's mining industry will be insignificant?
- [Gennady] I don't know. Three years ago, I was at an Ontario conference of developers and prospectors, and they said now we need government help immediately because the era of large deposits is over, and now we deal with medium scale deposits, and expenses for development, prospecting and exploration of medium, small or large deposits same, but economical profit it's not the same. And one man from Ontario Government who presented at this conference stood up and made so ...look at my pockets, empty.
- [Thelma] This man from the Provincial Government indicated that the government had no money to help subsidize the mining industry in Ontario?
- [Gennady] Yes. no money.
- [Thelma] You say you understand why Israelis don't like the Russian-Jews?
- [Gennady] Yes. it is very common.
- [Thelma] Because the Russians are so much better educated?
- [Gennady] Educated, and for starting of their career in Israel, they need only Hebrew...and when they receive a good Hebrew, they are jumping very quickly to high positions...and this relationship [negative] is a consequence of competition.
- [Thelma] They resent a Russian immigrant moving up faster than an Israeli?
- [Gennady] Yes. Just now I try to look at [observe] Israeli life from the [Israeli] newspapers...yes, I think there is one [another] reason why...it's a good reason why Israeli society does not like some part [element] of Russians...it's the new [recent] Russians ...it's a little maybe [small number of] real criminal people who stole a lot of money in the Former Soviet Union and transferred this money to Israel, and try to do this business [again] in Israel through fraud...and this is disgusting for everybody. In Canada, this is the same.
- [Thelma] We have some [criminals] here...I am informed that we do...but there are always criminals in every ethnic group...why should the Russians be different?
- [Gennady] I don't know every community...I suppose I try to understand my community.

I think inside the Russian-Jewish community, a lot of people...and especially last year...they say a lot of people with criminal activities tried to immigrate to Israel...and successfully immigrated.

[Thelma] So they are in Israel now, and you believe they are carrying on their criminal activities in Israel?

[Gennady] Yes. By the way, maybe you remember this scandal story about one immigrant from Russia [to Canada]...his name is [Dimitri] Jakobovsky...and he was a typical criminal man with a lot of money...and he married here with a Canadian lady under the *chupah* [wedding canopy] in the Jewish tradition.

[Thelma] Jakobovksy was a Jew?

[Gennady] Yes, he was Jew with skullcap.

[Thelma] He married a Jewish lady in Toronto?

[Gennady] Yes...and he bought, they say, a five-and-a-half-million-dollar house. He had a luxury life here...but despite he had a lot of money, he tried to increase his capital. For this purpose, he returned to Russia for a short period, and he organized the St. Petersburg robbery of Hermitage, the great art museum...and he stole with his companions a lot of old rarities [ancient Judaic texts] worth a few million dollars...and he sent this art to Israel. The Russian police investigated and made contact with the Israeli police. The Israeli police helped Russian government return it back and this man he spent approximately four or five years in Russian prison.

[Thelma] Israel sent him back to Russia?

[Gennady] No, no, he was arrested in Russia. Yes, I read it in Russian newspaper ...and during the court procedure, he put on the skullcap and complained...I am not criminal...it's a consequence of antisemitism, because I am Jewish and blah, blah, blah. Anyway now, I am reading in newspaper, he divorced his Canadian wife and he married a second time with a Russian lady, who was his lawyer. Now he is not Jewish. He has accepted Russian Orthodox religion. These are double- faced people. Now he is free, and I think he is trying to return back to Canada, but I think it will be a great Canadian mistake if Canadian government accepts him back.

[Thelma] Who gave you information about Canada while you were still in the Soviet Union?

[Gennady] There are many journals about other countries.

[Thelma] So you read about Canada on your own?

[Gennady] Yes, for example, there is one Russian journal...similar to National Geographic...and I read about Canada.

There is funny story which happened to me during interview in Canadian Embassy in Detroit. Consul asked me...after he had questioned me about my professional experience, my life experience, he innocently asked me: "Do you know some Canadian writer?" I immediately remembered: "Yes, I know, Melville, with his famous *Moby Dick* ...yes, I read it in my childhood." "You know *Moby Dick*! Because many Canadians forgot him. And did you watch *Moby Dick* movie?" "No," I said, I haven't possibilities." "Welcome to Canada for reading *Moby Dick*!"

[Thelma] When you got to Canada did you know any English?

[Gennady] My English was very primitive; only...how are you?...fine...thank you...how much?...how can I get to somewhere?...very, very poor. When I came to Canada, after a few weeks, I immediately understood that if I will not receive a good English, I will have a lot of troubles in this country and no success. I tried to improve my English in the school for adults...ESL...but it was not effective for me, and I can explain you why. There were around thirty people in the class and one teacher...and it's not good for English conversation...she only all day tried to explain on the desk English grammar...and we had no possibilities to talk...it was bad...and after two weeks I understood it was not my way...and I stopped my visits to this school.

[Thelma] How did you find out about this school?

[Gennady] Oh, everybody who immigrates here [knows] because in this school was a lot of people from China, from Soviet Union, from Latin American countries...it's international...and government, maybe federal government, maybe Ontario government is paying for these courses.

If the class will be smaller, around ten persons and one teacher, it will be very good, very effective...but thirty people, it's not good. Then I went to the Reference Library in Toronto, and the University Library and asked for special journals, magazines, newspapers about mining, geology profession, and tried to read them, and created my special vocabulary...and all day I taught myself the English I needed. When I came home, I continued to learn these words and terms...and after one year, first year of my life in Canada, I understood what it was about and I found my first contract.

- [Thelma] You are really a self-taught individual.
- [Gennady] It's my way. Maybe it's not good for other persons...I can't say I recommend it.
- [Thelma] Well, it worked for you. Do you belong to a church?
- [Gennady] No, no...I not like so much religion as my wife.
- [Thelma] She goes to the synagogue and you are not interested.
- [Gennady] Yes, I have been a few times! Lots of time Alla says: "Let's go together," but it's not interesting for me. I don't understand what they are talking about. By the way, my first expression [impression] in Canada was it is a typical socialist country; it's not a capitalist country.
- [Thelma] That was your impression?
- [Gennady] I understood it. Canada life is a typical socialist-country life because a lot it's good for medicine; it's a very good, beautiful idea; but I think if people do not work for a long period and have not a good motivation to find a job...it's the creation of a parasite society -- that's my opinion; it's very bad.
- I can explain you about my experience in Israel. Yes, Israelis can receive money if they lose a job, the same [as here], but after a period of time [one year] government ask people about the success of their job search. If he answers he did not find a job in his field, the government says, yes, we will help you. You go to the special worker help office and counsellor offers you a choice of a list of jobs available, and you must agree to take any job. For example, cleaning of the street...nothing special. During two years of my life in Jerusalem, I worked as a hard worker [labourer] in the archeological exploration; in the large Jerusalem bakery on a packaging machine...nothing special...because I must work if I want to live. I think Canadian government, Canadian parliament must be more strong, more angry... not at everybody...because a lot of people without legs, without arms, without brains... of course, they must receive welfare, but if you are healthy, you are very strong man and you are getting welfare and, in addition, you are sitting in the street with a can and ask money, change, I think it is a direct way to parasite society. That is my opinion.
- [Thelma] I see [questionnaire] that you are interested in politics.
- [Gennady] Oh yes! I like to read the newspaper and watch TV news.

- [Thelma] Which newspaper do you read?
- [Gennady] Different papers.
- [Thelma] Do you have a favourite English-language paper?
- [Gennady] Maybe *Northern Miner*. It's my professional newspaper...and *The Globe and Mail* is not bad newspaper. It is very conservative, but I like it...because I am a little conservative nature. By the way, *The Toronto Star* is not good for me...a lot of garbage.
- [Thelma] You state you don't have any friends in the Toronto-Jewish population. Have you had no opportunity to meet them?
- [Gennady] But I never looked for the case to meet with somebody. My answer to your question how many Canadian Jewish people do I know is "my wife". She is Canadian now, and she is Jewish, and she is my friend [laughing].
- [Thelma] Where did you run into anti-Russian sentiment?
- [Gennady] No...it's just people...for example...some part of people with whom I tried to study my English in the school...and, a lot of people are living in this building, and some of these people I am meeting in the swimming pool and in the street.
- [Thelma] Have they ever said anything negative to you because you are Russian?
- [Gennady] Who?
- [Thelma] Anybody?
- [Gennady] Not quite...but a little I am feeling...I never felt it in Israel...but in Canada I am feeling this. I don't know why. Maybe it is a consequence of the terrible Cold War because information...newspaper, TV...pressed the mentality of people in both the Soviet Union and the United States, and this was a good source for creation of negative mentality. I can tell you one case...I work sometime together with one geologist, he is Canadian...and he is a very good man...good specialist...and I was very lucky to work together with him...and once we discuss [were talking] by telephone...and he accidentally told me: "Gennady, do you know that in America, people don't like Russians?" I told him: "I don't know why." [He said]: "Because during seventy year period you supposed to kill us." I answer him: "Paul, you are intellectual man, why do you think that Gennady, it's his main target to kill Paul in Canada, or

somebody else?" It's stupid, but it's a reality.

[Thelma] He is a victim of propaganda.

[Gennady] Yes, victim of propaganda...because victims of propaganda same in the former Soviet Union and in North America...and I don't know why...what's a good vaccine from this disease? It is a good education only. For example, despite my specific topics, mining, you can discuss with me about literature, about music, about sculpture, museums because I spend my time not only with my professional things, not only for counting of my money and my bank account...something else.

[Thelma] You have many interests.

[Gennady] Yes. By the way, I had surprise when I travelled together with one American by bus. and he told me that he worked three years in Jerusalem by contract as a historical teacher in the Anglican College...and I asked him: "I suppose you have an excellent Hebrew?" He said: "No, I absolutely don't speak Hebrew." I asked him why and he told me one funny story...I don't know if it is good for recording:

*One foreign correspondent asking people from different countries: "Excuse me, what is your opinion about shortage of meat?" And the Pole asked: "What is meat?" and the Russian asked: "What is opinion?" and the American asked: "What is shortage?" and the Israeli asked: "What is excuse me?"*

[Thelma] [laughing] Can I use that?

[Gennady] It's up to you. I think maybe Israeli *Mossad* [intelligence agency] will kill me!

[Thelma] Don't worry...I won't use your last name. You state you miss Russia.

[Gennady] Yes, because I am here.

[Thelma] And you miss Israel too. Did you like Israel?

[Gennady] Israel, yes. It's an excellent country. I love Israel as a country...but if I do not have possibilities to find my job, how can I live in this country? It is impossible.

[Thelma] You are not Jewish. If you could have found work in Israel in your field,

would you have seriously considered staying there?

- [Gennady] Why not? If I would not be mining engineer...if I would, for example, be computer programmer, good specialist, then I would find a job...why not? Israel is a good country...despite this funny story.
- [Thelma] You state you are not optimistic about the future of your children because you do not have enough resources to pay for private schools.
- [Gennady] Yes...if you interview me, I think my first obligation must be to be honest...because it's no joke. When I try to compare Russian education and Canadian education...no comparison. Because in Russia people using only ten years [to complete] high school education...and this is twelve years [here]...and despite twelve years... [by] the eight grade or tenth grade many people doesn't know tables of multiplication...it's incredible! In Canadian private or public school, it is not necessary to study chemistry, biology, anatomy, world-wide history, world-wide geography...only geography of Canada and the United States. It's crazy!
- [Thelma] In Russia did you learn geography of North America?
- [Gennady] Yes, geography of all countries...and every Russian pupil who is in the tenth grade knows geography, knows all the continents, all the main countries, and all the straits, bays, seas, and mountains, yes...and capital cities. I don't know...maybe later we will find another source for money and immediately I will change the school for private.  
Because now I am his teacher in geography...when he comes home from school, he is learning geography because fortunately I know this subject very good. And I explain him in addition mathematics, and later me and Alla will explain him physics and chemistry...because there is none in Canadian schools. I don't know what is this school...it is just a kindergarten...it's a prolongation of infantism for a long period...for twelve years!
- [Thelma] I am listening to you...and this is not an argument...everybody I speak to compares the education systems...they say there is no comparison, it was much superior in Russia...so I believe that but....
- [Gennady] Not only Russians, sorry, not only Soviet Union, because if you will try to compare education level...for example, people who graduated from the high school in Poland...in Czech Republic... in Bulgaria... and other European countries...I think it is more higher than American standards.
- [Thelma] So my question, Mr. Professor, is...the tragedy is...in spite of people getting

this quality education over there, life is very hard for the masses in those countries...here, we are a bunch of lazy bums with a lousy education, and we are living very well compared to these countries. How come these educated people in Russia, and these educated people in the Ukraine, and these educated people in Bulgaria can't get their #\$\$@# together....?

[Gennady] Oh yes, I can explain you why. It's a good question, if you are so intellectual, why you are so poor?

[Thelma] Yes, that's my question.

[Gennady] Because it was dependent not on people's mentality...not on education level...it depended on government structure...social system in these countries...because in the former Soviet Union we had not possibilities to think about free economics...about creation of your own business...it was impossible because economy without competition is not economy...it's a dead body. Yes, that's my answer to you...but if you try to remember who created in America, in the United States, very great discoveries in the sciences, it was new immigrants...from Germany, from Russia. For example, do you remember Mr. Sikorsky who created a lot of aircraft in the United States? It was Sikorsky who created from the Russian Empire the University in St. Petersburg, and during the first world war, he was a very, very famous Russian aircraft designer...and when he immigrated to America, he immediately became to be an "American" designer.

[Thelma] I am going to close the interview with this optimistic comment. I think that Canada, with its well-meaning government, has imported a lot of very smart Russians...educated people...and I think, this is a personal statement, that given some time...there has to be that initial struggle; it is impossible not to have this struggle...they are going to in time do very, very well here in Canada, many of them, and I think they are going to make a big contribution...just like the other immigrants that you are talking about...because this group is the most educated group of immigrants we have brought into Canada, I think, since the small number of German-Jews that were allowed in around 1933, before Hitler. Probably America won the second world war because of the German minds in America...and I think that the educated Russians, engineers, scientists, doctors, professors...even if they can't work at their profession because of restrictions here...I think that they have trained minds and they will use these good minds to figure out a way to have successful careers in Canada...and if not them, certainly their children will.

[Gennady] Yes. I am not afraid about me, about my wife here, because we have strong

motivation for careers in Canada...and in addition to this strong motivation, we have enough background...but I don't know what my son will do here if we will have not the possibilities to give him a good education...I don't know...and in this area, I have not optimism...because money is only money...but if the education system is not quite well [mediocre]...I am sorry that I am so critical of Canadian life...but I have a fresh view...you were born in Canada...you are living here all your life...if you immediately came to another country you will have additional vision.

[Thelma] You look at our condition with fresh eyes.

[Gennady] Why I am criticizing this country is because I have seriously decided to stay here, and my son will be here, and his children will be here...this is now my country and I must think about this...where are we going...where is Canada going? I have not seriously decided to become the Prime Minister of Canada...but as a citizen I must think about these things.

[Thelma] A good note to end this interview on.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ILIA [47]**  
**FEBRUARY 2, 1999**

- [Thelma] If in 1990 you could have immigrated to Canada, would you have chosen to come here rather than Israel?
- [Ilia] Maybe...I don't know...not necessarily [laughing].
- [Thelma] You learned to speak some Hebrew in Israel?
- [Ilia] Yes...my Hebrew is not so good...but yes, I could...I still remember.
- [Thelma] You loved the Red Sea, the Mediterranean....
- [Ilia] It was wonderful! My son lives in Eilat with my first wife and her husband.
- [Thelma] How old is your son?
- [Ilia] Seventeen. He is a student. He is going to come here as a guest to visit me, and M's son will come soon in the summertime.
- [Thelma] You state that your worst surprise in Israel was the "contradictions between different ethnic groups of Jews."
- [Ilia] The cultures are very different...everybody is mixed up.
- [Thelma] Did you personally experience any anti-Russian sentiment?
- [Ilia] Yes, yes... but it was not so serious...it was not so awful, but yes, I experienced it. If I had bought an apartment on time [earlier] in Israel, maybe I wouldn't have that [experience] in Israel, but as I didn't do that, the prices started to go up...it was hard to pay the rent...and I was a little bit isolated from the Sabras [Israeli-born] because me and my wife, we used to work in the Russian-language school there, and I used to work for an American organization there, and it was not normal because I felt a foreigner living there because I didn't have any contact with the true Israelis.
- [Thelma] The true Israelis...because even in your work you were dealing with Russian immigrants...night and day you were in the Russian community.
- [Ilia] Yes, yes. Maybe I could [have] become a part of the society.

- [There]            There was no pressure put upon you to stay in Israel?
- [Ilia]             No, no.
- [Thelma]          You thought you knew a lot about Canada before you came here?
- [Ilia]             Not so much. I tried to grab information wherever I could.
- [Thelma]          You believe your information was correct?
- [Ilia]             It was fairly accurate. I didn't have too many illusions because this is my second immigration.
- [Thelma]          You have received help from JIAS and the City of Toronto. You state that you think that Canadians are "cold"?
- [Ilia]             Not all of them.
- [Thelma]          Is it difficult to meet people?
- [Ilia]             Yes, all my friends are in my own community. So, I was invited by Jewish families on Jewish holidays, but it just was from time-to-time...occasionally.
- [Thelma]          You go to synagogue "sometimes". Do you attend on the High Holidays?
- [Ilia]             Yes.
- [Thelma]          Does knowing Hebrew help at the synagogue?
- [Ilia]             Sometimes...but usually I go to Russian synagogue with Russian rabbi.
- [Thelma]          You belong to the Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst Street and you belong here [Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada]. Do you like this organization? Do you come to lectures?
- [Ilia]             Yes, I come to lectures because often they are very pleasant...yes, and very helpful. So I organized a Russian literature little club here, and now we are trying to co-operate with them, and I think it will be fruitful.
- [Thelma]          I am hearing that many Russian immigrants are starved for some quality Russian-language reading material.

- [Ilia] As a matter of fact, I have been translating poetry...American and British poetry...and from Hebrew and from Ukrainian into Russian, yes, for many years. I have been published a lot.
- [Thelma] From Hebrew and from English into Russian?
- [Ilia] Keats, Shelley, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost's poetry...into Russian.
- [Thelma] I know of one immigrant...he has only been here a few months...he was a publisher in Russia and Israel...who is in the process of putting together a cultural magazine.
- [Ilia] Oh, I know him! Of course. I know him very well! He is my friend...and my translations will be published in his magazine. Yes, very soon. I hope he will be successful. He is a very skillful person and very energetic.
- [Thelma] Do you and your wife have the same doctor and dentist? Are they Russian?
- [Ilia] My wife hasn't gone to dentist while living here. I have a dentist...he is a Korean person...very good dentist...as for Russian, yes, we [both] have the same family doctor. My Russian doctor has more than five thousand patients! He has been living in Canada for about thirty years. He trained both in Russia and in Canada. He works alone, just with two assistants. His office is just up here, beyond [north of Steeles on Bathurst St.] Steeles Avenue.
- [Thelma] You state your friends are Russian-Jews from Israel and from the Former Soviet Union.
- [Ilia] I am looking for contacts with Canadian poets, I would like to translate Canadian poetry into Russian.
- [Thelma] You should get in touch with the English Department at the University of Toronto or York University...they have large English Departments...why not? They know who the Canadian poets are...and they know who is writing...and sometimes they are poets themselves, working as academics because they can't make any money as poets. Right?
- [Ilia] [Laughing] Yes, it is impossible to make a living as a poet.
- [Thelma] So you have no Canadian-Jewish friends?
- [Ilia] Unfortunately, no.

- [Thelma] Are the Toronto-Jews you have met friendly?
- [Ilia] Yes.
- [Thelma] You say you have experienced some antisemitism here.
- [Ilia] Yes.
- [Thelma] Where?
- [Ilia] Well...when I tried to get welfare, yes, and the social worker was a black woman, yes, and she was very tough, and I asked for her supervisor...after that she told me...you may complain to your Mayor Mel Lastman. It wasn't pleasant.
- [Thelma] Did she eventually give you what you needed?
- [Ilia] Yes, eventually, but I had to turn to the Deputy of the Province.
- [Thelma] She did not make it easy for you.
- [Ilia] I am not a man of scandal, you see, but I had to do this because I had no choice.
- [Thelma] Since then have things been running smoothly?
- [Ilia] Yes.
- [Thelma] Like many people, you have not found work in your own field. That is too bad.
- [Ilia] I used to work as a lawyer's assistant here, and from time to time he calls me in when he needs my help to translate a document or to translate interviews, but it happens not so often.
- [Thelma] Is he an immigration lawyer?
- [Ilia] Yes.
- [Thelma] Have you talked to other immigration lawyers?
- [Ilia] Yes. I am going to take a paralegal course because I have an idea how to deal

with immigrants, and it's a good idea, because there are now so many people from the FSU and Israel that are coming.

[Thelma] You state you took a software testing course. Are you looking for work?

[Ilia] I am looking for a job, but I don't think that will be my profession because I do not like it...it is too boring [laughing]... unless I have no choice. I am losing my skills...I would like to teach English but, yes, the schools are overcrowded and positions are cut.

[Thelma] Have you considered tutoring Canadian kids...they also need help with English. Why don't you get in touch with a tutorial service?

[Ilia] You're kidding...they will never hire me because their English is natural. You see, I can't teach with Russian accent. My Russian accent betrays me.

[Thelma] Canada is a country full of accents...don't get paranoid about that. Henry Kissinger has a strong German accent. We have Chinese professors teaching at our universities with difficult accents. I had a Jamaican teacher at Seneca College...he taught sociology...he had a difficult accent...children don't care.

[Thelma] You state that "yes" you miss Russia, and "yes" you miss Israel. Do you sometimes regret leaving Russia?

[Ilia] Sometimes...I would like to visit Russia again. While living in Israel I used to visit Ukraine. I was born there and I lived there for many years...then I moved to Russia because my second wife is a Moscovite. I would like to visit Moscow in order to see the difference because everything has changed. Maybe I will be shocked.

[Thelma] Where did you meet your wife?

[Ilia] Not in Moscow. I was working in Chernobyl, which was a very dangerous area, so I was given the opportunity to go free to a healthy resort in the Caucasus [mountain range in the South-West former Soviet Union]. There I met Marina on my vacation...and in three or four days she left for Moscow. After that she visited me and I visited her, and we decided to marry. When we visited London, we were staying there with a British family, not far from London, and they are asking me this same question [Where did you meet your wife?] I know there is an international word "sanatorium", in Russian it is "sanatori", and I told them we met in a sanatorium. After that I thought they were very terrified of us. It's a good thing I asked them what happened, otherwise they would have been afraid to stay with us.

- [Thelma] They thought sanatorium was a hospital?
- [Ilia] A hospital for crazy people...I didn't know that...we call a spa a sanatori.
- [Thelma] Are you still optimistic about your future in Canada?
- [Ilia] Yes, I like this country...it is very peaceful.
- [Thelma] Do you think your son will come here?
- [Ilia] We have two sons living in Israel...my wife's son, and I have a son living there also. My son wants to go into the army, first of all. I said to him so: "Until you are nineteen, I have an opportunity to bring you here." He decided he wants to go to the Israeli army first of all, and then he'll make a decision. It's up to him, he is grown up.
- [Thelma] M's son is also thinking about coming to Canada?
- [Ilia] I don't know...he was thinking about that maybe two years ago, but now he has found there [Israel] a very good position as a programmer.
- [Thelma] Perhaps he has a girlfriend?
- [Ilia] This is a big tragedy because his wife didn't want to live in Israel and she left for Riga. for Latvia, with their little child, and he doesn't want to go there.
- [Thelma] He doesn't want to go to Latvia; so they have separated
- [Ilia] Yes, separated. He is a very good boy...very good boy. He will come as a tourist and then he will decide.
- [Thelma] If you could chose any job that you wanted, would you still want to be a teacher?
- [Ilia] A teacher for [Russian] immigrants. I know their mentality; I can deal with their parents. It would be much easier for me, of course, to teach the children of new immigrants.
- [Thelma] Did you go see the Jewish Vocational Service?
- [Ilia] Yes...they had absolutely nothing.
- [Thelma] Did they give you any advice?

- [Ilia] To take a computer course. To try to translate. He called and offered me some unskilled job, something in a bakery...not serious. I had such an experience to-day... they offered me such a job again.
- [Thelma] What did you work at in Israel?
- [Ilia] I started as a security guard in a supermarket for two, three months...and we used to clean as well, me and M. After that I found a part-time job as an interpreter in an American humanitarian organization, and in the evenings I worked as a teacher of English in a private Russian-language school. I had a lot of private students...before coming to Canada all-in-all I had about thirty private students, both children and adults. My wife and I were both teaching.
- [Thelma] Did you like living in Jerusalem?
- [Ilia] Yes. It is a very beautiful city.
- [Thelma] Did the religious "stuff" make you crazy.
- [Ilia] We got used to it. My wife's niece became an Orthodox woman and she left university under the pressure of her husband...they lived in the religious community...her wedding was in Mea Sharim [ultraorthodox section of Jerusalem]. Unfortunately, she cut all the contacts with her relatives after that.
- [Thelma] Because nobody was kosher enough.
- [Ilia] Yes, you're right [laughs]. She said that we were even worse than "goyim" [non-Jews].
- [Thelma] In English we say: "It's their way or the highway."
- [Ilia] [Laughing] Really!
- [Thelma] Have you any predictions for the next Israeli election [May 1999]?
- [Ilia] No...because I have no idea what is happening...I try to follow the events there but.... There are very interesting Russian newspapers sold in Israel. Some of them are sold here.
- [Thelma] Where do you buy them?

- [Ilia] In the Russian shops. M's cousin is a prominent journalist in Israel. In Russia he was persecuted as a Zionist activist...he was a Refusenik. He came to Israel in 1986 with Perastroika.
- [Thelma] You know, Natan Sharansky has his own party now...the Russian Party.
- [Ilia] By the way, I was translating his speech in the first organizational conference...from English into Russian...I know him personally. He is a politically obsessed man. Did you know that he is a prominent chess player? Twice he beat the champion....I am starting to forget my English because I have nobody to talk to ...this is not good at all.
- [Thelma] Since you have the spare time, could you register to take a Canadian literature course?
- [Ilia] I would like to but it's not cheap. Can you give me some names of Canadian poets? Here, write it down I don't trust my memory.
- [Thelma] Well, there's A. M. Klein....
- [Ilia] A Jewish man?
- [Thelma] Yes. He was writing in the middle of this century...I think he has died; do you know Robert Frost?
- [Ilia] I have been translating Robert Frost...I like him very much...he is American.
- [Thelma] Yes, we adopted him. Oh yes, Earl Birney, I love his work...he just died...he wrote very excellent Canadian poetry...not too sophisticated language...you will understand the emotion of his poetry. Just go to the library and ask the librarian, she will tell you what you want to know. It would be nice for you to translate some Canadian poetry into Russian for the new magazine...I am sure that your friends think that we don't have a [Canadian] poet and any great literary figures...not compared to the Russians...but we have a few. Have you heard of Margaret Atwood...no? Yes, she is Canadian. Also Margaret Laurence and a French-Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy...they wrote some wonderful stuff. These are women who were writing in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s...so it's a little before you arrived in Canada, but its not that far back.
- [Ilia] Thank you for this list.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**MARINA [47]**  
**FEB. 2, 1999**

- [Thelma] When you immigrated to Israel were you alone?
- [Marina] My husband...but my son came to Israel with my parents.
- [Thelma] Your son was already in Israel. How old was your son when he went to Israel?
- [Marina] Seventeen.
- [Thelma] That's unusual...the grandparents and the grandson went together.
- [Marina] It is not unusual...you don't know our situation...because at eighteen he had to go to Russian army...that's why. He could not wait. My parents were ready so they went.
- [Thelma] Were there any other children?
- [Marina] Just one boy...my husband has his own son because it is the second marriage for both, for me and for him.
- [Thelma] Did your husband leave his son in Moscow?
- [Marina] No. He is from Ukraine, and now he is in Israel.
- [Thelma] So your husband's son is in Israel too. Where did you meet your husband if you are from Moscow and he is from the Ukraine?
- [Marina] I met him on a vacation.
- [Thelma] I think you had to go to Israel at that time [1991]. Was it not the only way to get out of Russia?
- [Marina] It was the only way.
- [Thelma] Did you have problems getting into Israel?
- [Marina] No, it was easy.
- [Thelma] Where did you live in Israel?

- [Marina] In Jerusalem.
- [Thelma] That's an interesting experience. Did you spend all four years in Jerusalem?
- [Marina] Yes. From first to last day.
- [Thelma] Did your son go into the Israeli army?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Is he in the army now?
- [Marina] He finished last year.
- [Thelma] He was fine...no injuries?
- [Marina] Thank God [knocks on wood].
- [Thelma] Do you think he will stay in Israel?
- [Marina] I don't know. I asked him even to-day, but he doesn't know exactly because sometimes he wants to [emigrate] and sometimes he tells me that he likes Israel, I don't know. This year...this summer I want to clear this up. Maybe to push him.
- [Thelma] Do you want him to come to Canada?
- [Marina] Of course...I came here because of him...because I am afraid for him...you know the situation in Israel...between peace and war...there is no peace.
- [Thelma] There is no peace. It is a difficult situation. Is your son 21 years old now?
- [Marina] No he is more. He was 17 when we came to Israel, so he is 17 and 9 is 26 years old.
- [Thelma] Did he go to university in Israel? Is he finished with his education?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] So now he has to make a decision. Has he got a girlfriend?

- [Marina] Of course.
- [Thelma] Maybe that's the problem...he has to convince her to come to Canada. You are a social worker and a teacher. What did you teach?
- [Marina] In Israel I taught Russian...because a lot of Russians now most of them want their children to know Russian.
- [Thelma] You were teaching the children of the Russian immigrants. The children were learning Hebrew and Russian.
- [Marina] They know Hebrew very well...I mean most of them live in Israel for some time. Their parents want them to know Russian.
- [Thelma] I think it's the same here...the parents want their children to know Russian here as well.
- [Marina] Yes. I am teaching Russian here...right here in this office.
- [Thelma] Did you know any Hebrew before you left for Israel?
- [Marina] A little.
- [Thelma] You liked the natural surroundings in Israel. Did you like the desert?
- [Marina] I liked the desert in the spring...it is beautiful.
- [Thelma] Did you personally experience anti-Russian sentiment in Israel?
- [Marina] Many times.
- [Thelma] Did the Israelis say anything to you?
- [Marina] Actually, children...because adult people they are enough smart and they know that it is impossible to create something unpleasant, but their children say things. I think now it's better but when we were there the newspapers were full of anti-Russian sentiment...the women are bitches...the people are thieves...and are documents are not real...many, many things.
- [Thelma] Did you practice any Judaism in Moscow?
- [Marina] Almost nothing.

- [Thelma] When you got to Israel did the religious community influence you?
- [Marina] You know Jerusalem is a very religious city...we had to keep Shabbat, even if we don't want it [laughing]...but we kept *Yom Kippur* and here in Canada we try to keep it.
- [Thelma] So the high holidays are important.
- [Marina] Yes, important, and Passover we did not eat bread because of tradition, not because of our religion...and because we are living with Jewish people and I respect this.
- [Thelma] Is your husband Jewish as well?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Was your first husband Jewish?
- [Marina] No.
- [Thelma] Is it easier to be married to a Jewish man...emotionally?
- [Marina] Ah, yes, yes. We have more in common...I think so. But at the same time, I think Russian-Jews they are very similar to the Russian people. I am feeling maybe more Russian than Jewish.
- [Thelma] The Russian identity is very strong.
- [Marina] But Israel gave me the pride of my nationality...because before Israel sometimes I was shy...ashamed to be Jewish. It was our education...our tradition. But after Israel, everytime I tell people, I am from Israel...I am Jew.
- [Thelma] It is easier to be Jewish after you had the Israeli experience?
- [Marina] Easier for me, and I am proud of it...I know who I am.
- [Thelma] Did the weather in Israel bother you?
- [Marina] Sometimes it was terrible but here in Toronto the humidity is bad. In Jerusalem it was hot but without humidity. Here it is like Tel Aviv or Haifa, you know.

- [Thelma] Did your parents remain in Israel?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] You state that they did not put pressure on you to remain in Israel.
- [Marina] No...they think it is my decision.
- [Thelma] You say you knew a lot about Canada before you came. Where did you learn about Canada?
- [Marina] People from Russia, they read a lot. I read many books, and newspapers and magazines...but when I came here, it was not exactly like my reading..
- [Thelma] Anything in particular?
- [Marina] Yes...before I thought that the people in Canada and the United States, they liked to work...were hardworking people...but now I see in the offices a lot of people who are lazy. It was surprising me because when I was in Russia we learned that people in the West, they can work a lot and hard and make their money...but now I see, no, they are different people.
- [Thelma] Are we acting more like communist workers in Canada that you expected?
- [Marina] [laughing] Yes!
- [Thelma] Have you had problems dealing with the bureaucracy in government offices?
- [Marina] Yes, it is difficult...and I hate the telephone system because if I want to reach somebody, it is impossible...push one, push two, push, push and no people! I think it is difficult not only for newcomers...for everybody.
- [Thelma] Was it similar in Israel with the computerized telephones?
- [Marina] No. No if I need to talk I can find somebody.
- [Thelma] Did you find the people in our government offices slow-moving...lazy?
- [Marina] It was my first experience when I came to some office and I had appointment but I don't know Toronto...how long it takes...I was late maybe ten minutes for this appointment...the lady said it was impossible to keep the appointment because she is busy, but I had to wait for my

husband, and I watched her for a long time and she was not busy. She drank her coffee and talked on the phone with her friend...because I can understand it was not business talking...it was about her boyfriend. She was not rude...she was very pleasant...but she wouldn't help me.

[Thelma] Did you make another appointment with her?

[Marina] Yes. It was wonderful, she was pleasant again.

[Thelma] Did she help you?

[Marina] In her way, yes. I don't think she is bad lady, but she is lazy.

[Thelma] What Jewish organization have you received financial help from?

[Marina] First of all, JIAS.

[Thelma] Can you remember what they did for you?

[Marina] They were first people who told us "You are welcome"; they gave us some magazines how to settle ourselves in Toronto; they advised us something: we got some furniture from them; they gave us ticket for swimming pool, it was free for us for three months, and our social worker gave to my husband a temporary job that was very helpful for us.

[Thelma] Did they help you find an apartment?

[Marina] No.

[Thelma] Your first contact was JIAS. How did you know about them? How did they know you were here?

[Marina] Our friends told us about them, and they gave us their telephone number, and we called them, and they answered.

[Thelma] Did you talk to a Russian-speaking social worker?

[Marina] Yes, all of them are Russian.

[Thelma] Did JIAS give you any money?

[Marina] Loan...we got loan for computer and printer.

- [Thelma] What about English classes?
- [Marina] Yes, I took their classes...ESL...B'nai Brith Building at Sheppard and Hove...but the classes they belong to LINC.
- [Thelma] How long did you go to the classes?
- [Marina] A few months. They teach us about Jewish religion; how to make Shabbat...but I think people who came from Israel, they don't need this [laughing]. It is very interesting for the Russians who come from the FSU. Usually, almost every Shabbat now, I have candles.
- [Thelma] Do you attend synagogue?
- [Marina] Just on high holidays. There is a little Russian synagogue on 15 Torresdale...Rabbi Gersh.
- [Thelma] You say you belong to a community centre. Where is that?
- [Marina] The Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst Street. I attend Library, and sometimes swimming pool there and sometimes concert. It's very nice.
- [Thelma] How did you find out about this organization [Association for Soviet-Jewry in Canada]?
- [Marina] It is very close to our home, and we saw the sign, and we came in.
- [Thelma] You have a Russian doctor...was he born in Russia?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Your Russian dentist...was he born in Russia also?
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] You have Russian friends here, who have come from Israel; you have friends who have come from the FSU; and you have some non-Jewish Russian friends as well. But you don't have any friends in the Toronto Jewish community. None of your friends are Canadian Jews?
- [Marina] No.
- [Thelma] Why do you think that is?

- [Marina] JIAS tried hard to make connections between Russian-Jewish people and Canadian-Jewish people...I think they did their best...but it is very difficult because there is nothing in common. I think they are not interested in our friendship. They are very friendly...we had some experience...we were in some families and they were excellent, friendly, it was very nice. We were in their house because it was Jewish holiday, but they did not say come again. It was their obligation maybe...I liked them but I don't think it is wrong because they have their own friends...why they have to look for friends.
- [Thelma] Would you like to have a Canadian friend?
- [Marina] Yes...but now I know it is very difficult...I don't want to push myself...to force myself...because [Canadian] people are not interested in me...usually they don't ask us about our past and they feel we are unemployed maybe not very happy people.
- [Thelma] They don't give you a chance to tell them who you are?
- [Marina] Because I want them to know that I worked in university in Moscow...and Moscow is a beautiful city...and I read a lot of books...and I know American literature much better than Americans...I know this exactly because it was my professional interest, but nobody asks me.
- [Thelma] Do you feel that they underestimate you?
- [Marina] Yes, yes! My Russian friends, they know about me and that's why I can have good feelings with them.
- [Thelma] Canadians don't take the time...it takes time to get to know somebody who has a little difficulty with the language.
- [Marina] I don't want to complain...they are very nice people...this is the life. I think this is a common problem.
- [Thelma] It's too bad because the Canadians are missing the opportunity to meet some very interesting people.
- [Marina] I think so.
- [Thelma] Is there something that you think the social workers or the volunteers could have done for you or your husband that would have helped you more than they did...something in particular.

- [Marina] That is very difficult to say...maybe yes, maybe no. Maybe in Canada it is enough.
- [Thelma] Let me change my question. What more could they have done for you to make it easier for you to get established ?
- [Marina] I think maybe to try to help with job in my own field. I don't know...because it is very easy to say people are not good...I don't know exactly...because when I was in Russia I knew what everybody can do, here and here and here, but in Canada I don't know.
- [Thelma] You are working teaching Russian. Are you doing anything else to earn money?
- [Marina] No, just teaching, part-time.
- [Thelma] Were you referred to the Jewish Vocational Service?
- [Marina] Yes, of course. But because I don't want to be a cleaner....
- [Thelma] They were going to find you work housecleaning or babysitting?
- [Marina] I want to say it is very difficult to find something for such person as me because my profession is not very practical for Canada...there is no place for Russian teachers...maybe that's why...they were not helpful for me. I don't need such jobs as they can suggest me.
- [Thelma] [laughing] The work you were offered was not challenging enough...for sure. You have a television set. You rent Russian language movies.
- [Marina] And every evening I watch the TV programs...I like to watch movies about adventure...because it is easy to understand.
- [Thelma] What do you like about our supermarkets?
- [Marina] Just because I don't like ask persons about the prices and here in supermarket I like to serve myself...to think maybe about something...nobody interferes with me. The variety is good but I came from Israel and everything is available in supermarket...and sometimes better vegetables and better milk products ...yogurts...beautiful cheeses. During my life in Israel, I visited England and Germany and I know what is in supermarket [laughing]. When we came from Russia to Israel, it was a shock. We never saw so many varieties of food. But now everything is available in Russia...you only need

money.

[Thelma] In spite of everything you miss Russia. What do you miss most?

[Marina] My youth [laughing]. I was young...I was respected lady...and I had my own apartment, it was mine, it was not government's. I sold my apartment. And, of course I miss my friends.

[Thelma] Did you have many Russian-Russian friends in Moscow?

[Marina] It was no different for me in Russia...Russian or Jewish...of course, the Jewish people were closer than Russian but I have enough Russian friends because we had a lot of common interests.

[Thelma] Did you enjoy the theatre and the ballet?

[Marina] Of course. I miss them. Every day we attended theater, or museum, or exhibition.

[Thelma] Was a ticket to the theater inexpensive in Moscow?

[Marina] I thinks so...yes.

[Thelma] You say you miss Israel very much. What do you miss about Israel?

[Marina] First of all, I miss my family. And I miss Jerusalem very much because I love it.

[Thelma] With all the problems, you miss Jerusalem?

[Marina] With all the problems...with Arabs...with religion...with everything. I love it...it is magic.

[Thelma] Then you were lucky to live there for four, five years. Where do you live in Toronto?

[Marina] Here...no, not in this building...opposite this building...on Bathurst Street...in an apartment.

[Thelma] You like our parks...the wild animals...the birds. Tell me about the financial assistance you have received.

[Marina] I am on welfare

- [Thelma] Is your husband working?
- [Marina] He is looking also.
- [Thelma] If he could find any job he wanted, what would he like to do? What was his profession in Moscow?
- [Marina] In Moscow he was a teacher.
- [Thelma] What did he teach?
- [Marina] English.
- [Thelma] He taught English, and he can't find any work here?
- [Marina] They have more than enough English teachers here...with native conversation. This is the problem.
- [Thelma] When you were planning on coming to Canada, did you have any idea, either you or your husband, that you would have so much difficulty finding work?
- [Marina] I thought that here in Canada they would be happy to have us because there are so many newcomers here.
- [Thelma] That we would be happy to have someone who knew how to work with Russian immigrants?
- [Marina] Yes [laughing], but they are not happy.
- [Thelma] And your husband expected because he is an English teacher, he would have no problem either. Did you not talk to anybody at the Canadian Embassy, or Immigration Canada in Israel?
- [Marina] Oh, it was impossible! They don't like personal contact...just through mail.
- [Thelma] You are saying there was no opportunity for you to sit down and have a serious and honest conversation with anyone. Do you think it would be helpful if there was somebody in the Canadian Embassy to talk to about immigration?

- [Marina] Actually...usually...people don't listen...they think, oh maybe it's with those unlucky people, but as for me, I will succeed. That's why I think it would not be helpful.
- [Thelma] What you are saying is that even if somebody were there giving them the realities of the situation in Canada, people would still come?
- [Marina] Yes, I think so. Last summer I was in Israel to visit my family and when people asked me about a job here in Canada, and I told them the truth, that it is very difficult to find a job in their own field...people became angry at me. They thought that maybe I am happy in Canada, and I don't want them there because of conquration [competition]...they were angry with me but not with Canada [laughing].
- [Thelma] That's really interesting. They didn't want any bad news. They don't want to know the realities.
- [Marina] Human nature!
- [Thelma] So even if the federal government paid somebody to sit there with up-to-date accurate information about Canada, it wouldn't help?
- [Marina] No, I don't think so.
- [Thelma] When you needed financial assistance, were the government people nice to you?
- [Marina] It depends on the individual social worker. The first was terrible...the second was wonderful.
- [Thelma] You have to be lucky and get a nice person. The service is not consistent.
- [Marina] Yes.
- [Thelma] Are you getting tired? [of the interview]
- [Marina] No.
- [Thelma] You write that you like your neighbourhood. Are you comfortable in your apartment?
- [Marina] I think it's a nice apartment, but a very old building...it needs to be fixed.

- [Thelma] Was your apartment in Moscow much nicer?
- [Marina] It was mine.
- [Thelma] When you sold your apartment, were you able to take the money to Israel?
- [Marina] Not at that time. It was the beginning of *perastroika*...that's why it was possible to take dollars out. We never saw dollars before, and we thought it was big money, but when we came to Israel, we learned that it was nothing.
- [Thelma] You are not optimistic about your future in Canada?
- [Marina] No...I mean, just for me. Because of my work situation. and because of my age.
- [Thelma] You look pretty young to me.
- [Marina] But I am not young for change. I tried to change my field, but I understood it was impossible for me to change, because I am not so flexible now.
- [Thelma] But you are optimistic about the future of your son. if he immigrates to Canada?
- [Marina] He is programming.
- [Thelma] Computer programming?
- [Marina] Yes. He is young and he has a very nice profession. You know, his English is excellent.
- [Thelma] Is your husband also not optimistic?
- [Marina] I don't know...he does not like to discuss this.
- [Thelma] He doesn't want to talk about it. It is a hard time.
- [Marina] Hard time. Without family. When we came here, there was not even one people who we knew.
- [Thelma] What year did you come to Canada?
- [Marina] Three years ago...1995...August.

- [Thelma] For three years, you and your husband have had difficulty finding work. If you had found work, I think everything would have been different.
- [Marina] Of course...because I see enough people...they came from Israel, from Russia at the same time...and some of them have very nice job. They have their own houses.
- [Thelma] What kind of work are they doing?
- [Marina] With computers.
- [Thelma] Would your husband consider taking a computer course?
- [Marina] Yes. He finished some courses and now he is looking for job.
- [Thelma] Have you ever visited a Canadian Government employment service?
- [Marina] Of course, many times.
- [Thelma] It's the same story everywhere?
- [Marina] They explain how to write résumé [laughing].
- [Thelma] Is there any other line of work that you think you might find interesting?
- [Marina] In my third year, I was agreed to work for some shops, because I wanted to make money...but nobody asked me.
- [Thelma] Nobody offered you a job in a store?
- [Marina] No. They didn't want to train me...even to see me..."Just put your resume on the table"...I think it went to the garbage in the second minute.
- [Thelma] You don't think they even considered you?
- [Marina] No, no...and I stopped looking.
- [Thelma] Has you husband done any tutoring? Do you know the word tutoring?
- [Marina] No.
- [Thelma] It's when you help children, who are having trouble with their reading or writing after school.

- [Marina] Yes...but actually, children know English better than we, and they do it very fast. The problem is there are a lot of free English classes here; that's why the people don't want to pay for English...they agree to pay for Russian to me, but they don't want to pay for English, because they can attend free schools, a lot of them. I attended three of them: Clanton and JIAS and Earl Bale schools...and I can do it again, and again, and it is always free.
- [Thelma] Where does the money come from for this English education?
- [Marina] From the government.
- [Thelma] Is your husband's English very good? He was an English teacher....
- [Marina] [Laughing] I think his English is very good, but he has Russian conversation [accent]. I met enough teachers from Russia in those schools with the same conversation [accent], but they are teaching because they came here a long time ago. I studied in a day school one time, [when] we saw the teacher, from the very first time [at first], we did not even think she came for teaching English. We thought that she came for learning English...that she was a new student. She was from somewhere in Asia...maybe she knows excellent English from grammar, but her pronunciation was so strange.
- [Thelma] It would be very difficult to try to learn English from someone with an accent. Marina, here is something for your trouble. You have been a big help.
- [Marina] It will be better not to use our names [laughing].
- [Thelma] Total privacy...don't worry about anything, I promise you. And thank you very much.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ALLA [43]**  
**JANUARY 23, 1999**

- [Alla] The best part of the Soviet people immigrated to Israel, but not the best part of the Soviet people immigrated to Canada...this was my impression...and later on I was told that it may be true. For example, in Israel there were a lot of people from Moscow and Leningrad and large cities...and here, the immigrants, especially people who immigrated here twenty years ago...they were from small places in the Ukraine, from villages, from rural areas.
- [Thelma] Some of the Russian-speaking immigrants here in Toronto were not as sophisticated as the ones that you met in Israel because they did not come from the large urban cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg?
- [Alla] This is one of the reasons. There might be other reasons.
- [Thelma] Were you born in Moscow?
- [Alla] Yes.
- [Thelma] So you are a "big city girl". You wouldn't have a lot in common with a Russian-speaking person, who came from Kazakhstan?
- [Alla] I still would, of course. I met here people who came from Kazakhstan...and they were Koreans...and here they tried for a Refugee status...and I translated some of their documents and interpreted for them...and we became quite friendly because actually we had a lot in common...we had much more in common than with Canadians, for sure. And they felt the same to me, you know.
- [Thelma] Did you come into Canada as a refugee or as an immigrant?.
- [Alla] As a landed immigrant.
- [Thelma] Your family's papers are in order now. How long have you been in Toronto?
- [Alla] Since five years.
- [Thelma] Five years in Toronto. Do you think that the Canadian immigration officer that you spoke with in Israel gave you a realistic idea of what you would find here?

- [Alla] You know, our interview was in Detroit, not in Israel...because our lawyer was from Toronto, and he said that the quickest way is have an interview in Detroit...so we came to Detroit.
- [Thelma] You flew from Israel to Detroit for an interview?
- [Alla] The lawyer told that, if we were a success at the interview, we would be given the visas right away...but that was not the case. We were in a very bad situation when we were told at the Canadian Embassy...now you have to wait two or three months...and we had taken everything [from Israel].
- [Thelma] You believed in Israel that you could just fly to Detroit and get your papers?
- [Alla] I had a paper from the lawyer...and it was all in writing.
- [Thelma] This is important because the immigration lawyer from Toronto....
- [Alla] Mr. Waldman....
- [Thelma] You paid him a lot of money.
- [Alla] Four thousand Canadian dollars.
- [Thelma] Did he do much for the four thousand dollars?
- [Alla] Actually, there was not much to do because I filled in all the papers myself...they had just to retype them. For example, when I filled in the papers myself, I always got a negative answer. First of all, because I wrote that I am an *interpreter*, and in the list of required professions they have *translators*...and I wrote that I am an interpreter...and they always wrote to me we don't need interpreters.
- [Thelma] It's the same thing!
- [Alla] Yes, for me...but not for Canadian Embassy. That was one thing. And the second thing...that even as a translator I was given only one point for my profession, but for all other points I had the maximum score. Without the lawyer I could not be admitted. The lawyer wrote a letter that I have more than...about eighty points...seventy points are required.
- [Thelma] You don't believe that you could have simply gone to the Canadian Embassy in Tel Aviv?

- [Alla] I tried it. I wrote to them in Moscow and in Tel Aviv and they answered negative...your profession is not in demand they said.
- [Thelma] What would be the difference in Detroit?
- [Alla] We were doing the same things through a [Canadian] lawyer, who wrote a letter [on our behalf].
- [Thelma] So, when you went to Detroit, you had never been to Toronto?
- [Alla] No.
- [Thelma] You went from Israel to Detroit. How long did you remain in Detroit?
- [Alla] One week.
- [Thelma] Did you get your papers within that week?
- [Alla] No. We didn't know what to do...to return to Israel...and the lawyer told us that he would come to Detroit on business with some other client...so we waited...but when he came to Detroit, he did not meet us...he came back to Toronto, and then he called me from Toronto and said: "I think it would be the best for you to come to Toronto by bus, and to wait here as visitors until you get your papers." And that's what we did.
- [Thelma] How long did it take for the papers to come through?
- [Alla] Three months. It is not a long time, but for us it seemed a long time because we were not allowed to work...we only had to spend money.
- [Thelma] You believe without the lawyer it would have been impossible?
- [Alla] I am sure.
- [Thelma] In Israel was the Canadian Embassy encouraging at all to you and your husband?
- [Alla] No...they were not encouraging anybody. There were so many people who wanted to emigrate [laughs].
- [Thelma] I got the impression from an employment counsellor that I spoke with this week, that she believed the Canadian Embassy was painting happy pictures for the would-be immigrants in Moscow and Israel, and that they

were not telling them the realities.

[Alla] First of all, you could only speak to them about such things when you have an interview. In order to have an interview, you must first fill in the papers and they have to calculate how much points you have and then invite you for an interview...but when you do the paper work, you don't communicate with them. When you apply for immigration you don't get a rosy picture...and during the interview, they don't have time for this because they are asking you questions and checking whether you are the right person for admission. You know...it's already late...when you have that interview, you have already made up your mind that you want to emigrate. It is difficult for you to change your mind...although I would say that we were led to believe at the interview that my husband would be able to find a job in mining...and when we came here and when he started to look for a job...we understood that they don't want mining engineers from Russia...no matter how smart they can be...if you are from Russia, they don't want you.

[Thelma] Where do they want mining engineers from if not Russia?

[Alla] From Canada, America...probably from England...probably from South Africa and Australia...but not from Russia.

[Thelma] Did they ever tell you why?

[Alla] Oh, because they think that North Americans are the best in the world! And even when they see the contrary...it makes them angry...they do not appreciate foreign brains at all.

[Thelma] I think you said you did not get any financial aid from the Jewish community.

[Alla] No...and we did not apply for it. Why would we ask? First of all, we had money with us...and then we got the landed papers...then after a while, when I came to the Food Bank, there was a counsellor there, and we were filling in papers about what income we had...and I wrote zero...and he asked what are you living on...and I said we are living on our savings, but they are coming to an end...and he said, in that case you should apply for welfare...and he helped us.

[Thelma] So you applied for social assistance?

[Alla] And we received it.

- [Thelma] Are you still getting welfare?
- [Alla] No, we got it for seven months.
- [Thelma] And then you found work?
- [Alla] Then I found a full-time job.
- [Thelma] Are you still working there?
- [Alla] No...I worked there almost two years...but then the project was completed ...that was a project for the former Soviet Union.
- [Thelma] It was a project for the FSU and then it was finished...so you were out of work. Are you receiving assistance right now?
- [Alla] No.
- [Thelma] How are you managing?
- [Alla] We are both self-employed.
- [Thelma] Your son is almost ten. Where does he go to school?
- [Alla] He used to go to West Prep Public school, but this year he started to go to another school where they have middle French immersion program.
- [Thelma] Is he smart?
- [Alla] He is smart, but his brain is not functioning the way it should.
- [Thelma] Why?
- [Alla] Because of the educational system here...too few pressures.
- [Thelma] He is not doing as much as he is capable of. Do you think it is too easy here?
- [Alla] Yes...incredibly easy.
- [Thelma] If it's easy...is he at the top of his class?
- [Alla] Not really, because when it's too easy the child stops being interested.

- [Thelma] Do you think he is bored?
- [Alla] Yes...then he plays the fool...and then he has problems with his behavior and he starts to have problems with his teachers...so sometimes he is at the top, and sometimes he is at bottom.
- [Thelma] Is he involved in any after-school activities?
- [Alla] Of course. Painting, piano, Russian language, and last year he had gymnastics.
- [Thelma] He is a busy boy. Has he made any Canadian friends?
- [Alla] At school, yes, but here [at home after school] all his friends are originally from Russia, although they speak English with each other.
- [Thelma] They are speaking English, but he still feels more comfortable with Russian kids?
- [Alla] I think so. It was the same in Israel, you know, and I was shocked when I saw this.
- [Thelma] There is a Russian community here in Toronto that is very established ...they have been here since the 1970s and 1980s...some of them have been very successful in Canada. My impression is that they do not help the new Russian immigrants very much. Have you any opinions on this?
- [Alla] On the one hand, that's right, but on the other hand, in my case, it happened that I was helped by such a person to get my first job. My husband wrote an article for the *Northern Miner*...this is a professional magazine, and I translated it, and it was published, and that man, who immigrated here from Russia twenty years ago, he read the article and then he found us. At that time, they started that project for Russia and they hired me as a translator. Although I agree with what you say, I have the same impression, but it happened to me [that a Russian helped her].
- [Thelma] Maybe there is help being extended and I shouldn't make blanket statements.
- [Alla] They are not much interested in us because to some extent they perceive us as rivals. Before, if a company wanted people to work on some project in Russia, or projects from Russia, they were the first choice. Now we seem to be the first choice because we came from Russia just a few years ago.

- [Thelma] Because you are more in touch with what is going on over there?
- [Alla] Yes...and I think that they created a myth which said that people in Russia do not like when new immigrants come from Canada as Canadian representatives, and that is not true...but they invented it in order to get the jobs themselves, those who are twenty years from Russia. They said they don't mind about people who immigrated to Canada twenty years ago...they perceive us as Canadians...but if a person who has just immigrated to Canada comes back to Russia as a Canadian representative, they don't like it...which is a lie...an absolute lie. And because of this my husband lost one or two jobs because they believed that myth and did not hire him.
- [Thelma] Your husband is not Jewish. Did you have any problems in Israel because of that? Was religion a problem?
- [Alla] [Big sigh] You know, we lived there in a hotel for immigrants...mostly Russians and some homeless Israelis...so we lived essentially in a Russian community, and there were a lot of mixed families there, so nobody cared.
- [Thelma] It was not a problem. Was your husband being pressured by anybody to convert?
- [Alla] No...although there were people in the streets, for example, at the central bus station...they would distribute flyers saying *we do circumcisions, come to us...* but they would give them to anybody...they would give them to women [laughs].
- [Thelma] So he was not feeling pressured by the religious community?
- [Alla] No...although those who come here as "refugees," they say a lot of things...I myself have translated such things.
- [Thelma] Do you think they are exaggerating the facts because they want to make a case for refugee status?
- [Alla] Of course, because otherwise how can you get refugee status? You know, I translated also histories of those who came here from the Former Soviet Union as refugees...I am not saying they were [all] Jews...some of them are Georgians, Ukrainians, whatever, and they all try to convince the authorities that they are refugees...but when we finish interpretation [the translations] and we go home together, they are saying to me: "Of course you understand that I had to write it because otherwise ....." The main reason for immigration is, I think ninety-nine percent people would agree, economic

reasons. That was the reason for our immigration; this is the reason for all those refugees coming here either from the FSU or from Israel.

[Thelma] They can't make a living and things are very bad there now [FSU] and getting worse. You were just back in Russia for your brother's funeral; how long was your stay?

[Alla ] About ten days, but last summer I was there for one month...a year ago, I was also there for a month.

[Thelma] Did you notice that it was getting more difficult to survive?

[Alla] In August [1998] in Russia...the bank system collapsed...so after that what I saw in December [1998] was that the situation was very bad.

[Thelma] So very quickly it all went wrong.

[Alla] Yes. But that could only be expected...if the industry is not working...is not operating, what can you expect? Sooner or later, it had to happen.

[Thelma] Did your family talk about increased antisemitism in Russia?

[Alla] Actually, yes. When I was there, I went to my friends...they are Jewish...and they told me that the antisemitism increased.

[Thelma] In your opinion, do you think that there will be more Russian-Jews coming from the FSU because of the situation?

[Alla] As I said, I think most people are coming for economic reasons...whether Jews or Russians. Even if the antisemitism increased, I don't think it increased to such a degree. Three or four years after our emigration, I came [back] to Russia for the first time, and I was amazed how the attitude to Israel had changed for the better. I myself was prejudiced when I came to Israel...when I saw there the words "The Zionist Forum of the Soviet-Jews", I could not make myself enter that building because the word Zionism for me was something negative...very negative. And I knew nothing, just nothing...when I came to Israel, I knew nothing...and some things I could not accept because I knew nothing about Judaism, about Zionism, about Israel, about Jews. I was very prejudiced.

[Thelma] You were very prejudiced. Isn't that an interesting comment. Even though you immigrated there...you didn't have any idea about the country.

- [Alla] No, we immigrated because that was the place where we could immigrate.
- [Thelma] If you could have immigrated to the United States, would you have gone there?
- [Alla] Yes...we tried because my husband had an uncle there, but we couldn't.
- [Thelma] Then Israeli was just a jumping-off place in order to get to North America?
- [Allah] Yes...I am ashamed to say this...but we did not know...we thought at that period of time [1992] that everything is bad with socialism...everything is wonderful with capitalism. But when we emigrated we saw that every political and social system has their problems...and for me, as a grown up person, I think socialism is more acceptable then capitalism. This is what I say after two emigrations...that I belong to socialism, not capitalism.
- [Thelma] Some people say that Canada is very socialistic.
- [Alla] You know, when I emigrated to Israel, sometimes I felt that I had not emigrated at all...that I was just in one of the Asian republics of the Soviet Union...but when I came to Canada. I thought: "Oh, here it is not socialism: it is communism here."
- [Thelma] Well, that's an interesting comment. Why?
- [Alla] I'll tell you...because when I came to the Food Bank, I saw there a sign: "If you are a tourist and you have spent all your money, you have the right to apply for a one-time welfare assistance." I thought: "That is crazy!" Under socialism, if you do not work, you do not eat, but everybody has an opportunity to work. Here, if you are just a stupid fool and you spend all your money as a tourist, they will give you money. This is more like communism [laughing]. You work as much as you can, and you get as much as you want.
- [Thelma] Is that what communism is? [nods affirmatively] So that's how people survived even if they didn't do very much work. Very interesting.
- [Alla] To some extent there is communism here...and what [FSU] former government workers say to me, they say: "There's more communism and socialism here behind the government service than when we lived in Russia...Yugoslavia ...wherever." They say they work even less here and they get much more [laughing].
- [Thelma] I have worked for the municipal, provincial and federal governments as a

younger person. I did very little work. My problem was boredom.

[Alla] Yes, in Russia we had this problem.

[Thelma] So, it's still the same to-day in the [Canadian] government agencies. People are not working hard and they are getting well paid. Interesting.

[Alla] I was also surprised that here, the population is only thirty million, but there are so many governments and so many ministries...I could not believe that it is possible...how is it possible to feed so many people? I thought bureaucracy was the worst in Russia when I lived there; when I came to Israel, I thought, oh bureaucracy is worse in Israel; when I came to Canada I understood that it is the worst in Canada.

[Thelma] Do you think maybe that is because in Russia you were more comfortable and familiar with the system?

[Alla] No...I always hated it...and one of the reasons I emigrated was I was tired of bureaucracy. I thought I don't want to have to complain every time in order to get what I am entitled to; I wanted everything to be organized rationally. When I came here, it is the same system. You also have to adapt to it, and to find loopholes in it, and things like that, which I hate.

[Thelma] You have to work through the bureaucracy here the same as you had to do under the communist system in Russia?

[Alla] Much worse here. I can give you one example; it's about my husband. He came to a school here, and he wanted to register for courses in Computerized Drafting and Autocad; when he tried to sign up for the courses, they said: "No, you have to do it by telephone." [He said:] "But now that I am here....!" In Russia, nobody would have told him that. If you came, of course, you could register. My husband said: "Well, what am I supposed to do?" [They said:] "There is a telephone twenty metres away from here...go there and call", and he did; but he told me it was unthinkable. We said in Russia there is so much nonsense, but nobody in Russia could invent this. [Laughing] It is like you mock at everything that is human in you; everything that is intellectual in you.

[Thelma] I think the system is computer-driven...they just don't want to...there is no human connection...this is an interesting example.

Have you made any Canadian friends, Jewish or non-Jewish?

- [Alla] No, only immigrants.
- [Thelma] Is that because of economics?
- [Alla] Well, actually, I should say that I have not made any real friends here. I had friends in Israel, but here in Canada, I don't have friends. I have acquaintances among immigrants, and that's all. I don't have any friends, and I am surprised. I think it's the system...the way of life here...that people do not want to be friends, and I miss that because whenever I go to Russia, I meet my friends and they are ready to help me whatever happens. I can always ask anything, just whatever I need.
- [Thelma] I seem to be hearing that the concept of "friendship" is a little different in Russia than it is here.
- [Alla] When I read here in *The Toronto Star*....they have letters to Anne Landers and Miss Manners...oh, I cannot believe that people can be crazy like that in their relationships.
- [Thelma] You feel personal relationships are healthier and more honest in Russia?
- [Alla] Much more sincere in Russia. In Israel there are also sincere people; I think because they have *savlanot* [Heb. patience], except there they are shouting [laughing].
- [Thelma] They shout but they are sincere.
- [Alla] Here in Canada, people are so hypocritical. They will smile to you, and say: "How are you?" and they don't care a bit, and, you know, I am so angry with this how-are-you-business that when they say to me "how are you", I just answer "thank you". Once I asked my colleague: "Do you really want to know how I am or not?"....and he said: "No, no, I just thought if I don't ask that you would think I do not want to welcome you or something." I said. "Because it is different in Russia. Five minutes ago, I spoke to my colleague, who is from Russia, and he asked me: "How are you?" and I explained to him exactly how I am; about all my problems [laughing].
- [Thelma] Here when they say *how are you*, they want you to say *I am fine, thank you*.
- [Alla] I know, but I still hate it. You see, I am a grown-up person and I cannot adapt. I know that for my son this is not a problem.
- [Thelma] Maybe in time you will make one or two good friends with the same quality

of relationship you had at home; but you have to work at it.

- [Alla] No, I don't think so. I was in Israel only one year and eight months, and I made quite a few friends, and here....
- [Thelma] You say "here"...are you talking about Russians you met in Canada... or anybody else?
- [Alla] Russians...also, you know, I have good relations with immigrants from Yugoslavia, from Poland, from any country of the former socialist block...we have so much in common...we understand each other...we start speaking in five minutes...we feel like old friends...the same type of people.
- [Thelma] Have you not been able to make a close relationship with one of those people?
- [Alla] With immigrant? No, I think because they are not interested in making friends.
- [Thelma] Maybe they are also struggling to get on their feet?
- [Alla] But in Israel the immigrant's economic situation was much more difficult and people still made friends.
- [Thelma] They still had time to develop relationships?
- [Alla] Yes.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**NATALIA [54]**  
**FEBRUARY 16, 1999**

- [Nataly] We came to Canada December 20, 1991.
- [Thelma] You were forewarned by some people that it might be difficult for you and your husband to find work in Canada...but you didn't believe them?
- [Nataly] Absolutely not. I did not believe this. I believed so much in my husband's ability to find a job...his ability to work...but I never thought that I could work here as a doctor because of my age.
- [Thelma] Did you think that you would retrain?
- [Nataly] No, I think that I'm quite good [enough] to work in a doctor's office like a helper, assistant...to do something.
- [Thelma] That was something you were willing to accept?
- [Nataly] Absolutely! I never pretended [expected] I can be a doctor here at my age.
- [Thelma] You knew a little bit of English?
- [Nataly] Yes, from school...but, you know, comparing to what we need to know, it was not enough, because we never practiced.
- [Thelma] Let's talk about JIAS first. Before you arrived here, did you know there was such an organization as Jewish Immigrant Aid Service?
- [Nataly] I heard about it but I don't know what it is.
- [Thelma] When you arrived here you contacted JIAS?
- [Nataly] Yes. Our friends told us that the better way to start in Canada is to go to JIAS.
- [Thelma] How long were you here before you contacted JIAS?
- [Nataly] Right away. The first week we were here. We phoned because our friend provided for us the phone number to make an appointment with a social worker.

- [Thelma] Did it take long to get an appointment?
- [Nataly] No. Maybe ten days, one week...I'm not sure.
- [Thelma] Were you well received?
- [Nataly] Oh yes. My social worker was the best. Nice lady. They are all good. Absolutely!
- [Thelma] Did your husband and children go with you?
- [Nataly] I have only one daughter here...the other daughter she is in the United States.
- [Thelma] Did your daughter go with you to see the social worker at JIAS?
- [Nataly] Yes.
- [Thelma] What did JIAS do?
- [Nataly] What they did for us...they offer for us program to study English and Judaica. Then they provide for us bus tickets...not for daughter because daughter went to school...and we went to this program from JIAS. When our social worker found that we don't have anybody here, just this one [Russian] family, and we don't have friends and relatives, they provided for us assistance. We got cheque for \$1500 at the beginning to help get started ...to pay for our rent...and they allow us to go to this kind of small shop to get furniture. dishes, clothes. It was wonderful.
- [Thelma] How long did you attend the ESL classes?
- [Nataly] The problem with that was this was time that people couldn't work without status. We came here and claimed status refugee.
- [Thelma] Oh, you came into Canada as refugees....!
- [Nataly] And government didn't allow us to work. On one hand this was good because we can go to ESL classes...so we got one year, two semesters at JIAS, thank God, and we got three semesters at Flemington School...and I prepared myself to take TOFEL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] classes, and I took TOFEL exam.
- [Thelma] Good for you! Did your husband go with you to these classes?

- [Nataly] Yes, because we wanted to start over...we wanted to work for Canadians, not for Russian people. We understood that the main idea was to get the language. There are not so many opportunities in Russian community.
- I was not sure at the beginning what could I do, so I was searching for colleges, medical institute...actually I went to special courses...these courses prepare for examination for doctor's licence. I looked around but I understood the main [best] idea is TOFEL and to be prepared to take exam.
- [Thelma] Did the people at JIAS provide you with all this information or was it your friends?
- [Nataly] It was all together. JIAs advised us about Toronto, and it seems to me at the same time it was kind of Jewish agency for job search.
- [Thelma] Jewish Vocational Service?
- [Nataly] With Anna. They try. They help us to prepare resume and provide us with brochures.
- [Thelma] They have computers at JVS. Did you work on their computers?
- [Nataly] We worked a little bit [on computers] in Flemington School. Computers appeared a little bit later in JIAS and JVS. So we went to school: my husband studied computer in school...and that's it.
- [Thelma] They got you started. After you arrived in Canada as a refugee, how long did it take before they [Refugee Board] said you could stay in Canada?
- [Nataly] It was quite long. It seems to me we got [Landed Immigrant status] in 1993, but I am not sure...a couple of years at least.
- [Thelma] Did they make it difficult for you? Besides the waiting...?
- [Nataly] It was difficult, of course, because you need to be prepared about questions and about everything.
- [Thelma] Did you use a lawyer?
- [Nataly] Legal Aid. It was a policy; it provided for everybody.
- [Thelma] Did you get a good lawyer who knew about immigration?

- [Nataly] I think so. Now he is on the Board of JIAS. I have forgotten his name. He is very nice. He helped in some ways. You know it was a very painful process ...especially when we met with this officer, it was a woman, and she spent [time] with us [asking] questions...she asked my husband why he didn't go to Israel. *"If he's so Jewish why doesn't he go to Israel?"* Such difficult questions. Then she asked my daughter.
- [Thelma] How old was your daughter when she came to Canada?
- [Nataly] Almost seventeen. She was quite the reason that we came. Because you know what... I don't know why...but she started to wear this Star of David in Moscow...I never did this!
- [Thelma] You got nervous for her?
- [Nataly] And you know what...she went to a wonderful school [Moscow] and the teachers treated her very nicely, and one of the teachers he came up to her and said: *"Nataly, why do you put this on? Take it off."* -- but she said *"no, no, no."*
- [Thelma] What do you think influenced her to wear that Jewish star? It wasn't you and it wasn't your husband...it's interesting.
- [Nataly] It's interesting! I couldn't understand it.
- [Thelma] Where did she get it? Do they sell them in the stores?
- [Nataly] You know, she got it from, it seems to me, one friend of my eldest daughter gave her this when she was around synagogue. You know back in 1986, 1987, we started to go to synagogue once in a while. Things got more open. So that's why she got this. Till now, I don't understand what influenced her.
- I don't know...maybe we talk quite a lot about her grandfather Yuri, my husband's father. He was killed during Stalin...in 1937...a political casualty. You know, it was in 1956, my husband and his mother got letter that it was mistake. And you know what, in 1985 we got another letter. We had started to investigate...and we got another letter with another date of death, and his picture from the prison.
- [Thelma] Did he die in prison?
- [Nataly] He was killed...he was executed...and, by the way, the way it was written [in the letter] we understood that these kind of people were executed by just

hitting by hammer. It was ignorant. So, I don't know what happened with her [younger daughter] because I have another daughter, she is not so Jewish. This daughter, even here, she continues to wear Star of David.

[Thelma] Your daughter in the United States is older?

[Nataly] Yah. She came to United States and she claimed refugee status in 1991 and until now no answer.

[Thelma] So she still isn't legal?

[Nataly] She is absolutely legal. She has permission to work; she graduated from university; she is a nurse; and now she is a manager. Everything is fine.

[Thelma] But she has no papers?

[Nataly] No papers.

[Thelma] Did you get your citizenship yet?

[Nataly] Yes...and my husband and daughter also.

[Thelma] That's wonderful. So your older daughter went to the States and you came here with your one younger daughter. Families get so split up. Did your older daughter have friends or connections in the United States?

[Nataly] You know what? When she came to the United States she was absolutely alone. Totally. I think somebody had offered to sponsor her there, but the day she arrived and told her Russian friend she was twenty years old, that same day this person told my daughter: *"No, I cannot let you come in and stay with me; it's impossible."*

[Thelma] What did she do?

[Nataly] She telephoned our friend here in Toronto...and this friend called somebody else in New York, and they let her stay with them. She spent one month with this family, and then they told her to find a job..and she went to agency....and the man who interviewed her asked *"Do you want to travel?"* and she told him *"yes"*...and the man asked *"Are you Jewish"* and she told him *"yes"*...and she was introduced to a wonderful Jewish family...and they went to Fort Lauderdale where she spent one year working as a babysitter, legally...and she applied to different kind of universities in the United States and she was accepted by a couple because she is a tennis player...and she got full

scholarship.

[Thelma] She got full scholarship because she was a good tennis player even though she was in the country as a refugee at that time and really didn't have legal status?

[Nataly] It was very interesting. She just applied and she told that she is tennis player in Russia and she played a lot at State level, and you know what, she just wrote and they accepted her! Just a little while later coach wrote please send me tape how you are playing...and she asked this man, the father of the children she was babysitting, to tape her...and she sent tape...and she got in!

[Thelma] Did she play tennis at the university?

[Nataly] Yes, she was one of the best players in university and she won tournaments and her coach was pronounced the "Best Coach of the Year".

[Thelma] What a happy thing for you!

[Nataly] For me, yes...but I was so worried about her.

[Thelma] What was the name of the university?

[Nataly] Pace University in Westchester, New York. A very private university. It was wonderful.

[Thelma] Were you able to go into the States to visit her?

[Nataly] Before I got Landed Immigrant status, I couldn't. And you know, it was a kind of tragedy or drama. We decided to meet. Our friend told us: *"We go to Niagara Falls, and you meet her on the bridge."* No. Nobody allowed us to do this. And we were on one side and she was on the other...everyone was waving and crying! They [Canadian Immigration] told us: *"You can go, but you can't come back."*

[Thelma] You daughter in New York became a nurse.

[Nataly] Yes, she graduated from Pace University and she got job and she got promotion twice already. She works like a manager and she is taking courses, business courses, hospital administration...and she is with honey [significant other].

[Thelma] Is your younger daughter living here with you?

- [Nataly] She left us December 1st, just recently.
- [Thelma] So, going back. You got some financial help from JIAS and then did you received social assistance from the city of Toronto?
- [Nataly] Yes. It was just because I couldn't find job they allowed me to do this. It's a stupid thing that has happened in Canada, somebody paying for me doing nothing to go to ESL school.
- [Thelma] You used this time [on welfare] to go to school?
- [Nataly] Absolutely.
- [Thelma] Did you take nursing here?
- [Nataly] Yah. I started from the beginning at Centennial College and thank God that I took TOFEL classes, that's why I passed this exam.
- [Thelma] The entrance examination?
- [Nataly] Yes. And I started...and all around me were twenty, twenty-three [year olds].
- [Thelma] Did your young fellow students know that you had been a doctor? Did you tell them?
- [Nataly] No. I didn't tell them and, you know, they thought that I am just retarded person [laughs] because my English, now it's a little bit not so good, but before it was just something else...worse. And I was surprised...you know, in Russia we always say: *"I don't know anything about this subject, I can fail"*...and I look around they [other students] were so sure about everything ...they looked different!
- [Thelma] Confident.
- [Nataly] Confident...and, you know what, in a while when I passed one semester and another, these people who were so confident, I couldn't find them. So, little by little, when I started to talk...actually teachers didn't like me a lot because, you know what, you know, like Jewish persons I am full of questions...because I have some kind of [medical] background and I would like to discuss it a little bit.
- [Thelma] The teachers didn't have time for this?

- [Nataly] Absolutely. They don't like it! So I had a lot of difficulties.
- [Thelma] Two or three year program?
- [Nataly] Three. All courses with all these children...I call them children.
- [Thelma] Of course, they are very young. Did you think about becoming a pediatric nurse?
- [Nataly] You know what...when I came to Canada, I realized that I need a job...and I knew from my country, and I just watched TV here, and I realized not so much jobs for pediatric nurses because it's a small area...and I think, oh my goodness, Nataly, if you come for a job you can find job in geriatric patients. This is what I was thinking. So I just take all these courses and I think it was very nice decision for me.
- [Thelma] When you had to study nursing techniques, I mean the patient-care techniques, did you know all this?
- [Nataly] Its different here. For example, even injection, you know what... in Russia when you are doing injection, that's it...here, you're doing injection, then you withdraw a little bit the syringe, and then you give injection...so a lot of different techniques.
- [Thelma] Did you find the equipment more modern?
- [Nataly] Oh, no, no, no. For me what was modern was the philosophy.
- [Thelma] Philosophy?
- [Nataly] Philosophy. Different attitudes to people...to the patients.
- [Thelma] Better or worse?
- [Nataly] Different! An example...very simple...when in Russia if you have a cancer, your mother has a cancer, your brother has a cancer ...nobody tells you about it. It's a big secret. The doctor doesn't tell you. It's cultural. We think if we tell it can absolutely destroy the person. It's very difficult psychological to survive with this.
- [Thelma] You believe that the bad news will kill the person?
- [Nataly] Absolutely! And you know, it was very interesting, when I told about this

everybody was surprised -- *"No, you cannot lie to patient!"*.

Even in VON, I am working full-time for Victoria Order of Nurses, and you know what [VON] nurses told to me -- *"What is this going on...you come to Russian patients and treat them and you just don't tell patient he has a cancer...how come?"* *"Don't worry,"* I tell them.

It's a lot of differences. For example, patient has to make decision about treatment...not doctor. In Russia I make decisions. Patient has nothing to say.

The same happened with me. In three years when I started my studies I lost ten kilos, it was disaster...and I don't know what happened...so I asked my friend...he is a doctor, and it was my thyroid gland. Later I called my friends Sheila and David F. and I asked: *"Give me good doctor...good!"* What means good for me? That I can talk [to doctor]...and talk not one minute, not two minutes, long time, okay? And David provided to me this doctor, and I was surprised. She was a very nice lady doctor...she was not so young. And she told me: *"You have two choices...you have choice to take tablets for two, three years, or you have choice to take twenty radioactive tablets...and that's it. And then if we kill your thyroid, we can't give you nothing."*

I told her: *"You know, doctor, you're a doctor, I'm a doctor. Tell me what's better for me."* She told me: *"No, I can't."* I said: *"Doctor, you have experience, you know people, you know patients, tell me, what should I do?"* She told me: *"No, you make the decision!"* It's different!

These three years [in school] have helped me. It has helped me to know the society, not to be afraid of the society...because now my own patients. I understand why they are doing these things. When I came...and by the way, my daughter has thyroid when we came...she is just seventeen...I am her mother and a doctor...and we went to Toronto doctor. We went "Hi", "Hi", and "Bye" and she told my daughter *"Come with me"* and for me, she told me, *"You can stay here."*

[Thelma] The daughter had a private examination and mother was not allowed to come in. You had never heard of this before...the mother always was included?

[Nataly] Yes. The mother makes decisions in Russia. So it's all...we are in different society...and that's why sometimes it's difficult. And these three years [at nursing school], it was difficult years, but they helped me to understand values and morals, I would say.

And I wrote a lot of assignments in English...that's why when you called me [about interview], I just thought *"Yes, pick me, everything you need, I can do this for you!"*

You know to speak in another language when you are quite mature person, it is very difficult. You have to live another life. For example, you have to smile at other jokes, you have to use other postures, other gestures.

[Thelma] While you were getting social assistance and you were not allowed to work because of your immigration status what were you doing?

[Nataly] I studied in a college, and this studying was not professional studying...it was to improve my English...and to know how to communicate in medical field in special environment...in hospital. I was suffering a lot because I didn't know how to communicate...abbreviations...medical abbreviations...it's different.

It was very difficult for him to find job. I would say it's miracle that he found job...but he created this situation...he studied 24 hours a day for this because it wasn't his field...and he didn't want to go to work in bakery...he wanted to be professional.

Yes, he was taking computer programming with government providing. Do you remember this kind of program for people on welfare assistance? There were a lot of programs. Maybe a couple programs...they abused system...but you know if you look at my husband...it's working. And then, he paid back every penny!

[Thelma] Now he is working in the computer field?

[Nataly] Yes, he is network administrator for American company in Toronto. Actually he lost his job now, but he worked for sixteen months. And you know what's happened...it's interesting story. He installed all this system in the company; he did a lot of work...so then they fired him and a young boy was hired for less money.

But, I can tell you that the Canadian system works. Thanks everybody...I can say only thanks for everybody.

[Thelma] You met two Canadian Jewish families. Sara S. and her family, and Sheila F. and her family, who were helpful.

[Nataly] Yes, it was very helpful because when you come to another country and claim

status refugee, you know I would say you can't get so much respect from people if you are on assistance and you are not working and you cannot get job. Nobody needs us. That was a big surprise in Canada that nobody needs us. We thought at home if Jewish people came to Canada everybody would just hug us...no!

[Thelma] You really believed that the Jewish community would hug you!  
I'm serious...did you think that if you were a refugee Jew in a strange land that the Jewish community would.....?

[Nataly] Maybe I thought about this...maybe...but not so much. But you know what, you live in this Russian community...it's poor people...everybody in the same boat...and a lot of distress...a lot of stress...poverty and depression...you smell all this, and you go buying only for one dollar something on sale...and you got invitation for dinner party, for *shabbos*, and you go and see these wonderful people...they are real people...you can touch them...they speak English...you can speak English to them...and they express genuine respect...and it's real. I think they are not playing...and you feel so warm...you feel so good...and it continues...it's not everyday but it continues.

[Thelma] Have both women, Sarah and Sheila, kept in contact with you?

[Nataly] Yes! Sarah and Sheila, it's [the connection] not from JIAS immigrant program...it just happened. There was another program at JIAS..."Family to Family"...and I was introduced to another family...they took us... Dr. David and Helen L. -- he is a doctor and she is a teacher.

[Thelma] Did you go to their home for the holidays...for Passover?

[Nataly] Yes, and you know, now I cannot say they are friend, I cannot say friend even for Sarah and Sheila...I would say they are a little above us...I put them on this pedestal.

[Thelma] Only because they have the advantage of being established Canadians!

[Nataly] They have a lot. They talked to us...because you know when you are depressed you need to talk to somebody.

[Thelma] Did you feel free to telephone Sarah or Sheila when you felt down?

[Nataly] No. I wouldn't phone them with this [depression] but if I have some problem I would definitely call them.

- [Thelma] A specific problem.
- [Nataly] Yes. I don't want to complain to them. For me, you know it's like indulging to talk to them. And then through another program, telephone integration, I was introduced to another lady, Freda Z.
- It all helps...making contacts...and again...they were so patient...all of them...and they accept our family...and I talked to Freda Z. for maybe one year on phone.
- [Thelma] Did you ever meet her?
- [Nataly] Yah, and then we meet, and then we meet again. She invited me. Her husband is professor in Toronto hospital...so that gradually...I cannot say that I am at the same level...but they keep me...they kept me not to fall.
- [Thelma] They were as if somebody threw you a rope if you were drowning...just to keep you up.
- [Nataly] Yes. Yes...just to keep you up. It was very nice...because you know what...I need assistance...for example, I need money to pay for education... and I went to Freda Z. to sign for me application. When I need some name to put when I apply....
- [Thelma] You can use them for a reference.
- [Nataly] I use Sheila F. for reference. It's very important! And they treat me very nicely...like a doctor...not like somebody who is on welfare...you feel so good. For example, for first sader I was with one family...for second sader I was with another family...and it's good.
- [Thelma] You weren't sitting by yourselves in an apartment in a strange country.
- [Nataly] It gave me more than not being alone. I started accepting these Jewish values. I can see families...how they behave...the traditions. We learn about tradition in JIAS school but, you know, it's different to see it in a Jewish home.
- [Thelma] If you had known what you would be in for before you came to Canada, would you have come?
- [Nataly] No. I would never come to Canada if I knew. I thought it would be easier. I thought I need only three months in English-speaking country to know

English, that's it. And still now, I would go to ESL English classes to continue because it's never finished. When I was on welfare and went to ESL classes, I finished a course for assistant teachers in children's day care.

[Thelma] You took a course in day care....?

[Nataly] Yah...I finished. I gradually tried to find out more about this society, that's why I started with this interesting course. I was practicing in day care at Baycrest.

[Thelma] Were you volunteering or getting paid at Baycrest?

[Nataly] It was part of course.

[Thelma] You were taking this course while you were still on social assistance?

[Nataly] Yes. And you know what...I just came...it was a nice job...and then they asked me to change diapers...and I think "*Oh my goodness!*"

[Thelma] [Laughing] She's a pediatrician who never changed a diaper!

[Nataly] Everyday something new.

[Thelma] You say you have experienced some antisemitism at work?

[Nataly] Not in VON...but when I studied...the last semester I had my clinical work...three months in Sunnybrook Hospital in postcardiac surgery unit...and I work with one nurse...West Indian I think...she treated me so nicely at the beginning...she provided a lot of information for me...she arranged a lot of meetings with other nurses in other units...and we went to catheterization class...but you know what...once she found out I was Jewish, it changed. It was...I never thought before that a person can say that this person can have these kind of [Jewish] "horns". It seemed to me she started to look for the "horns", and she changed her attitude to me. She treated me very roughly and she gave me so bad notice after I finished t his job. I can see that this is antisemitism. And sometimes I can see...even when I study in college...you know what, it's better not to say.

[Thelma] It's better not to tell them you are Jewish? The attitude changes?

[Nataly] Absolutely. Of course, not the same like in Russia...but it is present in the air. It's very safe on Bathurst Street until Eglinton or even a little bit south...this is very safe and nice.

- [Thelma] You have never heard anti-Russian comments?
- [Nataly] No. Only jokes about vodka.
- [Thelma] You state that the immigration experience and the process of learning a new language makes a person act like a different kind of person than they were at home...an outgoing person will become shy because they are not confident with the language...so this business of language really changes your personality until you become confident and you can regain yourself. You can become Nataly again, once you can speak English.
- [Nataly] Yes.
- [Thelma] Does the immigration experience strain relationships with children?
- [Nataly] The teenagers lose respect for their parents...social assistance ...not working...English so bad they cannot communicate...people are a little bit mocking them...and that's why I think this assistance from another Canadian family is very important...because children can see that the Canadian family has respect for their parents.
- [Thelma] How old is your younger daughter now?
- [Nataly] Twenty-four.
- [Thelma] Has she any Jewish friends here now that she is a grown up young lady?
- [Nataly] Yes. Russian-Jewish and she knows one who came from Israel.
- [Thelma] Who is her best friend?
- [Nataly] The Russian-Jewish girl. By the way, this daughter who was the first person who forced us to leave Russia -- she missed most Russia.
- [Thelma] Even though she was the one who wanted to go, she missed Russia the most.
- [Nataly] She was homesick. For me, now I am okay...I have my environment...and the most wonderful thing that has happened to me...I can consider myself like an average Canadian...I am not rich...I am not poor...I am average...and I am proud of this. Starting from nothing...it will be in December 1999 eight years [in Canada]. You know I like to complain about the same things as all Canadians!

- [Thelma] You are complaining about taxes now...and you are complaining about the weather!
- [Nataly] And snow...and car. You know, when I came to Canada I couldn't drive a car and I thought that I could never do this...I was so afraid, scared...I took driving lessons with Russian instructor...and I told him *"You know what, Sam, I can never drive a car."* You know he was maybe good psychologist...he told me: *"You know Nataly, you will drive a car long before you own your first million dollars"*...so I started to drive a car...and now I complain about traffic!
- [Thelma] A typical Toronto citizen.
- [Nataly] It's good. When I came from Russia I didn't know anything about Canada, and now I am going into community and my job is to teach people, to give advice. to listen to their complaints...because now I am working as a mental health nurse.
- [Thelma] You didn't tell me that! [To tape recorder] She didn't tell me that! Mental health counselling? What is VON doing in mental health?
- [Nataly] We are going to these people with depression...on medication...and I am helping them with just listening...sometimes I take them to shopping mall...we go to take some coffee and they can open their heart for me...they are lonely...and this is a problem in Canada.
- [Thelma] Do they allow you enough time for these patients?
- [Nataly] One hour...so maybe twenty minutes I can sit with them. They are waiting for me...maybe once or twice a week... or once a month. I am so happy. I think: *"Oh Nataly, you can give advice."*
- [Thelma] Here you are giving advice to Canadians who don't function well. How did you get into the mental health business? I am looking at your questionnaire...nothing about mental health...I see critical care...I see VON...I see pediatrics...I see geriatrics...where did mental health come from?
- [Nataly] It happened. You know what, it was a Russian person who was suffering from depression and this Russian was put for VON services...not proper to send there Canadian nurse who can speak only English...so I thought I could do this...and they asked me to see another, and then another patient. It is difficult for me; it's not in my nature I can tell you. I am seeing some Russian immigrant patients with depression. I know this lady, she's like my mirror...I

can understand her because of all the things that happened to me.

[Thelma] You are a good person for them to talk to because you understand what they are going through.

[Nataly] You know...I went to school...maybe it was because of my husband because he just pushed...and I decided to be a nurse...I didn't think about being a doctor, so I didn't waste time. Now, I can tell you, that when I go to see patients I cannot think like a nurse...I can think like I thought before...maybe I look like a nurse but my process of thinking is the same like before [doctor]...and I am enjoying what I am doing!

**COMMENTS:** Nataly was a pediatrician in Moscow for many years. Her husband was a PhD specializing in laser communication. She is now a home-care nurse and he is a computer programmer. The daughter is a student at Ryerson University; she will be a dietician. The family belongs to Temple Sinai, a Reform Jewish congregation in the former North York. Nataly repeatedly stressed how important her friendships with a few welcoming Toronto Jewish families were to her state of mind and successful integration.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**NATASHA [39]**  
**DEC. 30, 1998**

- [Natasha] [Showing me a beautiful hard cover text] I worked with the editor of this book and actually in this book there are five of my articles about theatre...because this was my profession in previous life.
- [Thelma] What was your profession in your previous life?
- [Natasha] I have PhD in art...here you call it Fine Arts...from the leading Theatre Academy in Moscow...it is the best institution to prepare to train actors, directors, critics, theatre journalists, historians, researchers and so on.
- [Thelma] If you could do any work here, what would you like to do most?
- [Natasha] To write historical articles. I am not good in criticism of living performance. but to make historical articles, to compile something. to make articles like this. Actually I have the PhD in drama of one French dramatist at turn of century. so that's why I know French, but I can't speak at all.
- [Thelma] Do you understand French?
- [Natasha] Yes, when somebody don't speak fast...but read sure...in fact I even translated. but I had no practice at all in speaking. Not many in Russia speak French. even English not many.
- [Thelma] Where did you learn English?
- [Natasha] I studied at special school since I was seven...so ten years, every day...but I also had no conversational practice...I started to speak right here. A little bit I talked in Russia when I worked for international film festival...I worked as a translator and prepared catalogues.
- [Thelma] Did you receive credit for your work in this book?
- [Natasha] Yes, I am the author of five articles about Asian republics, former Soviet republics, like Kazakhstan. It is a Canadian book, but it is international because all these countries had their own article authors, and all of them have been translated ...but I wrote just in English...I didn't translate...the editor made some changes because English is not my native language but I did it myself...and here is .....[shows five chapters she has written].

- [Thelma] [Credit inside book] *Theatre writer, Natasha ...., theatre researcher, Gitis Institute, Moscow.*
- [Natasha] They call it Gitis, but this is the old name...now it is called the Theatre Academy of Russia.
- [Thelma] Is this book for academics?
- [Natasha] No, it is for anyone who is interested in theatre. It is the first publication of such kind because [there are] many different encyclopedias, they work as [are organized as] dictionaries, in alphabetical order, or in countries in alphabetical order...but this is countries and inside by artists.
- [Thelma] The book is called "*The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre.*" Volume 5, Asia/Pacific, the author is Don Rubin and he is a professor at York University.
- [Natasha] Yes, in the Theatre Department. I was so excited about this project...and that year he gave me an offer to prepare the reference volume... the world bibliography volume...and I worked alone on this project. I told him that it is impossible to work alone on the international bibliography of theatre for the last fifty years...but they were short in money, so I did it alone.
- [Thelma] For how long?
- [Natasha] Actually for nine months only. After he got my materials, he was very satisfied. and very proud that he got this material right here in Toronto...not to [have to] write to those republics because he can't receive anything from there.
- [Thelma] So you were writing about the theatre in the former Soviet Union's Asian republics that are now independent republics. That's fantastic!
- [Natasha] To write here in Toronto about Soviet Asia without any [reference] material. I called to my colleagues in the theatre library in Moscow and they sent me some copies [information] ...and I found in York University some magazines of theatre from Moscow.
- [Thelma] This book is published in 1998 by Routledge, New York and London... ISBN 041505933X...very interesting...good for you!
- [Natasha] You know, this is an international publishing house, so it was actually published and printed in London.

- [Thelma] How did you make the connection with the professor at York University?
- [Natasha] It was very funny...because my professor, my leader of my diploma and of my PhD, at a conference...it seems to me it was in France...somewhere in Europe...met this Professor Rubin...and she kept his business card for many years. He was a chief editor of *Modern Drama*, and this is a very popular and very famous theatre magazine in Europe...even in Moscow we had it. This part of Canada we can say has no theatre comparable to Broadway or even to Russia, but they have one of the best theatre magazines here in Toronto in modern drama, and Don Rubin was for many years the chief editor of this magazine. So, she knew that this person lives in Toronto and she gave me his business card and a reference letter...just in case I could meet him...reach him...maybe he remembers her... and I opened the Bell book and found him and I gave him a call. I was trembling...I was very worried about this...nervous ...because I supposed he didn't remember her but, you know, these are magic words..."this is the Theatre Academy from Moscow"...this is very prestigious and well known.
- [Thelma] He knew the name.
- [Natasha] He knew the name...this is the brand name for this profession...and I liked his reaction...he was excited about meeting me...so I came to the university...shaking his hand...and he introduced me to his colleagues...and that's it...but for [next] five months nothing.
- [Thelma] For five months you heard nothing?
- [Natasha] Nothing at all. It was very exciting, and he asked me some questions...he understands that I am experienced...I am professional...he has some ideas about me...but he didn't share with me...and in January he contacted me and made this offer...and I was undecided because I had not dealt with Asia...this is another culture...but he told me nobody knows anything so you can try and everything will be okay...he encouraged me...and I would like to do this because this is my profession...this is very interesting.
- [Thelma] Did you do all the research for your articles here in Toronto?
- [Natasha] Here in Toronto...and I was happy to find theatre magazines from Moscow in Russian in York University. ..and this was [because of] Don Rubin...he was responsible for that because many years ago he wrote to Russia and subscribed to these magazines.
- [Thelma] He arranged for these magazines for his Theatre Department?

- [Natasha] Yes...so these magazines even have no numbers...they are not registered anywhere because they are in Russian nobody knows where to put them. He tried to put them to library but they don't know how to catalogue them...and who will use them? They keep them just in Professor Rubin's office...and he never threw them out.
- [Thelma] So these Russian magazines were languishing here in Toronto and you were able to read them and use them as a reference source?
- [Natasha] Yes, sure...and they have some old books from early 60s...they are disgusting but these books contain information about Soviet theatre; they are disgusting in style because 1960s is interesting period [laughs]. I know the reality...I know our history...so I was able to write it with modern language and with modern point of view. I analysed it and compiled it and brought it up to date...because this information was so pro-Soviet...so slanted...to make this balance... because the theatre was a part of the ideology and to separate these two things was very difficult...and I had to take the period after the World War Two until now...and it is a very long period. And I did it... but I never read my articles [in the published text] because I am afraid they changed something after I signed it... and if it [some details] not true and something is misunderstood...I would be very sorry about this.
- [Thelma] But nobody knows anything about this theatre...nobody is going to argue about a detail.
- [Natasha] For myself I was very honest and very curious to make the facts accurate and the events real.
- [Thelma] Are you comfortable with the computer?
- [Natasha] Yah. sure, why not? I am comfortable. The next year, when I made for him a reference volume, I had to buy special programs...searching programs, converting programs...and my husband taught me how to use them...he tested everything and he explained me how it worked.
- [Thelma] Your husband taught you?
- [Natasha] Yes, that's why he decided to become computer programmer because he liked it...this was his first experience!
- [Thelma] Your husband was a geologist before...and now there is not much work for geologists.

- [Natasha] No. He got into a co-op program...you don't know about co-op program? Nobody in Russian community told you about co-op program? Yorkdale and some other schools for adults in secondary schools...they have the program name co-operative program...for two months they teach students a little bit English but more of job searching skills, how to pass interviews, how to write résumés, and then the leader of the group takes your list of companies...the companies you have to chose yourself...gaves them a call...and gets you a placement as a volunteer for three months. All the employers are excited to take these volunteers because mostly they are good specialists and professionals and the government pays to employers for these volunteers, the insurance, some benefits, and [there are] even some tax benefits...so they have the good reasons to take these volunteers. They benefit from them and they have the professionals for free.
- [Thelma] Does the volunteer get any money at all?
- [Natasha] The volunteer gets nothing.
- [Thelma] Who is this program sponsored by?
- [Natasha] The government but I don't know exactly provincial or federal.
- [Thelma] The people in the co-op program...are all these people receiving computer training?
- [Natasha] Actually they don't teach special skills. Just job searching skills as you are...as is...[in your own field], so if you apply for placement in geology...so please give me a list of companies and I [counsellor] will get you a placement.
- [Thelma] Are the Canadian companies co-operative in taking people on as volunteers?
- [Natasha] I can say yes. This is for three months...you can quit from this program...but in many cases, maybe fifty-fifty, the employers see that the volunteer is good so they offer a job. This is what happened to my husband...in maybe two weeks he got the offer for a contract...and he signed it without even looking precisely what he signed...for \$15.00 an hour...and he was happy...and then only later, later, later, he realized that it was a funny [low] salary because his colleagues received \$45.00 or \$65.00 per hour.
- [Thelma] The company took advantage of him?
- [Natasha] They sent him on business trip to Russia to mining site, and he worked two

months almost one thousand metres underground...without any insurance...without any increase in salary...without anything. And then, when he came back, he made a record...a report and so on...and everybody was very satisfied [with his work] but they were not satisfied with results because there was no gold...and the results were not exciting for sponsorship...for investment...for anything...and when my husband told [said] that he had a very dangerous job and he would like to receive a little bit increase in his salary....

[Thelma] He was receiving fifteen dollars an hour...Canadian? Did they pay for his transportation and room and board?

[Natasha] Yes, they paid for hotel and for accommodation but he asked for insurance because this is very dangerous job and they told him that everything is under control...and only when he came back, I realized that they had only travelling insurance for him which covers only accident or maybe flu...but if it is a business [workplace] accident, no coverage at all. His Canadian colleagues, they received in Russia just for dangerous, for separation from family, for inconvenience, for hard conditions...for everything...they received \$65 to \$85 dollars per hour.

[Thelma] Is this a Canadian company or a Russian company?

[Natasha] No...no Russian company here in Toronto. [Canadian company]

[Thelma] I am not going to take any names, but it appears this is a company that took advantage of a Russian immigrant.

[Natasha] That is why I was asking you about your question [in questionnaire] about antisemitism or anti-Russian sentiment in Canada...because as an immigrant even if you have PhD and professional skills...if you are in a [government] program this means exclusion from the rules...so you are the person of second class.

[Thelma] You are a second-class citizen if you are an immigrant, even if you are highly qualified?

[Natasha] Yes....and he thought that if he has already Canadian experience and good references...but they told that they have no [new] Russian projects for now or for near future and thank you for your good work....so they gave him a wonderful reference, and that's it. He tried to contact many, many other people...but, you know, in Canada they have no geology now at all. They are looking for stuff in South America, in Brazil, in Argentina.

- [Thelma] You are talking about gold exploration?
- [Natasha] Gold, diamonds, some other things...and they are looking for senior positions...the local staff is there...the senior positions [are available]...nobody can take him for senior position because he is an immigrant and he has no Canadian experience...and for those countries he has to know Spanish. Canada in geology has three targets to-day...this is South America, Russia and Siberia, Former Russian Asia for gold and diamonds and some other stuff. When they needed somebody speaking Russian for Russian projects, he was available...but the situation in Russia is so tough...nobody can get their money even if there is gold, and even if there are diamonds. They cannot get anything in stock...so all the projects have failed...and they don't need him [husband]. My contract was continued until this March (1998). We had some savings and we spent savings on living until August and in August we had to apply for welfare. My husband started in April this computer programming course. For four months he had tried to find something, but nothing...and no income.
- [Thelma] Who is paying for his computer course?
- [Natasha] He applied for OSAP loan and they paid for tutorial [tuition] fee only and we had nothing for living because we had spent our savings. so we applied for [social] assistance.
- [Thelma] Okay...so you lived on your savings...the OSAP paid for his tuition...and eventually you had to apply for help.
- [Natasha] Now it is not welfare, it is Ontario Workfare...this June there is a new program, Workfare, so nobody can stay at home just looking for job. You have to study somewhere to get professional training, or you have to volunteer or participate in a program that they send you to.
- [Thelma] Is his going to school considered Workfare?
- [Natasha] No. He applied for OSAP and this is his decision...and he started in April. and he continues to next April, so it is a one-year program...and Workfare paid for my courses. They sent me in the end of September [1998].
- [Thelma] Ontario Workfare paid for your courses. What kind of courses did you take?
- [Natasha] That was Digital Media Studios and I studied CD ROMs title productions ...so I can make a CD ROM. I was taught some special programs for

animation...for editing images...like photoshop.

[Thelma] Where did you do this?

[Natasha] In Digital Media Studios. It is the training department of a huge CD ROM production company named Hoffman and Associations...they are really one of the leading companies in this field. Actually, before this course I didn't even know the word CD ROM [laughs]. I enjoyed the course very much. I tried to enroll in the program of computer graphics, graphic designer, but there was no room, and I had to be registered somewhere and they offered me this one: "Maybe you want this one?" "What's that?" I asked. They told me "Oh, this is upcoming business and la, la, la and I said "Okay, let's try, why not!"

[Thelma] Did you like the course?

[Natasha] I enjoyed it. It was very interesting and I enjoyed the teachers...the guys beside me...they were just 20, or a little bit more, and I was like their grandmother.

[Thelma] How old are you?

[Natasha] Actually, a couple of days ago, I turned 39...next year 40...(sighs).

[Thelma] Thirty-nine sounds good to me! How old is your husband?

[Natasha] Forty-two now.

[Thelma] Oh, you two are just "young stuff."

[Natasha] Oh, thank you...but not enough young to start just from scratch in another field. To be a beginner at this age is difficult...especially when you know nothing about Programming...I am trained in Humanities....

[Thelma] From Humanities to Digital Technology!

[Natasha] It was a 360-degree change.

[Thelma] Is there any work available for you in this area?

[Natasha] In the last three weeks I tried hard to find something...through Internet...through special web site. You know, this is the season of holidays, and I finished this [course] 15th December. I will start looking again January 4 because as this is holiday

season, there is nothing. I sent maybe forty résumés and cover letters to different companies, and I received only three answers. One...thank you for interest, keep on file...the second one asked me who will pay for my internship...I even applied not for entry-level position but for internship...because I am not ready even for entry-level position...two-month courses are very short...they are very concentrated...but I need experience. I can't even tell what position I apply for...interface designer, image editing, sound editing, animating, story writing because I can do little bit this, little bit that, but I am not enough experienced in any specific field.

[Thelma] You need a chance to get started and learn on the job.

[Natasha] Just today I received an answer that one guy is ready to meet with me and I sent him an e-mail: “[I am] just ready anytime, anywhere.” Of course, I will go for an interview if he sends me the time and place. It seems to me, most of these companies are a one-man show...you know...these are very experienced workers...the main orchestra...who can do this, and this, and this, professionally, and they are doing everything themselves. They don't need somebody to look over their shoulder to what they are doing.

[Thelma] These are not large companies?

[Natasha] There are some big companies but, you know, seventy people is a huge company. One hundred and thirty people is quite huge company with management...with art directors, with accountants...with secretaries, and so on. But mostly it is eight to ten people with one man who got the project...who got the clients...and he compiles the team. He makes some phone calls to his pals, who he knows from previous jobs: “Are you available? Come on.”

[Thelma] And they make a compact disc. Are these educational CDs?

[Natasha] What I would like to do most...it's a new field, very new. “Edutainment.” I like this. It is very interesting because this is education through game...not stupid game with bang, bang, bang and something crazy...but where they can learn something. I saw some examples of this type of production at Hoffman and Associates. For example, I told my son about “Mediaeval Times.” You can be a conqueror, a knight, a soldier, but you can also work in mediaeval bakery, or with mediaeval shoemaker. You can learn how they fought...with what...with knights, with horses...how they built their houses in countryside and in cities...how did this develop...and how kings appeared...because it was the time in Europe when there were no kings at all, just landlords and farmers. A kid can learn something of the history...because they don't know this history from the schools at all. They can learn about astronomy, about mediaeval times, about literature...the whole Shakespeare for kids 7 to 12, 12 to 16...the history of pin-up girls from Hollywood...it's wonderful! It is for all different ages. They have even some special games for from-one-year-of age...they don't even need to click, but to put their finger to something pink, to something yellow...shapes and sizes. So, I would like to do something like this because the crazy games are not for me.

and I would like to put somewhere my knowledge.

[Thelma] You can use some of the background you have in the Theatre.

[Natasha] Maybe not, but in film history, I know this well enough. For example, I picked up some CD ROMS from Public Library. They are awful because you click and you have some bad, bad images...nothing...you cannot even recognize what is that.

[Thelma] How do you get into a company that is producing quality educational CDs? You have to find out who is producing them.

[Natasha] I already know. But they don't need me...I am trying!

[Thelma] To whom do you send your résumé ..the Personnel Departments?

[Natasha] No. I try to encourage myself [be proactive]. I make a call to learn the Art Director's name or Production Manager's name, but actually the Secretary always receives the résumé, and where it is going. I don't know. One nice person from Human Resources of a big company I would like to come to...she gave me a call...and we spoke to each other and [she said] "Oh. I haven't seen your résumé," but she called me, and she knew my telephone number. She said: "Could you send me your résumé once again?" I said: "Sure I can." She said: "I know this sounds crazy, but we have no position even for internship. Who will pay insurance if you hurt yourself in your working place, etc?" I said: "I don't know, but I will not apply for insurance if I hurt myself near the computer."

[Thelma] You have OHIP. Is she talking about Workmen's Compensation?

[Natasha] She was worrying if her boss will not suffer from hiring me for internship. I don't know, but she is a very nice person. By the way, one of the very best web pages belongs to this company. Its name is I.C.E. They have very friendly web page with friendly articles. You know, as if a human being did this...designed this...and wrote those articles, because in most cases, it is not a human being that did this...some machine created that with some ugly words and expressions: "Oh, wow! Kick the ass! Oh, wow!"

[Thelma] It's a whole new world for me.

[Natasha] I am excited about it...I am interested in it...and I would like to start. I am not professional but I have some ideas. I am not sure if I have good ideas because until you try, you don't know. I need a chance. I need some friendly guy who can show me...some practicing, and that's it. I have ideas but I don't know how to put them. I have to know the tools. And sometimes I know the tools, but I have no ideas [laughs].

[Thelma] Are there any more courses you can take to become more knowledgeable?

[Natasha] I have no money to pay for more courses. I am eligible to be paid for the courses only once in two years, and my limit is over. I told them that this field is very specific...I need a little bit more from another course; two more programs; two more weeks. [They told her] "We can't pay for this." Okay, can't is can't. I need somebody to show me. I can't learn from a book like my husband can. This is not my temperment. I need somebody to show me, and then I can take book because I already know what it is about...and I try.

[Thelma] Perhaps the people at I.C.E. would let you do an apprenticeship there?

[Natasha] What is difference between apprenticeship and internship?

[Thelma] An apprenticeship is where you are working at a job and they either pay you nothing. or they pay you a very small amount, but their responsibility is to teach you, and your responsibility is to work hard for very little money. But this is an opportunity to learn.

[Natasha] I would like to...but...during my courses, and even after, every Saturday, we had a special workshop with a lady who is from human resources of some huge company...I don't know where...she is very experienced in hiring, in interviewing, in résumés... She said that my résumé was wonderful...she made some slight changes...and she said you can apply for entry-level position, if you feel confident. You can apply for senior level too...go on...go ahead...but it would be better apply for internship because everybody loves this...and she encouraged me...and I was sure that to work for nothing, they would take me. But no, not at all. They need small team...ten people, eight people...they don't need me. Mostly these are small teams for special projects and then the project finishes.... Sometimes the same team starts another project and somebody may be replaced....

[Thelma] It is very hard to get your foot in the door.

[Natasha] To keep your foot in the door...to keep peace in the family...to keep on track! You know, office ethic [etiquette] in Canada is absolutely different than it was in Russia. We don't know the word résumé. It is word of mouth. Your friend calls you that there is a position available. You give a call to human resources. You are taken or not. Only in the last few years, when joint ventures appeared...when international or foreign companies got their affiliations in Moscow...then they tried to implement this word résumé. We said: "What?" But we already tried there...and we had these résumés...they were ridiculous. When we came here with these résumés, we were sure they are perfect...and it was so funny [laughs].

[Thelma] The résumés were not good? You had to fix them?

[Natasha] Absolutely. Once we realized that whatever you have in résumé exaggerate one hundred percent more...lie anywhere you can.

[Thelma] Make yourself look as good as you can!

[Natasha] So you add some years of experience...taking these years from anywhere. You must have at least three or maybe five different résumés...and each one should sound like truth.

[Thelma] That's called slanting your résumé.

[Natasha] It should be flexible [laughing].

[Thelma] Let's talk for a few minutes about your friends...who you are socializing with. Did you have friends here before you arrived?

[Natasha] No. One family my husband made acquaintance just in Canadian Embassy in Moscow. It was one week before their departure. We didn't know them at all...just we have something from their mother to bring here...yes, they are in Toronto. We gave them a call from Moscow: "Could you meet us?" My son was four years old then...the plane arrives at night...so we have no place [to stay]...nothing.

[Thelma] Did they come to meet you?

[Natasha] Yes. they had already a minivan. They were only four months here but they came here with money, so they had already bought their condominium.

COMMENTS: There were technical problems with balance of tape, so I am reporting from memory.

Natasha and her husband met me together at their apartment door. The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. They were a handsome couple; she is 39 years old; he is a few years older. I was introduced to their blonde and beautiful seven-year-old son. The living room was pleasant with furniture from IKEA. A small, decorated Christmas tree stood on a little round table and festive lights were strung across the living room curtains. Natasha served tea and cookies before we began the interview. Her husband excused himself to retire to the son's bedroom, where he does his computer studies homework. The son now sleeps in a little alcove off the living room so his father can study.

Natasha has since her job with York University been an office worker and admitted to doing house cleaning. She is having difficulty finding an entry-level position with a company that manufactures CD ROMs.

Natasha is her husband's second wife. He left a grown son from his previous marriage in the Ukraine. Natasha and husband both grew up and went to school in Kiev. She was a friend

of his younger sister. Natasha stated that she experienced much anti-Semitism in Kiev, particularly in primary school. She said that was cursed with a Jewish appearance, and because she was a gifted student, the other children were jealous and cruel to her. However, her teachers treated her well. As a little girl she was protected by a large Ukrainian boy, who liked her. She credits this boy with "saving" her in primary school. By high school, she had grown tall and was able to take care of herself.

Natasha moved to Moscow to attend university and enjoyed life there very much. Although life was very restricted under communism, the system allowed the masses to avail themselves of education, sports activities, music, theatre...and there always was a job.

Natasha's father was an architect, who designed public buildings in the Ukraine. He did not belong to the Communist Party. Her mother was a teacher, who did join the Party, to help find work in her profession. Currently Natasha has a step-mother. She also has an older sister in Moscow with whom she does not communicate. The father and step-mother arrived in Toronto a few months ago as guests of Natasha and her husband, and then applied to remain in Canada as Refugees. They believe they have nothing to return to in Kiev. There is no work and a freezing apartment. They are awaiting their Refugee Board hearing. Her parents are well looked after by the Province. Food and shelter is provided them. They are receiving welfare as well as medical and hospital benefits.

Natasha is very frustrated that she cannot find work. She has very few friends because she has no money for a social life. She has not lost hope that she will find work in the CD field. Clothes are purchased at used-clothing stores. Natasha is the family barber. There is no money for barbers or hairdressers. She must be very talented because the whole family looks very attractive.

Natasha and her husband, who is Ukrainian Orthodox, were married in the Orthodox Church and her son has been baptized. Her Jewishness has always been a problem for her. She received no Jewish education and seems to be very alienated from Jewry. She knows no Toronto Jews, and stated the Russian Jews avoid her when they learn that her husband and son are Christians. She talked about a "glass wall" between her and other Russian Jews. She stated that she worked for a month in the office of a Toronto Jewish agency. Her co-workers were very friendly and helpful, until they learned that she had a Christian husband.

The family received some assistance from JIAS at the beginning. The son went to subsidized summer camp at the Jewish Community Centre. Natasha felt her social worker was responsive and sympathetic when she telephoned her, but she did not help her or the family in any meaningful way.

When Natasha gets her Canadian citizenship, she plans to take her husband's Ukrainian name, but will change it slightly for easier pronunciation. The only thing that will remain of her Jewish identity will be her "Jewish face." She is so worried about her Jewish

appearance that she expressed concern that her very handsome husband would desert her when she became old and ugly. She is assuming that her facial features will not age attractively. She stated that she has no interest in learning about her Jewish heritage, but it seemed to me that she has longstanding unresolved issues about her Jewishness.

Neither Natasha nor her husband knew anything about Canada when they decided to emigrate from Russia. When I suggested that they were crazy to come to such an unfamiliar country with no money and no connections, she asked me if it was crazy to “jump out of a burning building.”

Before applying to emigrate, the husband was told at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow that there was a demand for Geologists in Canada. This gave him the encouragement he needed. However, in the two years of immigration bureaucratic delay that followed application, the Canadian mining-exploration field changed for the worse. In Moscow the couple were overcharged by an immigration lawyer, who was of little help. By the time they actually arrived in Toronto, their savings were diminished by Russian exit costs, legal costs, and travel costs.

They were picked up at the Toronto airport by a Russian couple that the husband had met briefly in Moscow. Natasha and her family camped-out on the floor of the contact's Toronto condo and shared their space for three weeks. They were charged rent by their hosts. Natasha found their apartment on her own, by walking around the Russian neighbourhood looking for “For Rent” signs. She immediately signed a lease for \$800 per month rent. Having no furniture, the family slept on the floor on their coats for several weeks. The only possessions they had brought from Russia were some books and a small sample of sentimental crockery.

This family is proud, well-educated and used to hard work. They compared their lives in Toronto to the life of the mythical Sisyphus, who was doomed to eternally push a huge boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down when the top was reached. Natasha and her family need some good luck in Canada.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ZOYA [64] WITH ELLA**  
**FEBRUARY 12, 1999**

- [Zoya] [Showing a recent letter from the Ukraine] She was my student at school in Kiev. She is a woman now. She became a teacher in my school and, you know, she writes poems, and she wrote for me a poem.
- [Thelma] That was so nice of her. Do you miss her?
- [Zoya] Yes...I miss...I sometimes help them.
- [Thelma] Do you correspond?
- [Zoya] Oh yes, regularly. Especially, I have two, three friends...they were my colleagues in school where I used to work...but I don't write to everyone there...only two...and I write them and they write me...and I give my....oh my goodness, my English is so poor!!...my regards to them and they to me. And I have a cousin there...my other relatives they went to States. to Israel.
- [Thelma] You left Kiev, Ukraine in 1990. Straight to Toronto?
- [Zoya] Straight...because my brother is here in Toronto, and we came on his sponsorship.
- [Thelma] Who came with you?
- [Zoya] My daughter, her husband, my granddaughter. I was widow then. We were four people.
- [Thelma] Is your brother older or younger than you?
- [Zoya] Four years younger [60].
- [Thelma] He has a family here?
- [Zoya] Oh yes. He lived in Israel, then he came here. He left Kiev in 1973.
- [Thelma] Was he a Refusenik?
- [Zoya] He was not Refusenik...it was a short time they opened...then in 1979 they closed [emigration].

- [Thelma] What did you teach in the Ukraine?
- [Zoya] Russian literature and language...it is together...for instance, two days language and four literature...it depends on the grade.
- [Thelma] What level did you teach? Did you teach young children, or high school, or university?
- [Zoya] No, not university. It was not separate...it was one school...elementary, then intermediate, then high school. So most I taught in high school. It was ten grades so from eight, nine and ten, it is like high school.
- [Thelma] Did you go to university or to an institute?
- [Zoya] The Pedagogical Institute, but it was the same as university there. The same...the diploma is the same.
- [Thelma] How many years did you study at that institute?
- [Zoya] Four years.
- [Thelma] You state your reason for emigration was you wanted to be reunited with your brother's family, and you wanted to leave Ukraine. Why did you want to leave Ukraine?
- [Zoya] Oh my God, for my children's sake. first of all. You know, Ukraine was always very anti-Semitic, more than Russia. Now Russia is anti-Semitic...it is terrible ...we have a Russian [TV] channel, so I am so afraid for all Jews...it seems to me that tomorrow they will be killed. In Parliament, they make anti-Semitic speeches, and nobody stops them because the government can be so feeble...weak...they can't stop them. Most of them [government members] are anti-Semitic. This is a Parliament...so the Deputies of Parliament, "Duma", actually...now the Communist Party is very powerful again...and you know the Communists and Fascists can [are] equal.
- [Thelma] You are saying that as far as the Jews are concerned, it's like the Fascists are in government?
- [Zoya] They go with swastikas, many of them, many of them! They go like a parade in Moscow...they are marching with swastikas and Nazi salute. I am so worried...I am so afraid. I have very elderly aunt and uncle in Moscow...they are 91 each of them, and she wrote me in a letter: "You can imagine my life when I look at my neighbour and I think will he come to kill me with an axe?"

[Thelma] She feels so endangered that she is writing these things?

[Zoya] Yes.

[Thelma] This is in the big city. What about in the little villages?

[Zoya] In the little villages there are no Jews.

[Thelma] History never stops repeating itself. Your reason for emigration you state was anti-Semitism. Were there also economic reasons for leaving?

[Zoya] Economics too but, you know, we did not know better lives.

My brother came to us for a visit...he came just after Chernobyl explosion...and he was very close to Chernobyl, only 8 km, so radioactivity was at very high level there. Then he came to Ukraine again a year after this explosion. He came to visit us because while he was in Israel and in Canada, our mother died, and then my husband died, and he came back to visit their graves, and he was so depressed after this. When he came back to Canada, he was very worried and...it was a depression...he used to take medicine...and he told me when he came back to [Toronto] airport: "If just my family was there [airport], no strangers around, I would kiss the soil of Canada."

Very interesting...when we came here...maybe in a month...my granddaughter, she fell in love with Canada. She was only almost seven-years old. A year later, we went to Rochester [N.Y.] to visit my colleague, and when we crossed the border into the States, and they asked: "Who is she?"...my granddaughter..."Is she a Canadian?" and we answered: "She is Canadian"... and we crossed over...she shouted so loudly, with such a pride: "I am Canadian! I am Canadian!" This was so touching, you know.

[Thelma] A proud Canadian. Are you a Canadian citizen?

[Zoya] Yes, I am and I am proud of that! When I come abroad and I show my citizenship, and my Canadian passport....!

[Thelma] Good for you! Do you go out to vote?

[Zoya] I voted already!

[Thelma] Good...voting is very important...Canadians do not all go out to vote ...sometimes only 45 percent vote.

[Zoya] From Russia, people are very "politicized". Maybe wrong word?

[Thelma] No, no problem. I understand everything! You're doing fine.

[Zoya] I am always very embarrassed.

[Thelma] You're doing fine, your English is fabulous!

[Zoya] Oh, thank you. Look, this is what I wrote about Canada in your questionnaire:

*Every morning when I wake up I feel happy because I am Canadian. More I live in Canada more I love this wonderful country. Especially I'm proud when I show my Canadian passport abroad. Canadian people are polite and friendly, they always try to encourage if you embarrassed with your English or to show direction in the street. I'm thankful to Canadian government to JIAS for the help in any ways I got. I appreciate schools of English as a second language, helping us to integrate in Canadian society.*

[Thelma] That's wonderful, Zoya, I'm going to put that in my report.

Now, let's talk about JIAS. you mentioned JIAS. Did you know about JIAS in Kiev?

[Zoya] Yes, I heard. And you know when we came to Vienna...we flew from Kiev straight to Vienna...

[Thelma] JIAS people got in touch with you in Vienna?

[Zoya] In *Sochnot*. [Jewish Agency]

[Thelma] How long were you in Vienna?

[Zoya] Only four days...you know what...we couldn't come straight to Canada. I could, but my children they couldn't from Russia. They [Russians] told them: "Uncle is not a very close relative"...so we could not go together to Canada...and they had Israeli Visas, but in Canadian Embassy they told us: "Go to Vienna and leave your documents here, and we will send them to Vienna, because at the border they will take your documents for Canada and that's it, you can't go."

[Thelma] They mailed your documents from Kiev?

[Zoya] No, from Moscow...in Kiev there was not embassy. Now they have Canadian Embassy because now they are independent country.

[Thelma] So many changes since you left...it's amazing. You flew from Kiev to

Vienna, and then from Vienna to Toronto.

[Zoya] Yes. My brother, he bought tickets for us.

[Thelma] Where did he buy the tickets?

[Zoya] In Toronto he buy tickets for us, and tickets were in Canadian Embassy in Vienna. He bought tickets from Vienna to Toronto.

[Thelma] JIAS was not involved at all to that point?

[Zoya] No. When we came here, we came to my brother, and then we went to JIAS for integration. For instance, they helped us with OHIP [health insurance], some advices, and even they gave us five hundred dollars. I remember...very nice.

[Thelma] Did they arrange furniture or clothing, or anything like that?

[Zoya] No. We didn't know about this. My brother, he knows only one way, to work...and he didn't know about all these things [JIAS services]. so he did not inform us, what we could or what we could not get.

[Thelma] Don't you think that the JIAS social worker should have informed you?

[Zoya] I don't know. Just some people told us go to JIAS...and JIAS helped us, for instance, to get the temporary passport to go abroad, you know? We could go to Rochester, for instance.

[Thelma] When you got to Toronto, did you all live with your brother for a while?

[Zoya] Four months...everybody...in his apartment.

[Thelma] And then you found an apartment?

[Zoya] It was very difficult because we wanted only in this area...and my children they went to work...my son-in-law went to work maybe in ten days.

[Thelma] He found a job?

[Zoya] Temporary job...and my daughter maybe in two weeks...and when they went to work, we could [afford to] rent an apartment...and we lived together.

- [Thelma] Do you all live together now?
- [Zoya] No, I got married.
- [Thelma] Mazel tov...you got married! To a Russian or to a Canadian?
- [Zoya] Russian...[laughing]...how can I marriage with a Canadian?
- [Thelma] You would learn English very fast. Did you marry a man from Kiev?
- [Zoya] No, from Belarus.
- [Thelma] Where did you meet him?
- [Zoya] Here!
- [Thelma] Here in the community?
- [Zoya] Yes. You know he was a volunteer...for instance...he helped people to find housing. I went with him to look at subsidized housing...to apply...I didn't know what it is, where it is. My neighbour was his friend, and in elevator we used to meet each other, and neighbour said: "You're alone...you know you can have your own [subsidized] apartment." And it would be such a happiness for me to live separately, because I used to work, I had my status, my independence, my apartment and here I have nothing...no language, no job, no status, no apartment. My neighbour told me his friend is a very good man, and he can help me to go there to apply for an apartment.
- [Thelma] And he did, and that's how you met him. How long did it take you to get a subsidized apartment?
- [Zoya] I didn't. I did not get apartment.
- [Thelma] Because you moved in with your [future] husband?
- [Zoya] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did he have an apartment?
- [Zoya] Yes.
- [Thelma] So your problem was solved...a pretty cute way to solve your problem. Were your children happy for you?

[Zoya] Yes. I was alone seven years; my late husband he died of cancer in Kiev.

[Thelma] Life is very unpredictable.

[Zoya] You can write so many stories after these interviews; you can be a writer now you have a lot of material!

[Thelma] My interest is the integration into Canada of your community, but we know so little. You speak Russian to each other, and we don't get to know you.

[Zoya] You know, that's why they don't know English so well as they should, because we have our area where we live...we have our doctors...we have our stores...we have everything we need...our clubs...and that's it...and now we have a Russian TV channel. You know we have for six months this channel, and I feel that my English is going down. People always chose the easiest way to listen...and very interesting things to listen to...because when I left Russia it was very like this "iron curtain". Now many interesting materials about our life back home is coming out and they give this on the television...many documentary movies...it is so interesting...I open wide my eyes and my ears. and I like to find out.

[Thelma] Are these documentaries being made in Russia?

[Zoya] Yes.

[Thelma] Russia is "open" now.

[Zoya] The archives...now they are open.

[Thelma] Probably Canadian and American researchers, who are interested in Russia, are travelling there to study the archives because before they were closed and you could get no information...nothing.

[Zoya] Even we who lived there all our lives, and we did not know about everything that was going on...very terrible things.

[Thelma] Terrible things that you didn't even know about.

*Ella Gurevich, secretary, Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada is listening and interjects: "And it was better!" [not to know].*

[Zoya] It was better before. I was happy. I was a teacher and teachers in Russia...most important thing for teacher in Russia was not to teach these subjects, you

know, for instance, history or biology or something else...but ideology was the most important thing. Oh yes, we were responsible for the communist ideology. If you want to convince somebody of something, you must be convinced yourself. We were very convinced in these years...and we used to teach these ideas to the students.

[Thelma] It was like that for seventy years...a long time...several generations. You knew a little about Canada before you came here. You answer: "More than a little, but less than a lot." No big surprises when you came here?

[Zoya] No. I knew about Canada the last few years because of my brother a little bit...but all educated people they did know, they must know, why not?

[Thelma] You studied some French?

[Zoya] A little bit...in Russia. Now I forgot everything...and my English is bad...and my Russian is bad now...everything is bad.

[Ella G.] No, you're not right. I don't know about English, but your Russian is perfect. She is a popular lecturer.

[Thelma] I'm talking to a celebrity here, and I don't even know it!

[Zoya] A star, a star! All of us are stars!

[Thelma] Well, most of you have talents...not that they are necessarily appreciated or used here.

[Zoya] But you know, we are very, very happy when there is something we can do...we can give something from us...not only to take, but to give! It is our inspiration.

[Thelma] All this wonderful Russian talent...you should share it with the Canadian community too...not just keep it within your own community.

[Zoya] You know, the language is like a wall between us and the Canadians, unfortunately. It is very interesting to be together, to integrate in the society.

[Thelma] I think that is very important. From what I see, there is not much of a crossover going on between the Canadians and the Russians, except where the children are concerned.

[Zoya] You know, children even too much. For instance, I am in fight with my

granddaughter. She doesn't want to speak Russian at all because when she came she wanted to integrate as soon as possible...to become a Canadian...you know, be like her peers.

We are very thankful to our [Association] leader, Ella Guravich. She does very much for us. Lectures, music, very interesting parties, and sometimes we have excursions. We went, for instance, to Chicago our group by bus...and we will go more. We have a bright future.

[Thelma] What was your happiest surprise in Toronto?

[Zoya] I'll tell you. The first surprise what shocked me in a good way...this is when I saw Jewish star in street. For instance, when I saw synagogue...when I saw store and in store is Jewish [artifacts], you know, near Wilson [Avenue]. I never saw this before. When we were leaving [Kiev], my late husband's sister wanted to make a gift for my granddaughter...like a memory...and she went to workshop with a silver spoon...where they used to make some jewellery...and she asked them to make a Jewish star for my granddaughter. They told her this is prohibited. This is a forbidden sign and they would not do it. For instance...in restaurant...have you ever been in Russian restaurant?

[Thelma] Yes, on Mount Pleasant, the Barmalay Samovar Russian Restaurant.

[Zoya] No, no, no...here is the real restaurant...music and dancing...we like when we gather...we like to have a good time...we dance and we eat...even when, for instance, we go to Chinese restaurant, we sing there. So, in restaurant, you could in Russia, like here, order some melody, some song, but nothing Jewish.

So in spite of [to spite them] the first what I did here, I went to the Jewish-Russian Synagogue. When I saw our rabbi...he is so young, Rabbi Zaltzman, and what a memory! When he saw me, he asked me: "To who you came here?" I told him: "To my brother." He produced my brother's last name...he is...and his wife is...the whole family. And now he knows about everybody.

[Thelma] Did you find out about the Jewish-Russian Synagogue from your brother?

[Zoya] Yes.

[Thelma] Do you go there now?

[Zoya] Yes, but rarely.

[Thelma] But you like seeing Jewish stars and synagogues?

- [Zoya] Yes, this was a very good surprise. You know, maybe no rabbi in the world such an enthusiastic rabbi as our rabbi. Because all the Jewish people from Russia, they are coming atheist, and he helps them to become Jews.
- [Thelma] Was there anything in Toronto that you did not like when you first arrived?
- [Zoya] No. No negative feelings. I am very emotional person. When I see something good, I am so happy that I don't see anything negative.
- [Thelma] Have you visited the Royal Ontario Museum. and the Toronto Art Gallery?
- [Zoya] Oh, yes!
- [Thelma] Okay, Zoya. what else do you do for fun? Do you ever go to the Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst Street?
- [Zoya] Yes, I go there every day for sports.
- [Thelma] Every day!
- [Zoya] Five days a week.
- [Thelma] No kidding! Wow!
- [Zoya] I just came...I was swimming there.
- [Thelma] Your Russian club is here. Do you belong to any other social organizations?
- [Zoya] Very often I go to Bernard Betel Centre [for active Seniors].
- [Thelma] You are a political person...interested in all politics...and you have Russian doctor and Russian dentist.
- [Zoya] Sometimes I go to Canadian, to English-speaking doctor...specialists...I go to doctors...I can express myself!
- [Thelma] You don't have too many friends in the Toronto-Jewish community ...people like me?

- [Zoya] No...unfortunately. Only when I come to the JCC sport club...I like to communicate with them...while we are swimming, we are chatting.
- [Thelma] You don't interact much with Russian-Russians?
- [Zoya] No. We have Russian-Russians?
- [Thelma] There are lots of them in Toronto.
- [Zoya and Ella] Not here!
- [Thelma] Not here, but outside of here, do you have friends in the non-Jewish Russian community?
- [Zoya] [Very coldly] We do not have any common interest.
- [Thelma] Not much connecting going on?
- [Zoya] We suffered too much.
- [Ella] Just language we have in common.
- [Zoya] We suffered too much of them, you know. for....
- [Thelma] Even in Toronto. it is two separate worlds?
- [Zoya] Just here, it is separate world. We can be separate here. We can afford it here, no? In Russia we could not do it.
- [Thelma] You had to be part of the larger Russian community there, but here you can be separate. I have often wondered if the Eastern-Orthodox Church helps the Russian immigrants the way JIAS helps the Jews.
- [Zoya] JIAS helps Russian-Russians, you know.
- [Thelma] Do they?
- [Zoya] Yes! They do. They go to them. They are not confused. They are not embarrassed. When I came here, I went sincerely to Ukrainian community with "Y". I thought that maybe I can be like a translator, you know, I knew Ukrainian very well. I came with Ukrainian dictionaries, yes. I was there maybe half an hour...I was waiting to speak to them...but while I was waiting, there were a lot of Ukrainian newspapers ...when I read these newspapers, I stood up and I left and NEVER I will not go there!

[Thelma] Were you reading antisemitic stuff in those papers?

[Zoya] Something...you know, when I read these newspapers, I just...I remembered Babi Yar [massacre of Jews], you know. I could not stay there...so I left.

You know what, sincerely, what I don't like so much...for instance...Italians they give jobs...they hire first of all, Italians. Chinese hire Chinese. But not Jews.

[Thelma] Are you saying that the Canadian Jewish community does not help?

[Zoya] For job! I see in Jewish Community Centre so many non-Jewish people...and so many Jewish people are unemployed...at B'nai B'rith even...secretaries and so on.

[Thelma] You think that Jews should help their own first?

[Zoya] I think so. I have a friend...his daughter was a very good specialist and her boss was Italian. Suddenly he told her, you know. I like your work but I can't do anything because an Italian needs a job.

[Thelma] She lost her job because her job was given to an Italian?

[Zoya] Yes.

[Thelma] I doubt a Jewish employer would do that. Here Jews don't always feel an obligation to hire another Jew first. Here's something else I want to ask you. [In the questionnaire] Are the Toronto-Canadian Jews friendly? You say, yes. Do they invite you to their homes? You say, no.

[Zoya] Harumph...[negative grunt] Not because they are not friendly, or they are not good...because I have no connections with them.

[Thelma] Nothing in common. If they tried a little harder to be friendly, would you like to go to their homes?

[Zoya] Maybe...why not?

[Thelma] They just don't try very hard.

[Zoya] Yes.

[Ella] One hundred per cent, she is right. The same for most of us!

[Thelma] I am going to report that, Ella, I think the Jewish community has not been particularly gracious in opening up their hearts and their homes and giving time to the Russian immigrants. Part of it, of course, is the language problem, but the Russians are so clever and so educated, and learn English so quickly, that if they had the opportunity to visit in the homes of Canadians...join them for dinners...talk with them ...their English would improve so much faster.

[Zoya and Ella] Of course! Sure! Of course!

[Thelma] You stay in your own community because that is where you feel welcome. On the other hand, there have been some Canadian Jewish families who have become quite friendly with a small number of Russians, and have taken an interest in them.

[Zoya] Yes, I know, I know...there are some families.... Maybe this is my mistake because when we [first] came here and JIAS offered us...it was a Jewish holiday...Rosh HaShanah [Jewish New Year]...and they offered...they told us you can go to a Canadian family.

[Ella] The Family Program....! [Family-to-Family Program]

[Zoya] But because it was the first Jewish holiday I could spend with my brother, you know, after fourteen years, so we went to him...and they did not propose [invite] us any more. Maybe another family used this proposition [invitation] and so they met these people. and maybe they became friends.

[Thelma] Would you have ever thought of telephoning JIAS and saying this is our first Passover in Toronto, and we would like to spend it with a Canadian Jewish family?

[Zoya] I could not...I was embarrassed to do this!

[Thelma] I am sure they would have been happy to arrange this.

[Zoya] That's why I said...I told you that this is my mistake maybe, but we are very shy and a little bit proud...because we were poor at that time...and maybe they could think that we want to use them for something.

[Thelma] There are two sides to everything but unless we talk to each other, we won't understand both sides. It starts with some communication.

- [Ella] That's right!
- [Thelma] The social workers at JIAS are supposed to understand these things.
- [Zoya] They are busy with other things.
- [Thelma] I think what happens is that beyond the initial integration programs at the beginning, they tend to lose interest.
- [Ella] You know at present JIAS has a special program...Community Integration Program.
- [Thelma] I know about that.
- [Ella] They should do something. [wistfully]
- [Zoya] But if they do, they do for newcomers...and they lost us!
- [Thelma] They only deal with the most recent arrivals, and the people that have been here longer are abandoned.
- [Zoya] When I came, JIAS was not so big...not so many social workers...then the immigration was larger...many people came in this period...you see, once I refused and told them I go to my brother...so good, never again.
- [Thelma] So there isn't enough follow-up aside from that initial assistance. And that might be a weak spot in their organization, which they should be aware of.
- [Zoya] For instance, I had a very good social worker at Manpower... an elderly man...I thought that he was a Jew...and he was an Arab [laughing], but he was so attentive...and I will remember him for always!
- [Thelma] Did he help you find work?
- [Zoya] No...he helped me to go to Seneca College to study English As A Second Language.
- [Thelma] JIAS didn't arrange for you to study ESL?
- [Zoya] Now I go.
- [Thelma] Where do you go?

[Zoya] There is a group -- 15 Torresdale -- this is the B'nai B'rith. Then Mr. T. [Manpower social worker], he sent me to another school as Assistant to teacher of Day Care for four months.

[Thelma] He sent you on a four-month course?

[Zoya] Oh, it was so terribly difficult for me because I did not know English so well. In Russia when I was a student, I was always a very good student, an excellent student, in the Institute the same, then when I came here, I thought that I would be a good student...and I tried so much that my blood pressure rose very high and I was sick. My brother told me to stop going to this school. "What are you thinking about?" but I went and I finished with A's.

[Thelma] You did...congratulations!

[Zoya] It seems to me I had only two B's.

[Thelma] Did you take this course at Seneca?

[Zoya] No, Mothercraft [Nannies], near Yonge and St. Clair... it is Heath Street, a school for teachers. But when it came to practicing with small children, it was too hard. I did not understand them...they did not understand me...and they ignored me because I couldn't [communicate]. I was so depressed.

[Thelma] All that work for nothing. So then you got married and retired?

[Zoya] And that's it. This was the best thing in Canada.

[Ella] The best idea!

[Thelma] Who wants to chase little kids anyhow? You are a housewife now. Is the building you are living in a co-op or a regular apartment building?

[Zoya] No, not a co-op, not regular, it is subsidized.

[Thelma] Is it for Seniors or a mixed population?

[Zoya] Mixed.

[Thelma] Are there lots of Russians in that building?

[Zoya] Yes. But not all Russians.

- [Thelma] Are you happy and comfortable there?
- [Zoya] Yes, very, I am very thankful to Canada for everything I have here.
- [Thelma] Are you getting some financial assistance from the government?
- [Zoya] Yes, my husband is a Russian war veteran, but he received a pension here equal to Canadian. Now he has his Old Age Pension and they help him with me. I am not retired [a Senior] not yet, so they help him to support me.
- [Thelma] You're too young!
- [Zoya] I'm so young!
- [Thelma] It's so nice to be too young for something. In this case, you get more when you are old.
- [Zoya] Very, very soon. Next year I will get this priority [laughing].
- [Thelma] Your response to my question, "Are you optimistic about the future of your children in Canada", is a question mark. Why a question mark?
- [Zoya] Because they divorced.
- [Thelma] They divorced here. Did their problems start in Canada?
- [Zoya] Maybe there were problems before, but when people come here it is very often they divorce.
- [Ella] *Thirty percent!*
- [Zoya] Unfortunately, this is a shade [shadow] that I have in my life...that's why I can't be happy.
- [Thelma] They have one child.
- [Zoya] Yes, she is sixteen years old.
- [Thelma] Do you think some of their problems were caused by the adjustment to immigration...financial...work?
- [Zoya] I don't know...I can't analyse.

- [Ella] People don't understand...immigration is just for the very strong.
- [Zoya] It's like an exam [test] of family life.
- [Thelma] It's ironic that your daughter is divorced and you are married. Is depression a big problem in the immigrant community?
- [[Zoya] Yes! It is very interesting...in Russia we were poor...we felt anti-Semitism and pressure...and no depression...and here all are depressed. You can't imagine.
- [Ella] They are coming here with maybe too high expectations.
- [Zoya] Big opportunities here, but they can't reach them. The most important ...the main thing...is they are always afraid of losing the job.
- [Thelma] No sense of security.
- Zoya] Because in Russia we were average-poor, all of us, but with equalized security. We knew we had this job to-day, and we will have it tomorrow. Here, it is different.
- [Thelma] Do you think it is harder for the Russian immigrant men than the women?
- [Zoya] Maybe. One Russian prominent dancer...he is divorced...she left him here in Canada...I asked him...and he told me that men here when they come and they can't reach so quickly their goal...they lose self-confidence...and the women they can faster adjust to new life. Some Russian women, they are very pretty...beautiful...and they find new partners...other men...and that happened with his wife.
- [Thelma] Do you think he will recover?
- [Zoya] Maybe, it depends on his career.
- [Ella] *More or less, everyone recovers.*

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ELLA GUREVICH (51)**  
**FEBRUARY 15, 1999**

- [Thelma] You lived in Moscow all your life. Where were your parents from?
- [Ella] From Ukraine.
- [Thelma] They moved to Moscow?
- [Ella] Yes, in their childhood.
- [Thelma] You went to the Institute in Moscow for five years, and became a chemical engineer.
- [Ella] Yes, that's right, my major was in food industry.
- [Thelma] Your 1972 decision to emigrate was early. Where did you learn about Zionism?
- [Ella] You know, my grandfather was a Zionist, and he wanted by any means to emigrate to Israel. In 1947 he tried illegally to go to Poland through Ukraine but he was caught and he was put in jail in Russia.
- [Thelma] Did he get out of jail alive?
- [Ella] Yes, in 1956. He spent almost ten years in jail because he was trying to escape to Palestine.
- [Thelma] Did he speak Yiddish?
- [Ella] Yes, of course.
- [Thelma] Do you speak Yiddish?
- [Ella] No.
- [Thelma] Did your mother or father speak Yiddish?
- [Ella] A little bit.
- [Thelma] You got your interest in Israel from your grandparents. Did you have problems trying to get out of Russia in 1980?

- [Ella] No, not at all.
- [Thelma] Did you personally encounter anti-Semitism in Moscow?
- [Ella] Yes, of course, many times, from my childhood.
- [Thelma] How old were your children when you left Russia?
- [Ella] My eldest was seven years old, and my youngest just one year old.
- [Thelma] How were you able to get papers to leave Russia at that time.
- [Ella] My grandparents lived in Israel. My grandfather emigrated to Israel the end of 1970.
- [Thelma] He died in Israel. Was he happy there?
- [Ella] Oh, very much!
- [Thelma] You lived almost ten years in Israel. Where did you live?
- [Ella] In Rehovot [town in the South on Ashkelon and Beersheva Highway]
- [Thelma] Did you work in Rehovot?
- [Ella] Yes, in medical laboratory in hospital. The food industry was too far from home and I had little children.
- [Thelma] Did you like working in a Hospital?
- [Ella] Yes, I liked communicating with the patients.
- [Thelma] What kind of engineer was your husband?
- [Ella] Electronic engineer. He found work in his field in Israel; he worked for aircraft industry.
- [Thelma] You went to an ulpan [Hebrew language immersion program]. Did you feel comfortable with the Hebrew language?
- [Ella] No. At the beginning it was difficult but I was lucky I got a job and, you know, through job is the best way of integration.

- [Thelma] Working in the community forced you to talk?
- [Ella] Yes. I learned fast...I was younger and I worked with very, very sympathetic people. They forced me to speak.
- [Thelma] Did you like the physical characteristics of the country...did you like the desert?
- [Ella] Everything. I felt happy and at home in Israel.
- [Thelma] In the questionnaire, you write about the tensions between the ethnic groups, religious and non-religious, Ashkenazi and Sephardic. It appears that the situation in Israel has worsened recently.
- [Ella] This is regrettable. You know it makes weak our country and our people.
- [Thelma] Did you know any English when you came here?
- [Ella] Yes. some English, I took lessons in Moscow at the Institute.
- [Thelma] When you came here. did you have any relatives or close friends in Toronto?
- [Ella] No, no one. My husband had some friends.
- [Thelma] You came here and you didn't know anyone. How did you manage?
- [Ella] It was hard and, you know, it was my husband's decision...he was motivated to come to Toronto. I did not want [to emigrate]. You can imagine what I felt!
- [Thelma] Your husband thought he would have better employment opportunities in Toronto? Did he find that to be true?
- [Ella] Yes. He got a job with an Israeli company [laughing].
- [Thelma] That's ironic! An Israeli company with branch office in Toronto?
- [Ella] Yes, in United States and Toronto.
- [Thelma] In his own field, electronic engineering?
- [Ella] Yes...and he is still with them.

- [Thelma] You came to Toronto at the end of December, 1989. You rented an apartment when you got here. How did you know where you wanted to rent?
- [Ella] My husband...his friends. We moved into the Russian community... Steeles and Bathurst...an apartment.
- [Thelma] Did you feel at home at Steeles and Bathurst?
- [Ella] Yes...it was familiar.
- [Thelma] You never thought about calling JIAS for anything...you didn't need to...you came with some money and were able to buy what you needed.
- [Ella] Yes... we made independent immigration...nobody sponsored us.
- [Thelma] You all became citizens four years ago. Was that a happy thing for you?
- [Ella] Mixed emotion. Now I have two passports...Canadian and Israeli.
- [Thelma] How old are your sons now?
- [Ella] The eldest is twenty-six and the youngest twenty.
- [Thelma] Do your children think of themselves as Canadians?
- [Ella] No...Israeli...they have just Israeli friends...I don't know why. From the beginning my eldest son had, you know, even black friends and Chinese and Canadian, but after a few years, he met Israeli guys and these are his friends.
- [Thelma] Does he talk to them in Hebrew?
- [Ella] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did your son go to university.
- [Ella] My eldest graduated from York University, and the youngest now he goes to University of Toronto.
- [Thelma] When your eldest went to York University, did he have Russian-Jewish friends there?
- [Ella] No, no, no. Canadian and South African and Israeli.

- [Thelma] Did he only have Jewish friends when he was at York University?
- [Ella] No...he had Christian friends too. He had a variety of friends.
- [Thelma] What did he specialize in at York University?
- [Ella] Business. He is working as Financial Analyst for Toronto-Dominion Bank. My younger son is studying Computer Science at U of T.
- [Thelma] Is your younger son also friends mostly with Israelis?
- [Ella] No...he has mixed friends...some Canadians, not many...mostly Russian-Jewish kids.
- [Thelma] Have either of your sons ever had Russian friends who were not Jewish?
- [Ella] No...no. Nothing to do with the old prejudice...just the way it was.
- [Thelma] In your opinion, is there social interaction between the Jewish Russians and the non-Jewish Russians?
- [Ella] Oh, I don't know exactly...but they have something in common...culture and language.
- [Thelma] Is that strong enough to make them forget the old prejudices and interact in Toronto?
- [Ella] Of course.
- [Thelma] I am told that in the Soviet Union it was very inexpensive to enjoy culture...to go to the theatre...to go to the ballet...to take lessons. In Canada this is not cheap. Do your sons attend the theatre, ballet and concerts here?
- [Ella] Sometimes. If I want, I go too.
- [Thelma] Is there anything about our Canadian culture that you particularly enjoy?
- [Ella] You know...politeness. People are polite in the stores...in line. And you know, I learned a lot.
- [Thelma] No pushing and shoving in the line.
- [Ella] And Canadians smile.

- [Thelma] You say you do social work now [questionnaire]. Did you organize this Association? [Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada]
- [Ella] No, I'm just staff person.
- [Thelma] How old is this Association? [ASJC]
- [Ella] I guess it formed in 1980.
- [Thelma] So it's been around almost twenty years. Do you think it has been helpful for the Russian community?
- [Ella] Yes, helpful...and important.
- [Thelma] Are there other organizations like this in the Russian-Jewish community?
- [Ella] I don't know. You know, we have JIAS and now Jewish Community Centre formed their own organization...Community Integration Program.
- [Thelma] That's part of JIAS...do they have parties and social functions?
- [Ella] Sometimes.
- [Thelma] Do you think it's effective?
- [Ella] I don't know. I really don't know. You know, I learned a lot with my Association...it's my baby! I am emotionally and personally involved with these people. You saw these Seniors...I feel that they are like my children!
- [Thelma] I want to share this with you. The happiest group that I have interviewed so far are the Seniors. They seem to be very content with how they are living here in Toronto. Maybe when you are older you come with different expectations. I am picking up an acceptance of their situation and appreciation for whatever the system here does for them. Also that this Association is very important to them.
- [Ella] You know, they shouldn't have to think about financial side.
- [Thelma] They can come here and don't have to worry about money? Is membership free?
- [Ella] Oh, you know, our membership is ten dollars per one year.
- [Thelma] That's just a token. Do you get some financial support from the Canadian

Jewish community?

- [Ella] No, not at all. We get just from Canadian Heritage...federal government.
- [Thelma] Do you get any financial help from the Lubavitchers?
- [Ella] No.
- [Thelma] Really, even though they are in this same building and next door to your Association? You do your thing and they do theirs? There is no crossover?
- [Ella] No. You know, sometimes we can invite rabbi for our Jewish holidays, and that's it. Sometimes for lectures.
- [Thelma] They will come and talk to you, but they don't control your organization. You are independent?
- [Ella] That's right.
- [Thelma] Does your Association have an executive?
- [Ella] Yes.
- [Thelma] Are they enthusiastic? Are there people in the Association who want to be President...Secretary...or are you doing everything?
- [Ella] You know, I try to do everything...they are just volunteers and they have their own jobs and lives and families and whatever...but they are very eager to do something for community.
- [Thelma] Do they do fund-raising?
- [Ella] No...we just help United Jewish Appeal.
- [Thelma] Your Association donates to the UJA...that's very nice to hear.
- [Ella] You know, we are calling to Russian immigrants...and we ask them...encourage them to donate money to UJA.
- [Thelma] For some Russian Jews, the Jewish experience has been so negative in the Soviet Union that when they come here it's a fresh start...and they just want to walk away from the Jewish issue.

- [Ella] You know, they know nothing about their heritage and they cannot be proud of it. If they knew more...maybe...but they don't want to take this opportunity [to learn]...Rabbi Zaltzman works very hard....to save a few...and you know everything is coming from family...from their roots.
- [Thelma] It is very difficult to be religious when your entire life you have learned nothing about religion. It is very difficult to believe when you have always been told it was a fable.
- [Ella] That's right! It is very hard work to try to reach the immigrants.
- [Thelma] Have you ever heard of Jews for Jesus?
- [Ella] Yes, of course!
- [Thelma] Have you ever been approached by this organization?
- [Ella] No. Not my children either.
- [Thelma] They reach out to Russian Jews. Next week I hope to interview a Russian Jew who was educated in Israel, who is now working full time for Jews for Jesus preaching Christianity.
- [Ella] Maybe he believes in it, you know.
- [Thelma] The different organizations I talk to are after Russian heads and hearts...isn't that interesting?
- [Ella] They know these people are coming without any heritage...any roots...any beliefs...like a blank page...and you can write whatever you want!
- [Thelma] You answer that you don't miss Russia, but you do miss Israel. What do you miss about Israel?
- [Ella] Everything...my friends...warm atmosphere...the relationships between people...you know, even in plane, in El Al, I feel like at home!
- [Thelma] Do you still feel a stranger, after so many years in Canada, or do you feel that Canada is your home now?
- [Ella] A stranger.
- [Thelma] What about your husband?

- [Ella] He is the same.
- [Thelma] And your boys?
- [Ella] So, so. You know, they have two homes, Canada and Israel. A dual loyalty.
- [Thelma] Have you been back to Israel with your family?
- [Ella] Yes, of course...almost every year...with just my youngest...my oldest cannot because of [Israeli] army.
- [Thelma] If he goes back, they will throw him in jail or in the army?.
- [Ella] At the beginning, he wanted to graduate from university; after university he got a job; and now Israeli embassy can offer [son] one hundred days in army. One hundred days of service in army. That's three months, you know! He cannot take the time off.
- [Thelma] He would lose his job...so that's a sacrifice your family has had to make. Maybe in time Israel will change that...but not yet.
- When you socialize with Russian Jews who have come to Canada through Israel, do you have more in common with them than with the Russians who have come from the FSU?
- [Ella] You know, I have more in common with Israeli people who live here. I don't know why [laughing].
- [Thelma] Do you think the Israeli experience made you feel more comfortable with the capitalistic system that we have here in Canada?
- [Ella] I don't know! [laughing] I never think about it...I don't know.
- [Thelma] Did you experience culture shock when you came here?
- [Ella] Yes...and when I came to Israel I also... [experienced culture shock].
- [Thelma] You have lived in three different worlds. You could write a book, Ella.
- [Ella] You know, I could. Every day I meet so many different people! They come from different cultures...different personalities.

- [Thelma] And you have to make them all work together in an Association. Canadian Jews talk about former Soviet Jews as if they have a single identity.
- [Ella] They are so different! The only thing they had in common was the government.
- [Thelma] Have you met individuals in your Association who have health problems because they were near Chernobyl?
- [Ella] Yes, some people. Older people.
- [Thelma] Why are you not optimistic about your future?
- [Ella] I am a certain age, and I don't know for how long our Association will exist. You know, regarding grants, financial aid...and I don't know how long they will be able to pay me.
- [Thelma] Have you ever gone to the Jewish community for help... the UJA/Federation for some financial support?
- [Ella] I applied several times for Jewish Continuity Grant from the Federation, and we were rejected.
- [Thelma] You were refused?
- [Ella] Refused twice...maybe 1995...1996...I don't remember exactly.
- [Thelma] You have not applied since then?
- [Ella] No.
- [Thelma] Did they tell you why you were refused financial aid?
- [Ella] Yes...they don't have enough funds for us. They have many applicants and....if you can keep your job...that's it...that was the answer!
- [Thelma] They didn't feel the Association was important enough to give it some financial support and keep one person on staff?
- [Ella] No, no...it was not for me...it was for our programs. We have program Israeli folk dance...and we have another rabbi, not Rabbi Zaltzman, another Russian-speaking rabbi, Rabbi Hersh, for Judaism class. Yes, for Judaism class and Israeli folk

dance. I asked them to help us to fund these programs.

[Thelma] To pay for some staff...and they refused.

[Ella] And the second time, it was...you know...we wanted maybe to draw more young people...and to make some Jewish musical..."Fiddler on the Roof" or something, and I had musical director...and they were not interested in helping me. Not at all.

[Thelma] Do you think that if you had some funding from the Federation, that you could organize a program that would attract some younger Russian immigrants?

[Ella] That's right. You know, I have an idea to attract young Russian people through doing movie about our immigration.

[Thelma] Make a movie?

[Ella] You know, we have a Director, who recently came from Russia. He is professional...and we have psychologist who works with the young Russian kids. We will try. I am not sure [if we can do it], but we will try!

[Thelma] Does all your funding support come from Heritage Canada?

[Ella] Yes.

[Thelma] And they have changed their criteria lately.

[Ella] Yes.

[Thelma] Have they cut your funding yet?

[Ella] Yes, it already has happened.

[Thelma] You are concerned that they will reduce it even further?

[Ella] Not reduce...maybe they will cut it off entirely! You know why...this year we got criteria to make some connections with community schools.

[Thelma] What do you mean by community schools?

[Ella] Public schools in our area. And you know, I went to many schools...they don't want us...they don't know us...they don't want our help at all! I succeeded to find one school...and I even didn't mention about this criteria...I just told the Principal, you know we want to help Russian parents, or Russian students...to meet with them...to help with staff to

understand them better...maybe to prepare some Heritage Night...whatever. The Principal wrote a letter to Canadian Heritage...OK they will work with us...when I came September, last year, they told me: "No, we don't need you. Whatever help we need, we get from North York Board of Education."

[Thelma] From professionals at the North York Board of Education. Canadian social workers and Canadian psychiatrists?

[Ella] Yes! Yes!

[Thelma] They don't want to use the Russian immigrant community as a resource?

[Ella] Not at all...what could I do now? I don't know what to do....!  
It is so sad...very sad...you know, all summer I worked to prepare stuff for this school...I talked with people...I encouraged them to come...to volunteer to go out to the school.

[Thelma] And the school didn't want you. It is an interesting thing in Canada that they don't want the skills for which you have been educated, and they don't even want your volunteered experience to help gain some insight into the problems of the Russian immigrant children and youth.

[Ella] You know, they told me, we have some Russian people. I told them you have so many schools here, and three or four people, how can they handle all of it? It's a lot of work! From my own experience. I had part-time job in Associated Hebrew School...I worked with Russian students and Russian parents.

[Thelma] What were you doing?

[Ella] Counselling. They used me like link-person between Russian students and parents and staff.

[Thelma] This was in the Jewish school system. The public school system doesn't want to use Russians as "links"?

[Ella] Yes...and you know, I had a lot of work! People called me at home...on Sundays...whenever they needed me! And teachers and principals...they really needed me!

[Thelma] Did you get paid for this?

[Ella] Yes, of course.

[Thelma] So they were treating you as a counsellor based on your experience and your

knowledge...but the public school system doesn't want you.

[Ella] They have few Russian-speaking people and they told us: "It's enough for us."

[Thelma] And your people were willing to come as volunteers, I want to be clear about this...so that your Association can do something useful in the community.

[Ella] Yes! I explained this to them. For example, Ilia and Marina, [both teachers in the Soviet Union], they were ready and happy...it's better than to stay at home not working and depressed...and they called me every time: "When are we going there?" I didn't know what to answer them. I told them "later", "maybe".

[Thelma] That's very sad. Nobody is interested in their experience.

[Ella] You know except for language [English] they have their own idea of Russian culture...Russian mentality...it is different from Canadian.

[Thelma] If there were problems with the children or even with the children's parents. they could help the Canadian teachers understand where the differences are and to work with them. I like the word "link". You are telling me there is no "linking" going on in the public school system. This could have been a practical volunteer use of your Association. You could give back a little to the community.

[Ella] You know our people really want to give something back!! Even for free. even for free!! You know, to give something back and to feel they have...like people...with dignity...with pride. You know how many calls I get from depressed people?

[Thelma] With nothing to do.

[Ella] It is not point of money, no! They need to feel useful. They come here and they can't believe they are not doing anything.

[Thelma] These are clever educated people. The worst thing you can do to somebody is not allow him to work if he is healthy and strong...depression follows.

[Ella] Yes! And you know, they are going to be burden for Canadian health system.

[Thelma] Is it better to give them the opportunity to contribute something to their community than to create a group of non-functioning depressives.

[Ella] That's right. You know, people are screaming to me: "I am going to suicide!" And you know, I am spending a lot of time talking on the telephone.

- [Thelma] You are acting as a therapist.
- [Ella] Yes.
- [Thelma] Can you link up in any way with the Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst Street?
- [Ella] No. Some years ago, we had our office there, but suddenly they needed our space...and they let us go away...and you know for some time we didn't have any space for our office.
- [Thelma] Try to remember what years your office was located at the JCC.
- [Ella] I started to work in 1990 and we were there until 1995 or 1996.
- [Thelma] And then they moved you out...there was no room for you anymore. Did your Association have activities at the JCC?
- [Ella] We did have activities there.
- [Thelma] Did you do folk dancing there?
- [Ella] No. For folk dancing we rented basement somewhere else...you know why, they want a lot of money...we didn't have enough to pay them for rent.
- [Thelma] So you rented a basement somewhere else for your dancing.
- [Ella] I have pictures!
- [Thelma] Good! When your office was at the Jewish Community Centre, did they give you the space for free?
- [Ella] For free, just for office, but for practice or any activities we had to pay.
- [Thelma] Where was your money coming from then?
- [Ella] From Heritage Canada.
- [Thelma] The Jewish Community Centre didn't really do much to make it easier for you or to give you the opportunity to grow?
- [Ella] No...I understood it was a very difficult time for them...they got financial difficulties...do you remember, they want to close them...No, I understand them, but.....

[Thelma] Your Association really suffered because of the financial situation at the Jewish Community Centre. Do you know any Russian-Jews that go to the old Jewish Community Centre downtown at Spadina and Bloor?

[Ella] No, you know, most of them live here.

[Thelma] Some of them belong individually to the Jewish Community Centre...some of the people that I interviewed go there for the swimming.

[Ella] Just for swimming. I wanted to change their perception of Jewish Community Centre as not just fitness facility. You know we can do something Jewish...have parties...I try to prepare our parties with some Jewish issue...the holidays...Israel Independence Day...whatever. I tried to show them something nice, Jewish, our heritage, our roots and I try to invite..... You know, if something Russian I understand for Canadian Jews it is not of interest, I understand it...but sometimes we organized Jewish song concert or Israeli Independence Day or whatever...and I tried to invite Canadian Jews. They promised...but they didn't show up.

[Thelma] The Canadians didn't show up. When you ran these events, where were they held?

[Ella] In the Jewish Community Centre.

[Thelma] Even though you put the signs up, nobody came?

[Ella] No, no. I personally called them and invited them.

[Thelma] Did you put signs up on the bulletin board?

[Ella] No.

[Thelma] Why?

[Ella] I don't know [laughing].

[Thelma] You can phone five people, but if you put a sign up on the bulletin board, more people will see it.

[Ella] OK...maybe you are right!

[Thelma] You wouldn't phone me, but I might come if I saw a sign...you have to give everybody a chance...you never know who is interested, and who is not interested. I think there is a communication problem...partly because of the language...but the people in your

Association know enough English to make contact. They just have to feel that the contact is wanted.

[Ella] Yes, yes, that's right. To-day our President has a meeting with Mila, the social worker from JIAS, at four o'clock, about our program with young people.

[Thelma] It will be interesting to hear what they have to say to your President.

[Ella] If they want to work with us, it would be fabulous. We have resource people...they don't need money.

[Thelma] No, you have lots of interested people, who have the time.

[Ella] Yes, that's right.

[Thelma] You just need a place and an opportunity.

[Ella] And many people trust us...we have very good reputation.

[Thelma] In the Russian-Jewish community.

[Ella] We don't lie to people...if we can, we do...if we cannot...but we don't lie.

[Thelma] Do you think if there was an organization at the JCC that was especially directed at Russian young adults, say 18 to 35, and you had lecturers discussing topics of interest for younger people...if you had people from the Canadian community come out...from the RCMP to talk about crime in the youth population...serious stuff...do you think that your sons would attend a meeting or a lecture like this?

[Ella] I think not.

[Thelma] Why? Just not interested?

[Ella] Yes. For example, my eldest is married, he is busy right now...but my youngest he doesn't have enough time. He is learning, learning, learning....

[Thelma] So who will come out to these things that you would like to organize?

[Ella] You know, if you are taking these serious subjects from the beginning, they won't come but maybe to start from some dancing night...more social...to attract people...and after this to start more serious stuff.

- [Thelma] Get them in with music and dancing and parties.
- [Ella] It would be a great idea to bring them together. They are suffering, I know, their parents told me about it. And they ask me: "Do something for young people!"
- [Thelma] Russian-Jewish young people.
- [Ella] They don't feel they belong to something. They don't have connections ...and they are suffering.
- [Thelma] They don't even know each other?
- [Ella] Yes, that's right.
- [Thelma] We assume they all know each other, but they don't. A twenty-year old girl from Ukraine doesn't necessarily know a 20-year-old boy from Moscow.
- [Ella] That's right.
- [Thelma] Do you think they would come to something social at the Jewish Community Centre?
- [Ella] I am sure. For example, this girl from Sandy [Sandy's daughter], she is very active, and through this girl we can bring more people, and we just need maybe a few people and they have their own friends and it will grow.
- [Thelma] I would be very interested in how the meeting with your Association President, Rudy, and Mila, the JIAS social worker goes.
- [Ella] It is very difficult for Canadian people to understand what Russian people really need. They are thinking from their own experience, but Russians think differently and understand things differently.
- [Thelma] But in order for this to change, you have got to eventually get some productive dialogue going between the two communities. The Canadians have to listen a little harder, and the Russians have to explain a little better. The Canadians have to bend a little and the Russians have to change a little because, after all, this is Canada. But there has to be goodwill, and there has to be patience.
- [Ella] And willing to understand each other.

[Thelma] People like you and this organization are just treasures...a goldmine of information that could be so helpful.

[Ella] You know what I notice sometimes...Canadian people have wrong perception about Russian people. For example, I heard from one Canadian Jewish lady: "Oy, they like just to take...they don't want to give something!" Okay, we came with this [communist] culture, I don't know...but we should try to educate them [Russians] ... to bring them closer...to make them real good Jewish and Canadian people...not to lose them. I told her: "Think about them...they are a lost tribe...their children...their grandchildren...think about it. Now they are making our future...through this generation!" I think both sides had unrealistic expectations.

[Thelma] Yes, both sides had unrealistic expectations. The Russians felt that the Canadian Jews should welcome them with open arms: "Thank you for coming...we are happy to have you...what can we do to help?"

[Ella] That's right! That's right [laughing]!

[Thelma] And they only did a little.

[Ella] Absolutely right!

[Thelma] And the Canadians thought they would say: "Oy, we want to join your shul...we want to learn Hebrew...we want to send our kids to religious school." But the Russians weren't interested. So the Canadians are thinking: "What kind of Jews are these?" And the Russians are thinking: "What kind of Jews are these. they don't help a Jew?" Have I got it right, Ella?

[Ella] Yes, that's right.

[Thelma] There's a cultural wall that needs to be broken down.

[Ella] The Russians need to get some general knowledge about Jewish heritage. For example, I try to invite many, many guests, how many I can to Jewish holidays. Russian Jews who never celebrated even in Israel. To my home. To show them the nice side of Jewish heritage. For example, for Purim I invited people, and I asked all of them to prepare their own role in the "Megillah" [the holiday story]. I gave them their parts...you will be this, and this, and this...and before holiday they went to library and they took out books about Purim...they wanted to perform their role properly ...with understanding.

[Thelma] Was it successful?

[Ella] Yes, very successful. Seventeen people. No children.

[Thelma] If the Holy Blossom Temple decided to throw a Purim party and they telephoned your Association and extended an invitation, would any of your members go to this Reform congregation's party?

[Ella] Maybe, but I [personally] would feel uncomfortable because we are [located] here with the Lubavitchers [in the same building]. They invite us to their Purim parties, but they are very, very religious. They invite us and offer us a lot of food because this is a "mitzvah" [good deed], but I try to make Purim not just to eat, but to have interesting activity.

[Thelma] Perhaps they think that the Russians are attracted [to Jewish events] only for the food.

[Ella] They are not hungry for food. They are hungry for information. To make "simcha" [celebration]. Personally, my grandfather was Lubavitch Jew.

[Thelma] Your grandfather was a Lubavitcher?

[Ella] You see personally how I would feel?

[Thelma] You would be uncomfortable [to go to Holy Blossom]. Would you be uncomfortable if your offices were located elsewhere, or at the Jewish Community Centre, and your activities were there, and a Reform rabbi wanted to come to speak to your Association?

[Ella] Maybe Reform...but maybe another [a different] Russian rabbi...we have another Russian rabbi....

[Thelma] You see, Ella, I am talking about trying to bring the Russians into the Toronto Jewish community, and you are talking about keeping them in the Russian immigrant community, except with a little more knowledge of Judaism.

[Ella] A Russian rabbi understands their needs more. We are not against Canadians! Once we invited Cantor Danto from Beth Emeth Synagogue [Toronto] to sing. He was happy to come...even after the concert I tried to give him money, but he refused.

[Thelma] He is a very well-known and talented cantor. Well, Ella, I think there is a lot of opportunity here.

[Ella] A lot of opportunity...a lot of problems. I have so many ideas, and I think

sometimes I should just write down everything. My concern is we are going to lose our people to another community.

[Thelma] They will go to other organizations...to Christian churches?

[Ella] Why not?

[Thelma] Communities that offer them more hope?

[Ella] Yes. If they have enough warmth, understanding, friendship...it's very important. We are losing time and we are losing money. We invested money when they came here, and JIAS provided them with money, with care.

[Thelma] Do you mean that the Jewish community has gone so far, but not far enough?

[Ella] Yes, that's right.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**LARISA [42]**  
**FEBRUARY 9, 1999**

[Larisa] I was born in Bobruisk, Belarus in 1957. When I graduated from high school in 1974, I went to university in Minsk. I graduated from university, and I stayed in Minsk. I got married in Minsk, and we left Minsk to go to Canada in 1989.

[Thelma] Whose idea was it to come to Canada, yours or your husband's?

[Larisa] Okay. The first [main] idea was to leave Russia. To go to Canada was my idea, because my sister left for Canada a year before we did. It was really a difficult decision because his mother and his brother were going to the United States, to Los Angeles, because of my sister-in-law's relative there. We had to split the family. It was difficult but it was necessary as my husband carries my family. We see each other at least every second year. They come to visit, or we go to visit.

[Thelma] Are they happy in Los Angeles?

[Larisa] Yes, they are happy; and last August it was Bar Mitzvah of our little one, and the whole family from L.A. came to Toronto, and hopefully, in a year it will be Bat Mitzvah of my niece there, and hopefully, we will go to L.A.

[Thelma] You state in the questionnaire that your reason for leaving Minsk was "unstable political and economical situation in USSR." Are you saying anti-Semitism was not a reason for emigration?

[Larisa] Personally, I didn't feel as much anti-Semitism in Russia as somebody would think...but there was sometimes...let's say...I remember perfectly...I was in Grade Five... there was a girl in my class, and once she called me "dirty Jew"... something like this. I was terribly upset because of this. I came home and I told my parents. My mom said: "You know what, she is not the whole world; she is not all the people; she is a bad person, but that doesn't mean that the rest of the people are the same." It wasn't on a level higher than school kids, but I felt it. There was another time, when I was in Grade Ten and I had the same thing. I was the leader of my class, and there was a guy in our class who didn't behave, and I was in charge of disciplining him somehow. We got all classmates together, and I was saying that he is this, and he is that. Everyone was disapproving his behavior, and after everything was finished, we went outside to go home and he called me that same name.

I thought, he is not my level, he is so low, I won't even bother to react to what he said. He could say anything, I would never react. And the funny part, I don't make any connection, but this girl who called me "dirty Jew"...she died after...it's unbelievable...but she had the pneumonia, a year or so later, and she died from pneumonia. It is so unusual, but it

happened. And the guy, he went to jail because he raped a woman; he was like 18 and she was 54, he was on drugs. I always remember these two cases, but never again I ever really experienced [anti-Semitism].

I knew my boundaries. I graduated from high school with honours. I had the highest marks...in Russia you get a medal if you graduate from [high] school with honours. I got a gold medal after I graduated from [high] school, but I didn't go to university because I knew up front I won't make it...because everyone knew...like it wasn't written anywhere...nobody said it aloud...but everyone knew you won't get into university if you're Jewish.

[Thelma] They wouldn't accept you?

[Larisa] You wouldn't pass, no matter how well you do...unless you are brilliant and you can prove it. But I was afraid, okay, I knew I am good but I couldn't say I am brilliant. I am not a genius...I am a regular person. That is why I decided...okay...I'll pick something which I want, in a university which I can get into.

[Thelma] Which was an institute?

[Larisa] Yes, which was a polytechnical institute.

[Thelma] Most of my interviewees have graduated from an institute and not from a university.

[Larisa] That's right. This was the main reason.

[Thelma] They never told me that the reason was that it was hard for Jews to get into university.

[Larisa] I was very happy with my institute because we had a lot of Jewish students. We had very nice gatherings.

[Thelma] You had a good time at the institute.

[Larisa] Very nice time. I enjoyed every day of it. It was five full years. It's a university program...just the name...it doesn't mean anything. If you are born here you think it is lower, but it isn't...it's the same thing.

[Thelma] Would you say that it is more the sciences than the humanities?

[Larisa] Precisely. I was always science-oriented and it didn't bother me too much.

[Thelma] So it worked out okay...and you became a mechanical engineer.

[Larisa] Right.

[Thelma] Did you work as a mechanical engineer in Minsk?

[Larisa] Yes, I worked in Minsk from 1979 to 1989...almost ten years...okay, I cannot call it ten years because I got married...then I got one kid...and I was off for eighteen months...I stayed home.

[Thelma] Eighteen months! Did you get paid?

[Larisa] Something...yes.

[Thelma] Really, you could have eighteen months leave!

[Larisa] And I think with the second one, I had twenty-four months.

[Thelma] Did they keep the job for you?

[Larisa] Yes, they keep your place. You are getting close to nothing in terms of money, but they keep your place. That's why I cannot say I worked ten years as an engineer, but let's say...five.

[Thelma] You say you have received no financial or social assistance from any government agency?

[Larisa] Maybe, I am not exact [sure]. Our tickets to Canada from Italy were paid by federal government, and as soon as we entered, we had to repay immediately the cost of the ticket.

[Thelma] The federal government?!

[Larisa] I think so. Yes, I believe it was on federal level.

[Thelma] From Russia to Vienna...?

[Larisa] It was our money from Russia to Vienna.

[Thelma] From Russia to Vienna, it was your money...and then from Vienna to Italy...?

[Larisa] Actually, it was JIAS. And from Italy to Canada, it was federal government...because I know that before we paid off our loan for tickets, we couldn't apply for passport.

- [Thelma] Did they give you the money in Italy?
- [Larisa] Our tickets were paid for...we received the tickets...that's it.
- [Thelma] Did JIAS make these arrangements for you?
- [Larisa] I would think so...or the Canadian Consulate in Rome...because we went through the Canadian Consulate to get permission to enter the country. You know, I don't know the details.
- [Thelma] If you couldn't speak Italian, and you didn't speak English yet, who was helping you get through the red tape?
- [Larisa] It was JIAS. They had a school in Italy where we studied English every night. My son, the seven year old, he had school there. He studied English, Hebrew, Math, and a little bit of Science for his level.
- [Thelma] In Rome?
- [Larisa] Yes. JIAS organized this school...and the teachers were immigrants, who were coming with us. They stayed in Italy...they were teaching. They did a good job because they take the best teachers possible. We had an excellent English teacher. She was a teacher, I believe, in Kishenev University. She was amazing. Like, I was full of words, but I couldn't speak. I knew...I could read...I could understand...but to speak I got stuck. She made us at least start speaking.
- [Thelma] It's amazing what JIAS is doing over there!
- [Larisa] Yes, it was really amazing how this whole machine was working...without any interruptions.
- [Thelma] So you didn't experience the terror of being abandoned in a strange place?
- [Larisa] No. You come...you don't speak the language...what are you going to do? And they meet you at the airport, and that's it.
- [Thelma] How do they recognize you at the airport? Did you arrive on a Russian plane?
- [Larisa] Yes. They just met our plane. We came to Vienna by train, not by plane...and they were meeting us at the train station and they helped us get our luggage, and told us what bus to use.

[Thelma] Did they hold up a sign with your name?

[Larisa] No, no. The person had a list. He was calling the names, and you go to this bus and you go to that bus, and that's it. Amazing. Now, it's not the best comparison, but I think the same type of organization now if you go for a cruise [laughing]...they meet you...they push you!

[Thelma] When you left Russia, you bought your own ticket for the train to Vienna. Did the Russian government know that you were going to Canada?

[Larisa] No. We had visa to go to Israel.

[Thelma] But you always knew you were going to Canada?

[Larisa] There was really no other way for us to go to Canada. At this time we could not have gone to Canada...but later on, they decided if you have relatives there [Canada] and if they can sponsor you....yes. Another thing, even if we would have liked to go straight to Canada, we had nobody to sponsor us because my sister was in Canada one year only with a little baby and she didn't work. Her husband was working making peanuts to make ends meet.

[Thelma] So you went to the Canadian Consulate in Rome. Did you and your family come as Refugees or as Family Reunification? What was the category you came in under? Did you have to attend the Refugee Board?

[Larisa] No. We were sponsored by JIAS.

[Thelma] JIAS took responsibility for you and your family?

[Larisa] Yes, my sister paid a little bit...but she couldn't [do much]...and JIAS knew that.

[Thelma] You stated that in 1990 you had to pay a bribe in order to get an apartment. Who did you pay the bribe to...the superintendent?

[Larisa] You know, it [the money eventually] got to the superintendent, but it was somebody else, who was making renovations [who initiated the bribe]. He was working for the superintendent and he knew which apartments will be available...they probably split the money...I'm sure he wouldn't do it for nothing...but it was a real shock.

We worked in Italy. It wasn't legal...we didn't have the right to work...but I was a cleaning lady for last month only...because there were so many people and everyone wanted to do something...and by the end of our stay there...the people who went to the United States, they

were gone already, but Canadian [immigrants] stayed longer than people who went to States. People who went to Canada used to stay about one-half a year, eleven months, something like this, and there were a few friends of mine who were working as cleaning ladies...and they were leaving to States...and they gave me their job.

[Thelma] In Italian houses in Rome?

[Larisa] Yes. They were very nice people...I can't say nothing bad...I cannot say that I like to clean, you know, but if you have to do it, you do it! From the beginning, you think: "Oh, I don't want to clean", but you get some money...if you have family, you have to think about them. My husband was working in a gas station and I was cleaning, and we made some money. [With this money] we were hoping to buy a car, because we knew the first thing we had to buy is a car. Instead, the first thing we bought was an apartment!

[Thelma] So the hard-earned money for a car went to pay a bribe for an apartment?

[Larisa] Yes, to a penny.

[Thelma] Did other immigrants have this experience?

[Larisa] Yes. It was the time when apartments were in great demand and people were taking advantage of it [1990].

[Thelma] And nobody reported these superintendents?

[Larisa] Later on, I know a case, because [there was] this superintendent, and he kept on doing this longer than anybody else probably...I know a person who got her money back. Somebody was suing the Superintendent...and everything came to the surface...and she went as a witness to the court...and they won...and she got her money back. But you can count these on your fingers.

[Thelma] Have you got a car now?

[Larisa] Oh yes! [laughing] Now we have two cars. Both of them are used, but they are cars.

[Thelma] Your English is fantastic. You studied English in Rome and....?

[Larisa] First I studied English in school...then I studied in institute...and we had the strictest English teacher...she was Jewish...she is somewhere in the States right now...and when we came to Rome we had a lot of help there.

It was not only JIAS. [They were] either Mormons, or some [other] religious Christian

people and they had classes. The best thing they did, which the teachers from Russia couldn't do for us...these people were from the States, not from Canada...like they were telling us what to do when you come to the store...you see, let's say, appliances...you want to buy...don't buy first one you see...you shop around...because in Russia every store has the same price for the same thing. Also, if you see the price doesn't mean by the time you get to cashier will be the same...don't forget there are taxes...we had no idea what tax is all about. They taught us these particular things, which were really important.

[Thelma] Survival skills.

[Larisa] Yes. Also, where are they having a sale? Maybe it will go on sale in two weeks. Look, if it's Christmas time, you might get a good deal...wait another week...wait another month. They taught us all these fine things in Rome.

[Thelma] You go to synagogue "sometimes"...?

[Larisa] High holidays. On Rockford...Jewish-Russian Community Centre. Both Bar Mitzvahs...we have two boys... were in Rockford synagogue. We go sometimes on Shabbat. At the beginning, we went more often than now. Sometimes we went for Shabbat to Rabbi's house...he invited us over there. The kids went to this Russian-Jewish Sunday School...Orah. At the beginning they went to Talmud Torah school at the synagogue, and their principal invited us for Sader [Passover ritual meal] to his house, even my parents went with us...he invited them too. It was an Orthodox home. It was really interesting...so unusual for us...very different...yes, it was a real Sader.

JIAS organized from the very beginning...the first Sader we had with a volunteer family...the next family we still keep in touch...we call each other...she invited us quite a few times this lady...we went, the whole family...we enjoyed it. She is not Orthodox. Eunice [deleted surname]... We keep in touch. At Rosh Hashana, I always call her and get updated about her son and grandchildren. And there is another family we also connected with through JIAS, but somehow we lost touch with them.

[Thelma] You didn't say anything about a community centre. Do you go to the Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst Street?

[Larisa] We go sometimes. Our little one, he is going to basketball...and my husband goes swimming with the kids sometimes...and we have been planning to get a membership for a long time. We go to a dance club...actually it is run by a Jewish fellow...it's at 1118 Centre Street, next to Hava Negilah...it's called Dance Fit...it's couples...ballroom and Latino dancing. Finally we are doing something not because we have to but because we just enjoy.

[Thelma] Your parents enjoy the Betel Centre.

- [Larisa] Yes. Sometimes I also go there; not often, but whenever I have time I'm trying.
- [Thelma] Do you go to concerts?
- [Larisa] Oh, yes! Room 206 of our Jewish Community Centre, Lipa Green Building. I go quite often. Also to the theatre, quite often they have nice performances and I am going with my husband. But this Room 206, every second Sunday in summer, they have somebody coming over, either a pianist or a singer, like they have very interesting people. They had a concert from [put on by] Beth Emeth Synagogue...oh I was so enjoying that concert. My parents they know all the programs because they have time to find out...and they call me: "Do you want to come?" "Sure, I want to come...I'll go!"
- [Thelma] You are not interested in politics?
- [Larisa] No, not me. My husband, not me.
- [Thelma] You have a Russian doctor?
- [Larisa] Yes.
- [Thelma] The same doctor as your mother and father?
- [Larisa] Yes. Dr. Sarah Pliamm.
- [Thelma] You have many friends. Do you have Canadian friends as well?
- [Larisa] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you find that Toronto people are friendly?
- [Larisa] Yes, I do.
- [Thelma] You say you have not been able to find work in your own field. What are you doing?
- [Larisa] Auditor. I am a Revenue Canada auditor.
- [Thelma] Oh my God...why am I talking to you?!!!
- [Larisa] [Laughing] Don't be scared of me. Nothing wrong with me!
- [Thelma] You are an auditor for the Federal Government. My God, how did you get

to auditing from engineering?

[Larisa] I wrote the whole story on the last page [questionnaire] how I got there.

[Thelma] Okay. Are you in a townhouse or an apartment?

[Larisa] In a townhouse.

[Thelma] Do you like it...are you comfortable?

[Larisa] Okay...the only thing is the maintenance payments, I don't really like. On the other hand, you pay the payments...they cut your grass and you don't have to worry about the outside.

[Thelma] Are you renting or did you buy it?

[Larisa] We bought it.

[Thelma] You have had no trouble with anti-Semitism? Nobody has called you a name because you are a Russian?

[Larisa] No...like sometimes they joke: "Oh, you are from Russian mafia!"

[Thelma] Do you get a lot of teasing about the Russian mafia?

[Larisa] Quite a bit...but, you know, I am working for Revenue Canada...they know the most about Russian mafia.

[Thelma] So they tease you. Does that bother you?

[Larisa] Absolutely not. I know it's a joke. I don't take it personally.

[Thelma] Do you ever think about the degree of stereotyping regarding the Russian immigrants?

[Larisa] I think it is exaggerated a lot. In any nation you can find bad people.

[Thelma] I know there are bad people...but what I am talking about is...do you think about this? It seems to me that I hear a lot of stereotyping going on...I've heard more than I would like to hear...if there is a Russian who has made some money, right away you hear from a Canadian: "Oh, he is probably the Russian mafia."

[Larisa] You know what...not only from Canadians...you can hear from Russians as

well.

[Thelma] You hear from Russians as well? This is not a good thing.

[Larisa] No. No. Like, you cannot judge people because one person is mafia, of course. Sometimes I feel bad when I read something..... Do you remember when this [Bill] Cosby's son was shot? It happened to be a Russian guy.

[Thelma] Was he a Russian Jew?

[Larisa] No, he wasn't a Jew for sure. He was Russian but not a Jew. And when you see this, you think "Ach"...again, it's a bad reputation. I hate when people are swearing. When people swear in English it doesn't bother me...it goes through...when I hear somebody swear in Russian, I want to turn around and say: "Stop!"

[Thelma] You are sensitive about that.

[Larisa] That's right.

[Thelma] Everyone wants to put their best foot forward. Do you like television?

[Larisa] Oh yes.

[Thelma] You watch English television. Do you rent Russian-language videos?

[Larisa] Very seldom.

[Thelma] Do you like our modern supermarkets?

[Larisa] Like window shopping.

[Thelma] Do you ever go to Loblaws?

[Larisa] Yes.

[Thelma] Do you like the Loblaws stores?

[Larisa] I found it a little bit expensive. In our area is Food Basics...my son is working for Food Basics...we better buy there only to support his place. And Price Chopper too...better prices. And I can't say that quality is different...same quality, better prices. But sometimes I go to Loblaws. Like I get a flyer...and I compare...and there are other stores in the plaza...like the Bay...on the way from work I stop there [Yonge and Steeles, Centerpoint Mall].

[Thelma]       Where is your office?

[Larisa]       On Yonge Street between Sheppard and Finch, 5001 Yonge Street. Parking is expensive. Sometimes I take subway...but most times you need the car to go somewhere during the day.

[Thelma]       You are optimistic about your future, and your children's future.

[Larisa]       Yes, I am. I was born optimistic. You can't survive otherwise!

[Thelma]       You miss Russia sometimes. Do you correspond with anybody back home?

[Larisa]       Once a year, I get a letter from the lady I worked together [with] in Russia when I worked in design institute. We were designing air conditioning, gas and heat supply...this was my job. I get once a year [a letter] for New Year's. I got a letter this year and I answered her, but I didn't send it yet.

[Thelma]       Was she a Jewish friend?

[Larisa]       No, no she is Russian.

[Thelma]       Did you go to Seneca College for your Certified General Accountant degree?

[Larisa]       I did go for some courses to Seneca because first I got full-year in George Brown College, which gave me five exemptions for this program. To finish the program needs seventeen credits. I got five after one year in George Brown full-time. Then I got enrolled and they allow you to take somewhere...like York University...I was taking in York a few [credits]...in Toronto university....

[Thelma]       You were taking different accounting courses all over the place?

Larisa]       Yes. And they were giving me exemptions from C.G.A. Let's say I take intermediate accounting and advanced accounting in York University, and I get exemptions from C.G.A.

[Thelma]       When you say "exemptions", you mean you get credits at the C.G.A?

[Larisa]       Yes...they give me a credit for taking it somewhere else. Why I was taking it somewhere else? Because it was cheaper...this was the main reason. By the time you get to level four or five, there are five or six courses you cannot take anywhere else except with C.G.A.

[Thelma]       Where is that located?

[Larisa] C.G.A....it's not located. It has a lecture centre and an exam centre. The exam centre is located in a building at Exhibition Place. This is the place where all the students at C.G.A. are writing their exams. For lectures you can go to different locations. I used to go to Seneca, and Ryerson sometimes. Sometimes I just took it [course] by correspondence.

[Thelma] How long did it take you to complete this program?

[Larisa] Five full years. Not that I studied full-time. I was working full-time and taking it at night or week-ends. It was very difficult. A lot of time, a lot of effort, unbelievable...but thank God it's over.

[Thelma] Expensive too.

[Larisa] It was expensive too...except when I started at Revenue Canada...they were the only one that paid...but it was only for one course...the last course I took when I was working with them. The company I was working for [before], they didn't need me to be a C.G.A. It was enough for them without the C.G.A. program. They were pretty happy with me, but since I started I figured out...I used to be a professional back home and now I am changing my profession and I have to become a professional, if I can...and I thought I can do it.

[Thelma] And you did it.

[Larisa] And I did it.

[Thelma] And you did it! Mazel tov.

[Larisa] Thank you...it was very hard...I won't say it wasn't.

[Thelma] Did you get any financial help for these courses?

[Larisa] No, I did everything on my own. There was a Jewish guy in my group. We studied sometimes in my house for the C.G.A. exam...sometimes at his house. It was funny...he used to come over...I don't keep Kosher in my house...he would say: "I'm so hungry! Can't you give me something?" "I can't give you anything! Open the frig and whatever looks okay take." "Oh, this yogurt looks Kosher to me." "Okay, so eat it." "I am so hungry...I am going to *Tovli Pizza* and I'll come back."

[Thelma] It's hard to be Kosher.

[Larisa] That's it, it really is.

[Thelma] When you say during your studies you met a lot of people who were very helpful...were these people in your classes?

[Larisa] In my classes and in my workplace...both. There is another Canadian-Jewish person we are friends with...he has two little girls...I know his wife...I used to come to his house because we were going to lectures together...I used to park at his house, and after the lectures, I was taking my car and going home.

[Thelma] Did he graduate with you?

[Larisa] Yes, we had a huge ceremony. On November 7, there was a party for ninety-eight graduates and...poor thing...he had to walk from his house because it was a Saturday [Jewish Sabbath]. Can you imagine...he lives at Lawrence and Bathurst and the party was at Weston Harbour Castle on Front Street. It took them, I believe, three or four hours to walk...with his wife and his friend, they walked. When I saw him, he was in his tux, but he was sort of unbuttoned. I said: "David, what happened?" He said: "We just finished walking." They couldn't even stay for dinner because he was so tired. He said: "I cannot dance, I'm tired. I cannot eat, I'm tired. I had better go home and go to sleep." Some friends, who came with a car, took them back home. I felt sorry for him, but what can you do?

[Thelma] Did he get there in time for the graduation ceremony?

[Larisa] Yes, we met them at the entrance [of the hotel] on time. We went to the ceremony. We got our red tubes with our two huge certificates.

[Thelma] What a proud and happy moment that was!

[Larisa] Yes...and they make you feel so special!

[Thelma] The Certified General Accountant Association...is that a government agency or an independent business?

[Larisa] It's an independent business; the same as Chartered Accountant. At the Provincial level, we have the Association of Ontario. I am a Certified General Accountant of Ontario. And the other certificate is for Canada -- both. We can practice anywhere in Canada...not only in Ontario.

[Thelma] So if you decide to move, your degree moves with you. Okay! Thank you so much.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**BORIS [52]**  
**FEBRUARY 12, 1999**

- [Thelma] Did you have an apartment in Odessa?
- [Boris] Everybody has...don't believe nobody who is crying...like Jewish...I am Jewish...Jews love more crying...it's not true.
- [Thelma] So life was not so bad in Odessa?
- [Boris] No.
- [Thelma] When you were there life was still comfortable. Were you working?
- [Boris] I was working. Everybody working! Everybody lives...everybody got apartment. You know what...in Russia, if you are living in an apartment, everybody in the summer...they are leaving their apartment and go out and got the small white cottage.
- [Thelma] A *dacha*?
- [Boris] *Dacha*.
- [Thelma] Did you have a *dacha*?
- [Boris] I had two floors.
- [Thelma] A beautiful *dacha*.
- [Boris] A stone *dacha*!
- [Thelma] A lovely solid place. Did you sell it before you came to Canada?
- [Boris] It was my wife's mother's. She sold it.
- [Thelma] Was your apartment a rented apartment?
- [Boris] Yes, yes, it was rented. Look...at first was three rubles a month; then was seven; then was ten; then eleven...it's nothing. You can pay for three, four months, then you can go away.
- [Thelma] Cheap.

- [Boris]            Eyes nothing...teeth nothing.
- [Thelma]           Medical, dental.
- [Boris]            Nothing...everything was free!
- [Thelma]           Comfortable...no big stress.
- [Boris]            I can't compare Canada and Russia.    Canada more rich...people richer...everything looks like [appears to be] better...just looks ...for poor people it was better in Russia.
- [Thelma]           For the working man, it was easier in Russia?
- [Boris]            Sure.    Everybody can in summer buy the ticket for ship around the Black Sea, you know....Ohhh!
- [Thelma]           Did you have a four-week holiday?
- [Boris]            Two weeks, like in Canada. It was not bad.
- [Thelma]           Did the government pay for your singing education at the [Odessa Music] Conservatory?
- [Boris]            I pass [high school] and I go, I don't think [worry] about it.
- [Thelma]           You had no problem about tuition costs?
- [Boris]            Look...who got problem?    Ask everybody...engineer, mechanic, singer, teacher...they are educated, those [immigrants] coming to Canada. Russians well educated!
- [Thelma]           Oh, I know!    We are receiving incredibly well-educated immigrants here.
- [Boris]            We leaving Russia and go to Israel...they [Israelis] all [say]: "Oh, thank you very much Russian immigration."    Physicians, mathematics, no problem. Canada doesn't like people like that.    Many people working in bakery, gas station...engineers, academics.
- [Thelma]           You are teaching?
- [Boris]            Yes.
- [Thelma]           You are teaching music?

[Boris] Yes. Guitar and voice.

[Thelma] Are you busy?

[Boris] Ohhh...

[Thelma] Could you use more work?

[Boris] I can, yes.

[Thelma] Are you doing any singing anywhere?

[Boris] Sometimes.

[Thelma] For money or just for.....

[Boris] For money...no, I'm ...[starts to laugh]

[Thelma] I'm asking are you making some money singing? Or are you not singing?

[Boris] Sometimes [very sad].

[Thelma] Do you like singing the best? If you had the opportunity, would you sing for a living?

[Boris] Yes.

[Thelma] Do you speak Yiddish?

[Boris] I understand. I understand one hundred percent. My grandmother when she was alive...then when grandmother died....

[Thelma] The Yiddish was finished.

[Boris] You know, that's everywhere same problem.

[Thelma] How many children do you have?

[Boris] One son.

[Thelma] Did you come to Canada with your wife or just your son?

[Boris] Whole family came.

- [Thelma] Did you come as a refugee?
- [Boris] No, no, no...landed immigrant.
- [Thelma] Did somebody sponsor you here?
- [Boris] My sister.
- [Thelma] She sponsored your family in 1992. Your son must be about 27 by now.
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did your son go to school in Toronto?
- [Boris] Sure.
- [Thelma] Has he finished school?
- [Boris] He finished school, and passed in College. He is working and is now studying computer programming...three-yearcourse [laughing]...no more six months...Canada expensive.
- [Thelma] It's a different world here isn't it?
- [Boris] Very expensive.
- [Thelma] Before you left the Soviet Union, did you understand the capitalist system that we are living under?
- [Boris] You know...in our schools everything was taught.
- [Thelma] Did you understand that it might be a difficult struggle?
- [Boris] You know what...before we arrived in Canada, I was visitor.
- [Thelma] You were here visiting your sister before immigrating?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] So you had a chance to....
- [Boris] I saw everything, and when I come back [to Odessa], I say no, I am not immigrating. Look, I sing in restaurant...I go to Black Sea....

- [Thelma] It was a nice life.
- [Boris] Yes!
- [Thelma] So really, the only reason you decided to emigrate was because you were afraid your son would go into the army and have a tragic ending?
- [Boris] Look, I was not hungry...everything was in the store...I was satisfied.
- [Thelma] Are you in touch with Odessa now?
- [Boris] Yes, my wife's mother.
- [Thelma] What does your mother-in-law tell you about the situation in Odessa since you left.
- [Boris] Not too bad. Still okay.
- [Thelma] You are Jewish. Is your wife Jewish also?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Was one of the reasons for leaving Odessa anti-Semitism?
- [Boris] I don't feel that. You know what...don't trust the Jewish people...okay? You know what? Never I feel that for myself like "You Jew". You know, a couple times was...so it's not...I don't feel so...everybody got educated, everybody working, what other things is?
- [Thelma] So you felt you had the same treatment as all the other Soviet citizens. Being Jewish did not stop you from getting anything you needed?
- [Boris] No, no.
- [Thelma] What about socially? Did you have friends who were Russians?
- [Boris] Yes...they are still my friends...they are living in Odessa...I call them.
- [Thelma] Are they interested in coming to Canada?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] They are.

[Boris] You know what...if you are deaf, you don't know what you are missing. The problems in our country [Ukraine] "Oh, terrible!"; when you live in this kind of country [Canada] "Oh, so many problems!"

[Thelma] There is an English expression...maybe you heard it, maybe not..."The grass is always greener on the other side."

[Boris] Yes! [Big laugh].

[Thelma] I am hearing that things are becoming very hard in Russia.

[Boris] Now very bad. Not that system [communism] and not capitalist system. Nobody know what will happen. Is a problem...[when] was communism was the same like capitalism...the same...just they say...oh, not capitalist system [here], blah, blah, blah...then [they say] no communist system [here]...THE SAME, THE SAME...all political.

[Thelma] All political.

[Boris] Everything free...no rich people...[under communism].

[Thelma] That's baloney! There were rich people under communism.

[Boris] Believe me, was rich people...you can't imagine how they lived under communism...just be smart...if you do something be quiet or they catch you.

[Thelma] But if you are clever, you get away with it?

[Boris] You know about this...many people talk about it.

[Thelma] In any society there are always people who do better and people who do worse. No matter what the system.

[Boris] Yes!

[Thelma] Now...did you have help from JIAS?

[Boris] Yes.

[Thelma] Did you contact them when you came to Toronto?

[Boris] Yes...they helped me with apartment...they gave me money...first and last month rent, I didn't know about that. They offer me furniture but I see the condition ...better if I buy something new one piece [at a time], I don't want [the old furniture].

- [Thelma] So you didn't want the old stuff. Did you bring clothes with you when you came?
- [Boris] Little bit.
- [Thelma] Did you need clothes?
- [Boris] You know what...no.
- [Thelma] Did they help you with anything else...information, etc?
- [Boris] They better than Russian...better than Ukrainian...better than Poland...I know one hundred percent...very, very good...they working very, very nice.
- [Thelma] The Russian social workers at JIAS...did they make you feel comfortable?
- [Boris] Yes, very nice.
- [Thelma] They didn't make you feel like a second-class citizen?
- [Boris] Oh no, no, no! For me, it was very nice...maybe for somebody [else] they was badder than [for] me, but in my opinion they was very nice.
- [Thelma] Your opinion is what I want. Did they help you get orientation information?
- [Boris] Sure...one hundred percent. They gave me books... Jewish organizations very helpful. Everybody that arrived to Canada, first of all they went to JIAS.
- [Thelma] Did they help your son?
- [Boris] Sure.
- [Thelma] How did they help him?
- [Boris] They helped him with school first of all; then athletics...they gave him pass to Jewish Community Centre for two years. They helped me too...I went a couple of times to gym...they helped...no problem...it's one hundred percent.
- [Thelma] Is your Social Assistance coming from the City of Toronto or the Province of Ontario?
- [Boris] I guess from Toronto.

- [Thelma] Did JIAS send you to English as a Second Language? Did you go to school?
- [Boris] Yes, three years. I was in JIAS...I got the paper...two years, maybe one and a half, I don't know...they stopped, then I went to Flemington School. Flemington I was maybe three years...you know what, I not working...I have time.
- [Thelma] Did your wife go to school with you?
- [Boris] No.
- [Thelma] Why?
- [Boris] She [laughing] don't like.
- [Thelma] Was she afraid to go?
- [Boris] No, she not afraid...she is, you know, she different than me...she is worker...she is dressmaker.
- [Thelma] She is sewing. Does she sew at home or in a factory?
- [Boris] In a factory.
- [Thelma] Boris, what did your wife do in Odessa?
- [Boris] She sewing...she mostly was like...
- [Thelma] Did she stay at home?
- [Boris] At home...he [son] was younger....
- [Thelma] So in Odessa your wife stayed at home and in Toronto she is working in a factory.
- [Boris] Yes [laughing, but embarrassed].
- [Thelma] She is sewing leather automobile upholstery.
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] What do you like about Toronto? Is it a nice city? Do you think if you have money you can have a nice life here?

- [Boris] Nice city...very nice...if you have nice job, not just....
- [Thelma] If you have a nice job, everything will change.
- [Boris] You know what? It is my opinion man have to get minimum two thousand and half every month. One thousand, thirteen hundred is not money...it's an apartment and that's it.
- [Thelma] Life is expensive here.
- [Boris] Expensive but still not bad. Now better than in my country, much better.
- [Thelma] You go to synagogue sometimes?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Where do you go?
- [Boris] Rockford...they invite me many times...they know me.
- [Thelma] It's very nice there. Do you know Hebrew?
- [Boris] No.
- [Thelma] When you go to the synagogue, you just listen?
- [Boris] It's Russian [laughing].
- [Thelma] That's right...I'm stupid! I went there on Saturday morning. I felt like the immigrant because the book was Russian and Hebrew and I didn't understand anything.
- [Boris] [Laughing] You didn't know anything!
- [Thelma] So I listened, it was very nice, very pleasant, and I didn't understand a thing. Do you belong to a music group?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Where?
- [Boris] My friends...we set up the band and play...sometimes.

- [Thelma] Do you play in your homes?
- [Boris] No we play...sometimes the Jewish community invites...sometimes concert.
- [Thelma] Do you belong to a Russian club?
- [Boris] In Canada? No, no Russian club.
- [Thelma] You are not interested in politics?
- [Boris] No. You know...why?
- [Thelma] Why?
- [Boris] It's not up to me [big laugh].
- [Thelma] Are you a Canadian citizen yet?
- [Boris] I will.
- [Thelma] You will be. When you become a Canadian citizen, will you vote?
- [Boris] Yes, I will vote.
- [Thelma] You had better vote. It's a social responsibility to vote...it's important.
- [Boris] Is it?
- [Thelma] Do you have a Russian or Canadian doctor?
- [Boris] Russian doctor sometimes sends me to Canadian doctor. To specialist.
- [Thelma] Do you like your doctor?
- [Boris] Not bad.
- [Thelma] Is he as good as the doctor in Russia?
- [Boris] You know what? Russian doctors very smart but they without the technical opportunities like here. They got this [points to head and heart].
- [Thelma] That's an interesting comment. Your friends in Toronto...who are they?

- [Boris] In Toronto I have couple friends.
- [Thelma] Are they from Russia?
- [Boris] Yes, from my city...the same city.
- [Thelma] Do you have any Russian-Jewish friends who came from Israel?
- [Boris] No, no.
- [Thelma] Do you have any Russian-Russian friends here...Christian friends from Russia?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Then why did you write "no" [on the questionnaire]?
- [Boris] I don't understand the question.
- [Thelma] Do you have any friends who are Toronto-Jews, Canadian-Jews?
- [Boris] Not yet...mostly my students' mothers...some parents...they invite me sometimes, you know, Jewish celebration they invite me...nice people.
- [Thelma] Okay, students' parents for holidays. Passover?
- [Boris] Passover, yes.
- [Thelma] Do you like to go to a Passover Sader?
- [Boris] Yes, nice...different culture...in Russia was different...we lived like *vee goyim* [like non-Jews].
- [Thelma] *Vee goyim*, yes. Okay, Toronto-Jews...like me...are they friendly?
- [Boris] Yes, sure, very friendly [big laugh].
- [Thelma] Are they helpful...do they help you at all? Try to understand the question, it's important. Has a Toronto-Jew ever helped you?
- [Boris] Yes, they help.
- [Thelma] I don't mean a social worker!

- [Boris] I understand.
- [Thelma] You know, an individual...help you get some work?
- [Boris] They try [laughing]. They try.
- [Thelma] Well, trying is good...and sometimes they invite you to their houses?
- [Boris] Yes, I'm friendly.
- [Thelma] You have not been able to find work in your own field as a professional singer?
- [Boris] No, no...it is impossible.
- [Thelma] Difficult?
- [Boris] No, no impossible [laughing]. Maybe if I was younger...maybe.
- [Thelma] You're not so old [52].
- [Boris] Seven years younger, I am trying to do [establish] my career. You know what, it is expensive in Canada...I take a couple lessons...I try to do like that...it cost money.
- [Thelma] Do you ever sing at a wedding or bar mitzvah?
- [Boris] Yes, yes...sometimes. Not too much. This year much worser than last year was for me. Economy go down.
- [Thelma] Everything is getting tight.
- [Boris] Tight.
- [Thelma] Where do you live?
- [Boris] An apartment.
- [Thelma] Do you watch English television? Do you understand a little bit?
- [Boris] Not little bit, I understand maybe forty-five percent...not easy...difficult.
- [Thelma] Do you like the musical programs?

- [Boris] Yes, sure.
- [Thelma] Do you rent Russian videos?
- [Boris] Yes, sure.
- [Thelma] Do you miss Russia?
- [Boris] Sometimes. Not hundred percent...first couple years...now it's better...like taking medicine, you get used to it.
- [Thelma] If you had some extra money, would you go back to Odessa for a holiday?
- [Boris] Sure! For two weeks. I want to see my friends. Very nice city...not political...not like Soviet Russia...very nice girls, beautiful girls.
- [Thelma] If you were going to try to describe Toronto on the telephone to your friend in Odessa what would you say?
- [Boris] I would say very nice. Toronto is a very nice city. City is not political.
- [Thelma] Do you like the buildings...the architecture?
- [Boris] New, new city. After America when I come back to Toronto...oh how much better...different!
- [Thelma] It's nicer here?
- [Boris] Yes, everybody says this.
- [Thelma] Have you travelled in America?
- [Boris] Yes.
- [Thelma] Where?
- [Boris] New York.
- [Thelma] Do you have friends in New York?
- [Boris] Sure, many friends...all my friends in New York from my city.
- [Thelma] There is a big Russian population in New York.

- [Boris] A million!
- [Thelma] There is a million Russian-Jews...or Russians-Russians?
- [Boris] Russians.
- [Thelma] Amazing. One last question.
- [Boris] No problem.
- [Thelma] Your son is now twenty-seven. Who are his friends? Are they Canadians...are they Israelis...are they Russians?
- [Boris] He has friends Russian, Jewish and Canadian...many friends.
- [Thelma] Does he have a girl friend?
- [Boris] I don't know [big laugh].
- [Thelma] Is he still living with you at home?
- [Boris] Yes, why not, feels very nice.
- [Thelma] Does your son think of himself as Jewish?
- [Boris] Yes, sure, he wears Jewish star.
- [Thelma] Did you ever think you would like to go to Israel?
- [Boris] No...you know why? You know how many Russian people leave Israel and come to Canada?
- [Thelma] Plenty. I have interviewed Russians who went to Israel and then came to Canada.
- [Boris] That's not good for Israel, by the way, it's not very good for Israel...my opinion.
- [Thelma] Why is it not good for Israel?
- [Boris] I guess [the question is]...why they are leaving Israel?

- [Thelma] Oh, you think people are wondering why the Russian-Jews are leaving Israel? That this is somehow bad for Israel?
- [Boris] Sure. Do you know how many Russians not Jewish?
- [Thelma] Yes, I interviewed some Russians who have perhaps a grandfather who was Jewish.
- [Boris] Not true.
- [Thelma] Maybe.
- [Boris] Maybe [laughing].
- [Thelma] They have exit papers. They go to Israel...they are not happy in Israel...they come here...they say Israel was not good for them. So I ask them...and I have no problem asking...and I think they tell me the truth...I ask did you ever intend to stay in Israel...and they say, no, never...they always wanted to go elsewhere...but they could not get out unless they went to Israel...and they are happy when they get here.
- [Boris] Yes...[laughing] they say it is better in Canada than in Israel.
- [Thelma] In Israel they have problems with the religious, and also they feel it is dangerous...they worry about their children...like you did.
- [Boris] Yes, sure.
- [Thelma] So, welcome to Canada...and I think we'll stop now.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**LIUDMYLA AND VIKTOR [51 and 61]**  
**FEBRUARY 19, 1999**

- [Thelma] We are talking about Feodor...their seven-year-old son, who started Grade One last year with no English at all.
- [Liudmyla] And it was a very difficult period for us because I was working and my husband was in hospital.
- [Thelma] Who took care of Feodor?
- [Liudmyla] Friends and neighbours. After Grade One, he [Feodor] brings us...I will show you....
- [Thelma] He won a medal! The father was sick... the mother was working...a new country...and he won a medal. [Principal's Award, 1998, Dublin Heights Public School] That's fantastic!
- [Thelma] What did you know about Canada before you arrived? In the questionnaire you answer "a lot". How did you find out about Canada?
- [Liudmyla] From my husband's brother and his wife and family...and we have many friends in Canada. They were writing me letters from Canada and we were talking on the telephone. The family of my husband's brother arrived in Canada before us...they live in the same building.
- [Thelma] So you had a little bit of a support system here when you arrived...and they had encouraged you to come. That's important.
- [Liudmyla] Oh, yes, very important.
- [Thelma] You came with your husband and young son. You knew some English and were fluent in French. Does your husband speak French?
- [Liudmyla] No...[laughing].
- [Viktor] Russian only.
- [Thelma] Did JIAS help you at all?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, JIAS is for us miracle in Canada because we have never seen an

organization like this before. And people in JIAS are wonderful. I wrote a letter for President of JIAS...if you want copy, this is for you.

[Thelma] Oh thank you. This is excellent! I see here the name of Mila Voihanski. Was she your social worker? May I refer to this letter in my thesis?

[Liudmyla] Yes.

[Thelma] Did JIAS help you with money?

[Liudmyla] Yes, when we went there, they helped.

[Thelma] Did they help you with furniture?

[Liudmyla] Oh, of course! You see this furniture here....[indicates furniture in very good condition].

[Thelma] Did they help you find this apartment?

[Liudmyla] No. Apartment found the brother of my husband.

[Thelma] Did you have the apartment rented before you arrived?

[Liudmyla] Yes.

[Thelma] What about clothing? Did JIAS help with clothing?

[Liudmyla] Yes, yes, we made visit to store.

[Thelma] What did you bring with you from the Ukraine?

[Liudmyla] All decorations...paintings...old pieces.

[Thelma] All your beautiful treasures.

[Liudmyla] Some clothes.

[Thelma] Did JIAS help you with ESL? Did you go to classes?

[Liudmyla] Yes...I wrote in my letter about this school...wonderful school...this is very important when people arrive in Canada to be in school like this. This school is very friendly...this is like a family.

[Thelma] How long did you attend this school?

[Liudmyla] I started from September and in November my husband got sick and I can't continue...and this year from September to December, but not all day because he needs to go to hospital.

[Thelma] You have been so busy. Have you been working while he has been sick?

[Liudmyla] Yes. I had position with Montessori School. I am teacher.

*Liudmyla was hired from February to June of 1998 by the Toronto Montessori School as a maternity-leave-replacement French teacher to work primarily with elementary level students, six and seven year olds. She received a wonderful reference from Florine Shuber, who is the principal at the Montessori School, 8569 Bayview Avenue, Richmond Hill. Husband, Viktor, was a boxing champion in the Ukraine and a very respected scientist in his field of metallurgy. Since he has come to Canada, he has become ill with cancer and he is being treated at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. He remains optimistic about getting better.*

[Thelma] You don't have to give me all the details, I just want to know what the Federal or Provincial governments have done to help you.

[Liudmyla] Now we are receiving social assistance because after Montessori School, I had offer of position in Mississauga, but I need five hours daily to travel to Mississauga and back because we haven't a car, and the sickness of my husband changed all the life. I refused [the position]. And I think it is good that I have time to go to the hospital with my husband...and three months ago doctor told that my husband has new cancer...and it was terrible blow...but in a month the tests became better...he is doing better now with treatment and we hope for the best.

[Thelma] It was probably important that you be available for your little boy too, under the circumstances.

You state that your happiest surprise in Toronto is the "Jewish Community". Do you like the Jewish community here?

[Liudmyla] Very much.

[Thelma] Anything in particular?

[Liudmyla] The people the best of Toronto. We have many friends from Jewish community and they support us very, very much.

- [Thelma] Are any of these friends from the Jewish community Canadians?
- [Liudmyla] Canadians. They arrived in Canada after Second World War.
- [Thelma] Are they Russians?
- [Liudmyla] No, Polish Jews.
- [Thelma] How did you meet them?
- [Liudmyla] Ummm, relatives.
- [Thelma] Your relatives had met them and they introduced them to you?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, sorry for my English [laughing].
- [Thelma] No, no, I am understanding everything. I am very happy that some of these people, who have lived here longer, are being supportive. Is there anything you did not like about Toronto?
- [Liudmyla] No....
- [Thelma] Nothing?
- [Liudmyla] We have not good social worker in Welfare... but this is not important.
- [Thelma] Was she harsh with you?
- [Liudmyla] No...every month I sent on time our information, and every month she told us she didn't receive our information, and every month I phone because I need to pay rent... and I call, I phone, I speak....
- [Thelma] Has she ever suggested a way to improve the communication?
- [Liudmyla] Yesterday, I told this lady all that I think about it. I think that it is impossible that every month...we have very good mail...she didn't receive our information...and in two hours she called us and she told us she received our information [laughing].
- [Thelma] Does she speak English to you?
- [Liudmyla] Yes.

[Thelma] Does she understand Russian?

[Liudmyla] No, but there are staff from Russia.

[Thelma] There are people who can translate for you if you need it?

[Liudmyla] I understand [English], but she is afraid that I didn't understand what she told me, and after I am speaking with this lady [social worker], this staff [person] speaking Russian called me and tried to tell me again...and I said thank you very much...and I told him that I am not satisfied with this lady...I am not happy.

[Thelma] Did they change the lady?

[Liudmyla] No...but we are waiting...I think maybe my husband have...I forgot what is in English...Family Benefits. Maybe we will have another social worker and maybe I will work and we don't need [welfare].

[Thelma] Is Viktor entitled to Disability?

[Liudmyla] Disability.

[Thelma] Because of his illness. Can you get Disability and Social Assistance at the same time?

[Liudmyla] No.

[Thelma] Maybe in time, if he has Disability and you are working, there will be two incomes coming in. That would be helpful.

[Liudmyla] That would be wonderful. I hope that I will have work.

[Thelma] The best thing would be if he gets better and you both can go to work.

Do you both go to synagogue?

[Liudmyla] Not together because we haven't time.

[Thelma] When you go, do you go to the same place? Where do you go?

[Liudmyla] No, not same place. I do not go all the time. This place I go is on Bathurst Street...Progressive synagogue...this is like a temple.. big...and people are very friendly and there are concerts and performances..and a Museum, for example, Chinese Jews....

- [Thelma] That is probably Beth Tzedec Synagogue...it's a big beautiful Conservative synagogue.
- [Liudmyla] Yes, yes! Conservative...and my husband visits another synagogue.
- [Viktor] Rabbi Gersh!
- [Thelma] Oh, that's the Russian-speaking community...is it on Rockford?
- [Viktor] No, Finch Avenue. Rabbi Gersh.
- [Liudmyla] He has very good impression of this rabbi.
- [Viktor] He give me Torah!
- [Thelma] You carried the Torah?
- [Viktor and Liudmyla] Yes!
- [Thelma] Oh, your husband carried the Torah...that's very nice.
- [Liudmyla] This was first time in his life.
- [Viktor] For me first time.
- [Thelma] Did it feel good?
- [Viktor] Yes!
- [Liudmyla] [Shows a small Torah and Torah Book in Russian and Hebrew]
- [Thelma] Oh, that's beautiful. Did you buy this or was it given to you?
- [Liudmyla] No, this is from Library.
- [Thelma] Which Library?
- [Liudmyla] Jewish Library.
- [Thelma] Can you keep this for a few weeks?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, we may keep this for a few months.

- [Thelma] Do you read this sometimes?
- [Liudmyla] My husband. This is interesting because it is history, and we didn't know anything [before].
- [Thelma] Do you belong to a community centre?
- [Liudmyla] Yes. Jewish Community Centre on Bathurst.
- [Thelma] Do you both go?
- [Liudmyla] Yes.
- [Thelma] What do you do there?
- [Liudmyla] We go for see our social worker, and for visiting Library, and our son visiting summer camp.
- [Viktor] [Says something in Russian which Liudmyla translates]. Yes, and we visited two or three times course about Jewish history.
- [Liudmyla] And now we received an invitation for a course in Jewish history that will be given in Russian by Kolel [Centre for Jewish Learning] with Russian teacher, once a week from Feb. 15 to April 26 in the evening 7:30 to 9:00, on Monday.
- [Thelma] A Jewish history program sponsored by Kolel and JIAS once a week. Is it free?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, free.
- [Thelma] Are you going to go?
- [Liudmyla] My husband, yes, of course. Me, I have [to give] private lessons tutoring with a child. Maybe I make arrangements for another day my tutoring because this is very interesting for us.
- [Thelma] You state that you are interested in all politics. Is your husband interested in politics?
- [Viktor] [Liudmyla asks Viktor, in Russian, if he is interested in politics]. Oh yes!
- [Thelma] Do you watch television?

- [Liudmyla] Oh yes. We watch Canadian TV and we see Russian TV. This is from United States, but we have some programs [directly] from Russia.
- [Viktor] Satellite.
- [Liudmyla] This is interesting...we sit and listen...we are afraid of all of this...what is becoming of our country.
- [Thelma] You hear bad news.
- [Liudmyla] Bad news and anti-Semitism in Parliament. Yes, a Member of Parliament told that this [collapsing economy] is fault of Jews.
- [Thelma] Do you think, personally, that more and more people like you will be trying to come to Canada? Can we expect a lot of new Jewish immigrants from former Soviet Union?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, because it is impossible to live in a country when the government doesn't do anything [about anti-Semitism].
- [Thelma] Did you ever consider going to Israel instead of Canada?
- [Liudmyla] But we can't go to Israel -- we aren't Jewish [enough] for Israel!
- [Thelma] You aren't Jewish for Israel? Okay, all right. When you came to Canada were you sponsored by your family?
- [Liudmyla] We came as Landed Immigrants.
- [Thelma] Was it difficult to get papers?
- [Liudmyla] Difficult. We were customer of JIAS.
- [Thelma] JIAS sponsored you?
- [Liudmyla] No, no, no. But I think it was good [helpful] for us. We have like visas...what is it?
- [Thelma] Applications?
- [Liudmyla] Application! Application from Jewish community.
- [Thelma] In Ukraine?

- [Liudmyla] In Ukraine...our relatives they sent us this application, and with this application we went to Canadian Ambassador.
- [Thelma] Where was this?
- [Liudmyla] In Kiev.
- [Viktor] Mila Voihanski help for us in Kiev.
- [Liudmyla] First of all, we was meet with Mila in Kiev. She arrived in Kiev like a member of JIAS...and she give our papers and she bring this in Ambassador.
- [Thelma] So Mila Voihanski was actually in Kiev and she helped you with the papers there?
- [Liudmyla] Yes. And we didn't know nothing about JIAS.
- [Thelma] Of course, how could you know anything about JIAS? So Mila was with you from the beginning and continued to help you when you came to Toronto?
- [Liudmyla] We think she is a representative of God for us.
- [Thelma] Mila is an angel.
- You have a Russian doctor and a Russian dentist. Has the Russian doctor been supervising Viktor's medical care?
- [Liudmyla] Yes. She is our family doctor...she is Russian-speaking but she arrived in Canada, I think, twenty years ago. She is a very good doctor. We are happy with her.
- [Thelma] Where is her office?
- [Liudmyla] Bathurst Street...in front of this park [Earl Bales Park].
- [Thelma] Oh, I know where she is, Bathurst Street, South of Sheppard Avenue. So you have friends from everywhere. You have friends from the Soviet Union. Do you have non-Jewish friends as well?
- [Liudmyla] This is Russian family from Moscow.

- [Thelma] And a few Toronto Jews as well...good for you...you are a good example of an integrating immigrant! You find everybody has been friendly. Do you think it is because you are friendly?
- [Liudmyla] [Laughing] Maybe that helps.
- [Viktor] My wife very friendly!
- [Liudmyla] But I am a teacher!
- [Thelma] Yes, but some teachers are not so friendly.
- [Liudmyla] People are different. Some are very friendly...they are smiling but I know inside...for example... in the school that I worked at...I worked with French lady and she doesn't love Jews...and she was very afraid that I will work in this school and the teacher that I am [replacing] is a friend of hers...and she was very afraid....
- [Thelma] ...that the Jewish lady would get her friend's job. Did she ever say anything anti-Semitic to you?
- [Liudmyla] No.
- [Thelma] You just felt it?
- [Liudmyla] I felt it...but that time she told [asked] about "Who are you?"...I think that I am helpful...and she told [said]: "Oh, Jewish...they are so.....I forgot this word in English. So....
- [Thelma] Say it in French.
- [Liudmyla] So happy to be Jewish...do you understand?
- [Thelma] No...say it in French.
- [Liudmyla] *Ils sont tellement fiere.*
- [Thelma] So very proud!
- [Liudmyla] Proud to be Jewish! I told [said]: "Why not?"
- [Thelma] Obviously, she did not think that being Jewish was something to be so proud about. But you still say here [questionnaire] that you have not experienced anti-Semitism.

- [Liudmyla] No, nothing serious. We are very pleased [to be here] because of our son. Sometimes in Ukraine....
- [Thelma] Go back to your son...you were worried about his future in the Ukraine, particularly with what was going on. Were you afraid for him?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, we are afraid.
- [Thelma] Is your name a Jewish name?
- [Liudmyla] No.
- [Thelma] So how would they know he was Jewish?
- [Liudmyla] He asked us now: "Mom, pappa, who is I?"
- [Thelma] What am I?
- [Liudmyla] Yes, what am I? And we told that you have Jewish some, you have Russian some....
- [Viktor] And he said: "I don't want Jewish!"
- [Thelma] He doesn't want to be Jewish.
- [Viktor] [I ask him] Why? He says: "School."
- [Thelma] Because it's a problem for him?
- [[Viktor] At school. "I don't want Jewish!" "I am not Jewish!"
- [Thelma] I can understand that being Jewish in the Ukraine means problems for him at school...fights.
- [Liudmyla] [Big sigh] The grandparents of my husband was killed in German occupation, Second War.
- [Thelma] Because they were Jewish?
- [Liudmyla] Yes...and all our life [we have experienced anti-Semitism]...this may explain why we are afraid for our son.
- [Thelma] Now that he is here, are you planning to give him a Jewish education?

- [Liudmyla] He visits Sunday school sometimes but to be student of Jewish private school is too expensive...we can't afford it.
- [Thelma] Feodor is only seven years old. I am trying to understand what you want for him. When things are easier for you, when Viktor is working, when he is better, and Feodor is a little older...do you plan to give him some sort of Jewish education?
- [Liudmyla] I think yes. He knows what he is.
- [Thelma] Some people say, "no." Some people say, "yes, it is very important." Others say, "I will leave it up to the child." I find from my experience you can't be a little bit Jewish. You are either Jewish, or you are not Jewish.
- [Liudmyla] You are right!
- [Thelma] And even if you are a "little bit Jewish," the non-Jews consider you totally Jewish...do you understand...*totalement*? So the Jew can play games in his head about who he is, but the rest of the world considers him Jewish.
- [Liudmyla] [Translates my opinion to Viktor]
- [Thelma] So if one has all the negatives of being Jewish, sometimes it is good to have some of the happy experiences of being Jewish too.
- [Viktor] [Liudmyla translates] My husband says that our son needs to be Jewish because it is very difficult if you don't explain *la vérité* [the truth] and because in our life in Canada JIAS helps our family.
- [Thelma] I think the thing to do, if you have the opportunity, is to celebrate some Jewish holidays and include him when its *Chanukah*, or the high holidays, so at least he will know a little bit.
- [Viktor] [Liudmyla translates] There is very big problem for us, and I don't know what is in English....
- [Thelma] Say it in French.
- [Liudmyla] I don't know what it is in French. All Jewish boys need this....
- [Thelma] Circumcision.

[Liudmyla] Our son wasn't. This is very big problem for us. He can't be student of Jewish school....

[Thelma] That's something you can discuss with a rabbi. Don't be afraid, they are very helpful. Telephone the rabbi at Beth Tzedek, if you like it there, and ask him for advice. It is not an impossible situation...there are many Jewish organizations that would help you with this. He might even have to have a conversion...to actually convert *officiellement*...to become Jewish officially.

[Liudmyla] [Translates above for Viktor]

[Thelma] Tell your husband to have a conversation with Rabbi Gersh. He knows all about this...this is a situation that he deals with all the time. Just ask him what people do. You don't have to do anything...you just ask. When you have some information, you can think about it. He is only seven years old...you have lots of time.

[Liudmyla] [Translates above for husband] And a bar mitzvah, this is when he is thirteen.

[Thelma] [Some conversation off the tape]. Coming from the Ukraine, do you like our modern supermarkets?

[Liudmyla] Oh, it was very big surprise for me when the [electric] door opened...it was very big surprise!

[Thelma] Do you enjoy all the variety?

[Liudmyla] Yes, of course. And people are very friendly...smiling...and comfortable.

[Thelma] Where do you shop?

[Liudmyla] Dominion.

[Thelma] You like Dominion?

[Liudmyla] But we haven't a car.

[Thelma] If you had a car you might shop at different stores?

[Liudmyla] Maybe.

[Thelma] Do you go to Earl Bales park?

[Liudmyla] Wonderful park! We go sometimes to performance...sometimes free...sometimes not, but very good for us. This is very big support. My husband likes very much trees, and before we arrived in Canada we had very big *dacha* [country house or villa] and my husband had planted sixty trees...a very big garden...and sometimes when we visit park, we remember our garden.

[Thelma] Did you sell it, or did you give it to somebody in the family?

[Liudmyla] Sell it...for one thousand dollars [laughing].

[Thelma] That must have been difficult to give up. I am happy you have the trees to look at. You say you miss Russia "sometimes." What do you miss?

[Viktor] Friends...our friends.

[Thelma] What about the culture...do you miss the music...reading Russian books?

[Viktor] I think songs. We have Russian, Ukrainian songs.

[Thelma] You brought tapes so you could hear the music?

[Liudmyla] And my mom sent us [tapes], so this is part of Ukraine.

[Thelma] Is your mother still in the Ukraine?

[Liudmyla] My mother arrived the end of September, and now she lives with us. She is refugee...this is very big happiness for us when she came here.

[Thelma] *Elle est seule?* [Is she on her own?]

[Liudmyla] *Ici, oui. Mais son maris* [Here, yes, but her husband] is in Ukraine. If all will be good, so my mother will try to bring him.

[Thelma] It must be very sad for her to leave him behind.

[Liudmyla] But he has other children.

[Thelma] Is she okay here?

[Liudmyla] She is okay, but she writes very often letters.

[Thelma] Does she cry?

- [Liudmyla] Yes...she tries to do poems [laughing].
- [Thelma] *Son maris écrit des poemes?* [Is her husband sending her poems?]
- [Liudmyla] [Laughing] Yes!
- [Thelma] Is she working?
- [Liudmyla] Mama, no. She is helping me...when I go with my husband to hospital, she stays with our boy.
- [Thelma] Well, good luck with your mother. I hope that things work out with the Immigration. Is JIAS helping her?
- [Liudmyla] But what can they do?
- [Thelma] You are still optimistic about your future in Canada, and for your son also. If you knew the problems that you would have before you came here, would you still have come?
- [Liudmyla] Yes. We are happy we are in Canada, *mais quel dommage* [but it's a pity] that we arrived in Canada only last year. We should have come before because it is difficult to start from zero. We aren't young. I have 51 ...my husband 61.
- [Thelma] Well, you have this little boy...he's a miracle!
- [Viktor and Liudmyla] Yes, a miracle!
- [Liudmyla] His name means *gift of God*.
- [Thelma] Well, if he has a Bar Mitzvah, his Hebrew name will have to be *Yitzrak* because *Yitzrak* means "and she laughed". In the Bible when an angel told Sarah that she was going to give birth to a child in her old age, she laughed. So usually in Jewish families, they name the youngest son *Yitzrak*.
- [Liudmyla] [Translates the above to Viktor.]
- [Viktor] *Yitzrak!* [Thelma writes this out for them in English and in Hebrew...they are very interested].
- [Thelma] So that would be his name in Hebrew. Okay, I thank you both very much...this has been wonderful.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**SOFIA [67]**  
**FEBRUARY 2, 1999**

- [Thelma] How long was your son in Canada before you arrived here?
- [Sofia] Ten, eleven years.
- [Thelma] Is he married with a family?
- [Sofia] Yes...[I have] one grandchild.
- [Thelma] Okay, one is good!
- [Sofia] One son...one granddaughter!
- [Thelma] Did your son come to Toronto directly from Belarus?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] I see here that you immigrated with your mother.
- [Sofia] My mother died in Toronto. She was very old...ninety years old.
- [Thelma] How long was she in Canada?
- [Sofia] One year.
- [Thelma] Did she want to come to Canada?
- [Sofia] She wanted because of me and my son, and she wanted to enjoy the grandchildren.
- [Thelma] Have you been receiving financial help or social assistance from the government?
- [Sofia] Yes, I have been.
- [Thelma] Every month you receive some money? Is it from the federal government?
- [Sofia] The government.
- [Thelma] Is it an Old Age Pension? Is it Social Assistance?

- [Sofia] [Looking confused] I have Benefits.
- [Thelma] Is it enough for you to live on?
- [Sofia] [Laughs]
- [Thelma] Never enough! But you manage?
- [Sofia] Good! Good! I don't work [here]. I worked in Belarus.
- [Thelma] It's nice in Canada...you didn't work here and you still get money from the government. Do you live with your son?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] You live alone. Do you have an apartment?
- [Sofia] [*Misunderstands question...thinks I asked does she own an apartment*]  
No...I have apartment in house government give me [Ontario Housing].
- [Thelma] Where...on Bathurst Street?
- [Sofia] Bathurst, yes.
- [Thelma] So the government is a big help to you?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] You are getting Benefits from Ottawa and housing from the Province. You say you never received any help or money from a Jewish organization. Did you receive any help from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] Nothing? Are you sure?
- [Sofia] My son help me when I came to Canada. I don't have money...don't have house...so my son helped me for ten months.
- [Thelma] You never thought to ask the Jewish organizations for help?
- [Sofia] No.

- [Thelma] Are you a Canadian citizen?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] Congratulations! For how long?
- [Sofia] Oh, five, six years.
- [Thelma] You immigrated in 1990 and you got your citizenship in 1995/1996. What was your happiest surprise in Toronto?
- [Sofia] Air. In Minsk is not good...worse...more pollution. Here, very good! When I came to Canada, I feel very good.
- [Thelma] Do you like the Canadian people?
- [Sofia] People polite, very polite.
- [Thelma] What about our weather?
- [Sofia] Oh, brrrr!
- [Thelma] You don't like the weather. What about television? Do you like the television?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you like the shopping?
- [Sofia] I come to shop...everything is here. In Minsk we don't have.
- [Thelma] No big line-ups here. So, the shops are good...what about our streets?
- [Sofia] Streets...Bathurst Street, Yonge...downtown...very nice downtown. Minsk is very nice, but houses little...little houses in Minsk.
- [Thelma] Do you like the small streets in downtown Toronto with the old, narrow houses?
- [Sofia] Very nice! Houses...streets....
- [Thelma] There are many immigrants living downtown...Portugese, Italians...people

from different countries. Do you still take English classes?

[Sofia] I go now to ESL on Patricia Avenue.

[Thelma] Do you like school?

[Sofia] [Big laugh] Very heavy, English. Oh, very difficult!

[Thelma] Well, you're trying, that's important.

[Sofia] I old woman!

[Thelma] You are not an old woman. I am 60 now...a few years ago I tried to learn French...I studied for four years.

[Sofia] French? My granddaughter learn French, English, Russian.

[Thelma] Does your granddaughter think of herself as Russian, or Jewish, or Canadian?

[Sofia] [*Misunderstands question...thinks I am asking if granddaughter is studying Jewish*] Jewish, no. She in North York...very far for Jewish school.

[Thelma] Does your granddaughter think of herself as a Jewish girl?

[Sofia] She is Jewish!

[Thelma] She is Jewish...but she doesn't go to Jewish school...too far.

[Sofia] The two languages...English very good...French.

[Thelma] She is learning French. Does she speak Russian?

[Sofia] She born in Canada. She speaks Russian to me. I learn her [teach her] to read, write Russian.

[Thelma] You were a Russian-language teacher in Minsk, and now you teach your granddaughter Russian. Is she interested in learning Russian?

[Sofia] Oh yes. She reads the books. Little books. Reads very good.

[Thelma] How old is she?

- [Sofia] Nine and a half.
- [Thelma] Nine and a half. Russian, French, and English. Good for her!  
Do you belong to a health club?
- [Sofia] Yes...and Russian Club.
- [Thelma] Do you enjoy the health club? Where is it?
- [Sofia] Like, like. Ah...health club at Jewish Community Centre. I swimming and exercise.
- [Thelma] Good, good. And the Russian Club is where?
- [Sofia] Betel Centre, Bathurst and Steeles.
- [Thelma] So you are using the Jewish community.
- [Sofia] I work in Jewish community.
- [Thelma] Do you belong to the organization here in this building...the Association for Soviet Jewry in Canada?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] Where did you see my notice about this interview?
- [Sofia] Ella.
- [Thelma] Did she mail it to you?
- [Sofia] I came here. Ella knows me.
- [Thelma] You are interested in politics American politics. Israeli politics?
- [Sofia] This is all interesting. I go in club for a lecture.
- [Thelma] Are the lectures in Russian?
- [Sofia] In Russian, yes.
- [Thelma] You have a Russian doctor and a Russian dentist.

- [Sofia] I have Doctor Livshin...he is Russian.
- [Thelma] Is Doctor Livshin a Russian immigrant?
- [Sofia] Yes, immigrant. Dentist was born in Canada...Canadian...speaks good Russian.
- [Thelma] You have no friends in the Canadian community?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] All Russian friends...all immigrants.
- [Sofia] Russian and Israeli.
- [Thelma] Israelis or Russians-from-Israel?
- [Sofia] Ah...Russians-from-Israel.
- [Thelma] You state that the Toronto Jews you have met are friendly and helpful. Do they invite you to their homes?
- [Sofia] No. Language problem. In water pool...I talk...talk to lady.
- [Thelma] In the swimming pool you talk to a Canadian lady?
- [Sofia] Jewish Canadian.
- [Thelma] Jewish Canadian. Does she ever say, "Come to my house for a coffee?" Does she ever invite you to her home?
- [Sofia] No, no.
- [Thelma] Would you ever think of inviting this lady to your apartment...this Canadian lady?
- [Sofia] No. My apartment is very poor.
- [Thelma] Is it because of language or because your apartment is too poor?
- [Sofia] Poor, little, little, not deep, not deep.
- [Thelma] So you think she wouldn't like it?

- [Sofia] I shy [laughing].
- [Thelma] You're shy. Okay, I got it. It's about money...not friendship. Did you ever work in Canada?
- [Sofia] One year I was babysitter.
- [Thelma] The first year you came?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] And now you are not working. Are you having a good time?
- [Sofia] Sometimes [laughing].
- [Thelma] Is your apartment okay for you?
- [Sofia] Yes, it's okay.
- [Thelma] Did you buy your furniture or was it given to you?
- [Sofia] My son gave me...not new...good...they pay...TV condition new...colour...I have VCR!
- [Thelma] Do you watch Russian movies?
- [Sofia] Yes!
- [Thelma] Do you rent them from a store in the plaza at Bathurst and Sheppard?
- [Sofia] Yes. My friend have Russian TV.
- [Thelma] How can she have a Russian TV?
- [Sofia] Yes, she have Russian TV, I know. They have Russian TV...I not.
- [Thelma] You don't?
- [Sofia] In my house not.... *[Satellite not available at her apartment building]*
- [Thelma] Okay. Do you like your neighbourhood?
- [Sofia] Yes.

- [Thelma] You feel safe there. Is the building clean?
- [Sofia] [*Misunderstands question*] I clean...I clean. Small home.
- [Thelma] It's small, so you clean. Where do you do laundry?
- [Sofia] Laundry...in building.
- [Thelma] The building has washing machines?
- [Sofia] Yes...but I not have machines in house.
- [Thelma] Have you ever experienced anti-Semitism in Toronto?
- [Sofia] No, I haven't.
- [Thelma] And no anti-Russian sentiment?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] You are answering "yes", "yes", "yes" to my question: "Have the social workers and volunteers at the Toronto Jewish social services been: Friendly, Available and Helpful?" But you told me before you had received no financial help or social assistance from any Jewish organization. Did you understand this question?
- [Sofia] Ah, I don't...I not [understand].
- [Thelma] Have Jewish social workers helped you?
- [Sofia] Well, social workers help me...government...where I go.
- [Thelma] Are these social workers Jewish?
- [Sofia] No.
- [Thelma] Are they Russian?
- [Sofia] No. Canadian. Government...Canadian.
- [Thelma] So they have nothing to do with any Jewish organization?
- [Sofia] No. I don't understand if Jewish...Canadian...Jewish-Canadian!

- [Thelma] Well, for this research I am trying to...*[having thoroughly confused her, I give up on this question]*. At the Betel Centre where you go to the Russian Club....
- [Sofia] Lecture, concert , dancing...old women dancing and singing [laughing]!
- [Thelma] Do they have a good time?
- [Sofia] Oh, good time, good time, good time!
- [Thelma] Do you watch television in English?
- [Sofia] Sometimes.
- [Thelma] Do you understand a little?
- [Sofia] Music good...and movie, yes. I see movie...sometimes on television ...sometimes I go out to English movie. My friend near me translates.
- [Thelma] Do you like our supermarkets...the big food stores?
- [Sofia] Big, yes...yes, I go!
- [Thelma] Do you miss Russia?
- [Sofia] No. I have not my friends...they are in Israel...in America. Old friends went away...Jewish friends. Russian friends in Minsk.
- [Thelma] The Russian friends have stayed in Minsk and the Jews are leaving. Did you have problems in Minsk because you are Jewish?
- [Sofia] Yes. Problems...yes.
- [Thelma] Did your son also have problems?
- [Sofia] Oh, yes!
- [Thelma] Is this why you came to Canada?
- [Sofia] My son learn in institute...he want go to university...but he is Jewish so no.
- [Thelma] Did your son go to school in Canada?

[Sofia] He go to school six months...college.

[Thelma] Did your son speak English before?

[Sofia] Oh, very good!

[Thelma] Did he learn English in Belarus?

[Sofia] Yes, in school...institute.

[Thelma] What does your son do in Canada?

[Sofia] Electrician.

[Thelma] Is he working? Does he have a job?

[Sofia] Yes, working.

[Thelma] When did your son come to Canada?

[Sofia] 1987. They lived in Italy...one year.

[Thelma] And then they came to Canada.

[Sofia] Yes.

[Thelma] Did they come as Refugees?

[Sofia] No.

[Thelma] Are you optimistic about your future in Canada?

[Sofia] I optimistic? Sometimes... [laughing]

[Thelma] Are you optimistic for your granddaughter?

[Sofia] Yes...she will have a good life.

[Thelma] Do you go to synagogue?

[Sofia] Yes...sometimes.

[Thelma] Where do you go?

- [Sofia]           Holidays.
- [Thelma]          The High Holidays.   Where do you go...the Russian-Jewish Centre?
- [Sofia]            Yes...Russian-Jewish Centre on Rockford...and Fisherville School.
- [Thelma]          Does your son go to synagogue?
- [Sofia]            Sometimes.
- [Thelma]          When you lived in Belarus, did you go to synagogue?
- [Sofia]            No, never...problem...in Minsk is one little, little synagogue.
- [Thelma]          Here Jews are free to go to synagogue, or not go to synagogue...is this good?
- [Sofia]            Very, very good.
- [Thelma]          Did you ever go to Israel for a holiday?
- [Sofia]            No.    I cannot...I have Benefits.  If I go to Israel I finished Benefits [*they will be cut off*].
- [Thelma]          Before you emigrated from Belarus, did you have any information about Canada?
- [Sofia]            My son write me *briefs* [letters] about Canada.
- [Thelma]          Do you speak Yiddish?
- [Sofia]            No, I *farshtei* [understand].
- [Thelma]          *Di farshteist.* [you understand]  Me too!  [Laughing] Did your mother and father speak Yiddish?
- [Sofia]            My mother...yes.  And my father in 1933 was teacher in *Yiddisher* school.
- [Thelma]          Your father was a teacher in a Yiddish school in Belarus?
- [Sofia]            Yes.  And then the school was *farmacht* [closed].  My father and mother teach in Russian school.  Yes.

- [Thelma] What did your parents teach?
- [Sofia] History and Russian language...my father. He is Director of the school. Mother teach Geography.
- [Thelma] They were educated people. Did your mother and father go to university?
- [Sofia] Yes. Father mine die in Two War.
- [Thelma] Was he a *soldat* [soldier]?
- [Sofia] *Soldat...Stalingrad.*
- [Thelma] Stalingrad...how terrible! Do you have brothers and sisters?
- [Sofia] No...my brother died in Minsk.
- [Thelma] So your mother had to come with you to Canada. She would have had no family left in Belarus after you emigrated...you had to take her with you...*zee vat gebliben alein* [she would have been left alone]. Yes?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] You were a teacher. What did you teach?
- [Sofia] Russian language.
- [Thelma] Did you teach little children or older students?
- [Sofia] Little and big [laughing].
- [Thelma] Did you like teaching?
- [Sofia] Yes. I work for thirty-seven years!
- [Thelma] You were a teacher for thirty-seven years! Interesting...you work in Belarus teaching for thirty-seven years, but your pension is here in Canada [laughing].
- [Sofia] I worked in little villages...village one...village two...six years in villages...and then in Minsk.

- [Thelma] When you were working in the little villages, did you have any problems because you were Jewish?
- [Sofia] Yes. In 1952 Stalin kill village doctors.
- [Thelma] I don't think we knew about this in Canada until later. The *Yidden habben nisht gevisen* [the Jews didn't know].
- [Sofia] Ohhh.
- [Thelma] Where did you go to school? In Minsk? *Vee hast dei gelernt?* [Where did you study?]
- [Sofia] In Minsk...the Institute. I finished.
- [Thelma] Do you like going to school...studying?
- [Sofia] Yes...good teacher...teacher Canadian...we say "Sir"...he is Polish-Canadian.
- [Thelma] So most of your help has come from the government.
- [Sofia] Give me home...give me welfare...then Benefits...Jewish give me first, yes....
- [Thelma] This is what I have been trying to find out!
- [Sofia] For Passover [laughing].
- [Thelma] They gave you *gelt* [money]?
- [Sofia] Twenty-five or fifty....
- [Thelma] Dollars?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] For Passover they gave you *matzah* [unleavened bread] and some money?
- [Sofia] No...*gelt* for *matzah*! For *matzah* and *gefilte fish*! [laughing]
- [Thelma] So that you could celebrate Passover.

- [Sofia] In 1998 the Jewish Centre gave me \$50.00.
- [Thelma] This money was only given at Passover?
- [Sofia] Yes. I go...and they see my Benefit very low...you see, they give me. Every year they give me money for buy the food.
- [Thelma] Who is "they"?
- [Sofia] Jewish Community Centre.
- [Thelma] Is this the same place you go for swimming?
- [Sofia] Yes...I pay half-price for membership.
- [Thelma] Do you go to your son's home for Passover?
- [Sofia] No. She work...he work...sometime day...sometime night. I go to friends. I go to club. To me comes my granddaughter.
- [Thelma] Do you cook Passover food for your granddaughter?
- [Sofia] I not cook. You know Russians....
- [Thelma] Does your granddaughter like Jewish food?
- [Sofia] Some...a little bit. She very likes Canadian food...pizza...hamburger.
- [Thelma] Your son's wife...is she Jewish?
- [Sofia] Yes...oh, yes!
- [Thelma] So you have everything organized...Jewish doctor...Jewish dentist...stores.... Are you satisfied with your medical care?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] You get medicine from the government?
- [Sofia] Yes.
- [Thelma] You have no problems.

[Sofia] No problems.

[Thelma] Do you travel on the bus?

[Sofia] No.

[Thelma] Are you nervous?

[Sofia] No! I old!

[Thelma] You're not so old...you're beautiful! So do you walk everywhere?

[Sofia] Yes, I go to Jewish Community Centre...three and half kilometres.

[Thelma] Three and a half kilometres and you walk!

[Sofia] Seven [both ways].

[Thelma] In the summertime, do you go to Earl Bales Park?

[Sofia] Sometimes....seldom...on holidays.

[Thelma] You walk with friends?

[Sofia] I have friends...women [laughing].

[Thelma] I know about this problem...no men. Are there men at the Betel Centre?

[Sofia] Very old!

[Thelma] Too old for you. Can you walk to your son's home?

[Sofia] MacKenzie...north...far. [Major MacKenzie Drive, north of Hwy. 7]

[Thelma] Too far for walking. Does your son come to visit you?

[Sofia] My children not walking.

[Thelma] No, they drive over. Is your son happy in Canada?

[Sofia] [Worried] Sometimes. The work very hard.

[Thelma] Would he like to change his work?

- [Sofia] He want to change. Work night...day...he nervous.
- [Thelma] How old is your son?
- [Sofia] Thirty-nine.
- [Thelma] He's a baby.
- [Sofia] He say: "I very old."
- [Thelma] How old was your son when he came to Canada?
- [Sofia] He is here twelve years.
- [Thelma] Your son was about twenty-eight years old when he left Belarus. Tell me a little about Minsk.
- [Sofia] Oh my...it is late...[I am] very slow....
- [Thelma] Thats okay...we are doing well. Minsk is....
- [Sofia] Very nice...beautiful...in war she is finished...new buildings...big beautiful buildings...theatres...movies...very, very nice clubs. When I come in Canada, I go to club...what is this club? What is this club?
- [Thelma] It was nothing compared to Minsk.
- [Sofia] Museums...new, beautiful stores...the best stores.
- [Thelma] When you went to shop in these beautiful stores....
- [Sofia] Lines...lines....
- [Thelma] Was this a problem for you?
- [Sofia] Lines problem. This year [receive] cards ...shortages... rations...butter...and now very much worse.
- [Thelma] We feel very bad for the Russian people.
- [Sofia] [Sighs] Russian people. Old people suffer.
- [Thelma] Do you write to Russia?

- [Sofia] To my Russian friend...teacher...English language.
- [Thelma] No problem with the post?
- [Sofia] First year, one letter in two weeks. Now, one letter every three, four months.
- [Thelma] After a few years away, that's normal.
- [Sofia] I send clothes before, now not. She have in village *dacha*. Her children have a car...daughter have a car...son have a car. Son have business...good flat. Very good.
- [Thelma] Did you have a good flat when you were in Minsk?
- [Sofia] Two rooms and kitchen.
- [Thelma] In a big modern building?
- [Sofia] Old building, five floors. First years I have not flat...I live with somebody else.
- [Thelma] Is there anything you would like to tell me about your experience in Toronto? You look happy.
- [Sofia] I am happy. The first years I am not happy. I cried. I very homesick. Now better. I have good friends...I go to club...I am guest...I go movie...my son here, my granddaughter here.
- [Thelma] Are you happy you came? Was it a good decision that you came to Canada?
- [Sofia] Yes, good. My family here! I live in Minsk without my son and daughter-in-law [for] three years...I was crying.
- [Thelma] You had to come because of the children.
- [Sofia] I had not relatives. In America one cousin.
- [Thelma] Where?
- [Sofia] New York. "Big Apple" [laughing].

- [Thelma] Do you speak with cousin in New York on telephone?
- [Sofia] Yes, we speak Russian. I go to New York on bus...Jewish bus.
- [Thelma] What Jewish bus?
- [Sofia] Toronto have Jewish bus.
- [Thelma] Toronto has a Jewish bus? Where do you get this bus?
- [Sofia] Bathurst Street...Rockford.
- [Thelma] Do they have a special bus to New York for Russians?
- [Sofia] No...for Jewish...two a week...to New York. Summer two and winter one.
- [Thelma] Is the ticket cheap?
- [Sofia] No, one hundred dollars.
- [Thelma] One hundred dollars, back and forth.
- [Sofia] On Rockford...Fire Station...and plaza. See in Russian newspaper.
- [Thelma] They put an ad in the Russian newspapers.
- [Sofia] Big, comfortable bus!
- [Thelma] This is good to know. Do you go on trips with the Seniors?
- [Sofia] I very like the trips with club. We go to Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Florida.
- [Thelma] You went to Florida on the bus!
- [Sofia] Seniors. Boston, New York. Around Canada. Tour around Canada.
- [Thelma] Have you been to Montreal?
- [Sofia] Yes, Montreal...Ottawa...Quebec...St. Louis...Mark Twain's Mississippi...Niagara Falls, three times.

[Thelma] That's pretty good for a little Russian lady. Do you have a Canadian passport?

[Sofia] Yes...but I don't [show passport]...I sit in bus...need my Benefits.

[Thelma] I think you are *oisergeveinlech* [fantastic]. You have made a very good adjustment to Canada. It makes me feel happy that somebody like you can come to Canada...older...so far from her homeland...and make a new life. This proves to me that nothing is impossible.

[Sofia] Seniors very good in Canada.

[Thelma] Seniors have a good life in Canada.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**JOSEPH [46]**  
**FEBRUARY 9, 1999**

- [Thelma] You studied to become a mechanical engineer at an institute in Minsk. You state that your reason for emigration was: "Not stable political situation in former USSR." Was anti-Semitism a consideration in your decision to leave Belarus in 1989?
- [Joseph] Yes...partially. I was worried about my children.
- [Thelma] Did you personally have any problems with anti-Semitism in school or in the workplace?
- [Joseph] Yes...probably...a few times I had.
- [Thelma] Did you get into fights with the kids at school?
- [Joseph] No...but sometimes there are crazy people...who really.... [hesitates]
- [Thelma] Was it just anti-Semitic language or were you physically threatened?
- [Joseph] Mostly it's words...or just you feel a kind of pressure...a type of atmosphere.
- [Thelma] You could feel this.
- [Joseph] Yes. Basically you know your limits [as a Jew], so you limit your movements and your actions too.
- [Thelma] Although the Russian Jews are very Russian in their culture, their education, and their language, it appears they are not really Russian in the same sense as the Christian-Russians. Is that true?
- [Joseph] That's true. That's actually true. This is forced, because in Russia there is a passport system which states that you are Jew.
- [Thelma] Your identification card doesn't say "Russian?"
- [Joseph] No, it says "Jew." Like other nationalities...it would say Ukrainian ...Cosack...or whatever...but not Russian.

- [Thelma] If you were from Moscow...your passport would say Jew. Would it say Russian-Jew?
- [Joseph] No. Jew. But passport was for all citizens of Soviet Union so on the front you would see Soviet Union...inside you would find....
- [Thelma] If you were a Jew born in the Ukraine, under the Russians, you would still be identified as a Jew, not a Ukrainian?
- [Joseph] Yes.
- [Thelma] Okay, so the system is very careful to identify the Jews separately. I just wanted to make sure I understood that. Where did you learn such good English?
- [Joseph] After nine years [in Canada], it's coming better. When I was preparing to come here, I studied with private teacher in Belarus for half a year. He taught me some stuff, and then we stayed in Italy for half a year and basically I was concentrating on English.
- [Thelma] Your wife told me that JIAS was a big help to your family.
- [Joseph] We also went for English lessons there...and in Italy they gave us help and partially sponsored us.
- [Thelma] They partially sponsored you...they helped you when you got here as well...and they helped your family. You didn't answer the question: "What was your happiest surprise in Toronto?"
- [Joseph] Actually I was thinking about this...I know I didn't answer two questions here...I was kind of surprised that people are really friendly...friendlier than I thought they would be.
- [Thelma] When you were looking for work, were people nice to you?
- [Joseph] They were doing their job...I think they had their limitations.
- [Thelma] Is there anything you don't like about Toronto?
- [Joseph] No...I actually like the city.
- [Thelma] What do you think of the architecture?

[Joseph] I was used to different architecture...at first, I couldn't adapt easily...it is completely different...but these highrise buildings are basically similar to what we had. The only difference is that they are not arranged in the way we used to have it. Here you are buying a piece of land and putting a building...within limitations...but you can put it anyway...there you have to have a lot of approvals of the project...so there will be some commission looking after the city as a whole rather than individual properties.

[Thelma] Would you say that the architecture in your city was more uniform...the buildings were all the same because of that?

[Joseph] No, I am not really saying this, I am just saying...if you are looking at highrise buildings...they would be more organized really...because if you are going through streets here, you can see different orientations, because people are buying pieces of land and they are doing what they want...with architectural supervision...but also trying to implement commerce, more units, something like this.

[Thelma] So the architecture is more diverse...more of a "mishmash."

[Joseph] And, of course, you cannot see the small buildings...one, two-storey buildings are not common in Russia.

[Thelma] Do you like the townhouse you are living in now?

[Joseph] Yes, why not? We used to live for some time in dormitory in Russia...then we had an apartment in Russia...one floor.

[Thelma] Do you think you are living nicer here than you were in Russia? I am talking about physically...not intellectually.

[Joseph] Yes...but people are working harder here.

[Thelma] It's harder. You have to hustle here?

[Joseph] Yes.

[Thelma] Were there less decisions to make under Communism?

[Joseph] Yes basically...we drifting in the flow kind of...life was more or less uncomplicated, unless you were doing some stupid things or whatever.

[Thelma] So you just drifted along, obeyed the rules, and did your work. You didn't have to worry about having a job. You had guaranteed work?

- [Joseph] Right.
- [Thelma] And it wasn't so competitive?
- [Joseph] No.
- [Thelma] So in that sense it was easier.
- [Joseph] True.
- [Thelma] Are you still taking English-language classes?
- [Joseph] Not at this time.
- [Thelma] Was your first ESL class at JIAS?
- [Joseph] My first ESL was a two-month course at JIAS, and then I left because I found a job...and then I continued in school a little bit at Seneca College. I took a few English courses...different communication courses...communication for engineers...kind of specialized courses.
- [Thelma] Did you find a job in your own field?
- [Joseph] Yes...actually I am working in my own field.
- [Thelma] You state in the questionnaire that you go to the synagogue "sometimes". Do you go only on the High Holidays?
- [Joseph] Actually I go once a week on Sundays...sometimes on Shabbat, but not usually.
- [Thelma] What happens on Sundays?
- [Joseph] Just first morning prayers.
- [Thelma] Do you attend on High Holidays?
- [Joseph] Trying to go...yes...but I am not really taking whole day off, if it's Jewish holiday...not yet.
- [Thelma] So you work part of the day and you go when you can.
- [Joseph] In the evening.

- [Thelma] Your wife told me you go dancing. Do you enjoy ballroom dancing?
- [Joseph] I always loved it.
- [Thelma] Did you dance in Russia?
- [Joseph] Yes, why not? [laughing]
- [Thelma] I don't know...I'm asking...I don't know anybody who goes ballroom dancing. You belong to this association [Association of Soviet Jewry in Canada]. Do you come here for meetings and lectures?
- [Joseph] Not much.
- [Thelma] You are interested in Russian, Canadian and international politics. Do you read the English-language newspapers?
- [Joseph] Yes.
- [Thelma] Which newspaper do you like?
- [Joseph] I have Toronto Star. Basically going through Section A and Sport...quite extensive.
- [Thelma] Are you a hockey fan?
- [Joseph] Yes, I like it.
- [Thelma] Do you have any friends who are non-Jewish Russian immigrants?
- [Joseph] Yes, we do, yes. I have a few men non-Jewish Russians...the foreman... I have mixed couples.
- [Thelma] Do you have a lot of mixed-couple friends?
- [Joseph] No, just a few. Some of them got married here in Canada.
- [Thelma] Have you run into any anti-Semitism here in Toronto?
- [Joseph] Well, yes, there is some. On construction site...I work in construction business...he is designer of air conditioning systems...I kind of felt when I was on site...when I was asked once [if he was Jewish] I told it...okay...so after this, I was....

- [Thelma] They asked you if you were Jewish?
- [Joseph] Well, what nationality I was...it was one guy...I said I am Jew...I said it, okay? And after this I kind of felt putting down a little bit.
- [Thelma] Were you working with immigrants or with Canadians?
- [Joseph] I think they are Canadians...mostly Italians.
- [Thelma] So it's the same thing all around the world...you can't get away from it.
- [Joseph] Yes, unfortunately.
- [Thelma] Have you run into any anti-Russian sentiment?
- [Joseph] No...there are so many immigrants here that people are really trying to keep... [unintelligible]
- [Thelma] Has anyone asked you if you are part of the "Russian Mafia?" Have they asked you that as a joke?
- [Joseph] No. I don't look like member of Mafia, I think. [laughing]
- [Thelma] You like TV. What do you watch on television?
- [Joseph] Mostly news, some movies, sports.
- [Thelma] Can you understand the English-language movies?
- [Joseph] Yes, if its not too...well, there are some movies that have difficult dialects, but normally I don't have problem.
- [Thelma] Do you rent Russian-language videos?
- [Joseph] Not often.
- [Thelma] What do you miss about Russia?
- [Joseph] Basically...mostly...here you have too much worry about few things...there it is kind of easier.
- [Thelma] There is more stress here. You have more control over your life, but with that comes responsibility.

- [Joseph] Right.
- [Thelma] You worry more here on a day-to-day basis?
- [Joseph] Yes.
- [Thelma] Are you more physically tired here than in Belarus?
- [Joseph] Well, I am getting older, and that is also adding something, but on top of this, we really have...kind of...stresses.
- [Thelma] Under capitalism you get ulcers and heart attacks. [laughing]
- [Joseph] You really have to understand the psychology. You have to live there for some time. You really have to be grown there. When you are coming here, you can see the difference. Sometimes I am listening to the news, and Clinton is saying you have to continue to go on the way of reports in Russia [believe the Russians]. Now I am wondering what have they really achieved [in Russia]...at this moment...where are they going...really?
- [Thelma] They are going down the toilet!
- [Joseph] Yes, basically!
- [Thelma] So Clinton is talking about reforms, and in Russia the people are suffering.
- [Joseph] Yes, they are suffering, stealing, whatever...you know, like money or... you know...it's really terrible.
- [Thelma] Do you think the Americans understand what is happening over there in Russia?
- [Joseph] Well, I think they have an understanding of what is really happening there, but it is really just words [propaganda]...real life is still real life...people are suffering.
- [Thelma] You are feeling that Russia is in big trouble with big problems. Are you happy you're not there now?
- [Joseph] Kind of...just because of the instability.
- [Thelma] From what I hear, you would be having the same worry and the same stress and fatigue [as in Toronto] now.

- [Joseph] I agree!
- [Thelma] Now, not before, just since *Perestroika and Glasnost*, and all the good news!
- [Joseph] You know what is *Perestroika* actually?
- [Thelma] No, tell me.
- [Joseph] You could translate it as "reconstruction." I was surprised when I was reading this *Gone With The Wind*...it was the time of reconstruction in America...in the United States...and that was one hundred fifty years before the Russians started.
- [Thelma] I never made that interesting connection. The reconstruction in the southern United States after the civil war and the reconstruction in the Soviet Union.
- [Joseph] You can also translate this as "upgrading."
- [Thelma] Reconstruction was a tough time in America. A lot of people suffered also, you know. The people in the north did okay, but the people in the south...their whole life was in upheaval.
- You are optimistic about your children...tell me a little about your work...what are you actually doing right now?
- [Joseph] Design of air conditioning systems, plumbing systems...design...not physically working like plumber but designing services for buildings...large buildings or plants. We are doing all kinds of mechanical designs really...office buildings, plants, pharmaceutical facilities, colleges.
- [Thelma] Did you have to upgrade your engineering background for Canadian standards?
- [Joseph] Definitely...I had to really learn this.
- [Thelma] Did you do it through school or on the job?
- [Joseph] Partially I have done it through the school...lets say Autocad knowledge ...computer drafting...short form is CAD... Computer Aided Design...also I was taking a few courses again in Engineering.
- [Thelma] How long did it take to learn Autocad?

- [Joseph] I was taking two courses...there are different levels...I took the first two and then continued to do it at work...I would think it's about two months.
- [Thelma] Where did you take Autocad?
- [Joseph] At Seneca College.
- [Thelma] When you were there, were there many Russian students taking this course?
- [Joseph] Actually none.
- [Thelma] You were the only one. Has this helped you in your current job?
- [Joseph] Yes, I had to know this...it was completely new for me. We didn't have personal computers in Russia. We did calculations, but these were calculated on the main central computer...so this was something that you must know.
- [Thelma] Do you feel that you have caught up now...that you are as good as the Canadian engineers?
- [Joseph] No, no...I still have to catch up...because you have to work in this field really...to go step by step to get to the point. Meanwhile, I got this professional degree here...I am professional engineer here...I passed the exams...everything.
- [Thelma] Was that through Seneca?
- [Joseph] No...there is an Association of Professional Engineers. I am member of this Association.
- [Thelma] And you got certification...I think you call it.
- [Joseph] Yes, I have licence now. I can work independently. As far as academic knowledge, I don't have problems really...as far as technology, it is a little bit different because technology has different products...you really have to gain this experience.
- [Thelma] Are we more advanced than Russia?
- [Joseph] As far as technology, yes.
- [Thelma] Somebody at Jewish Vocational Services told me that it would be better for the immigrants if they did their retraining at home before they came to

Canada, and then discovered they needed retraining, particularly in certain computer areas. She said they could retrain in the FSU for rubles and then when they come here, they already have this knowledge. What happens is they come to Toronto and then they discover to their surprise that they have to do some retraining ...and the courses here are very expensive...and they haven't got the money...and they are in trouble.

[Joseph] Well, I didn't think much about this at the time I was leaving because this training wasn't available for sure...these computer courses...nobody had this...the only thing I could do at that time was to learn English.

[Thelma] There was nothing more you could do to prepare yourself in Belarus?

[Joseph] Actually nothing.

[Thelma] Some of the Russians who are coming to Canada through Israel could upgrade over there, because Israel has the technology... but they don't know this is necessary...so they are in the same predicament when they arrive here.

[Joseph] Some people are working on Autocad in Israel, so if they are planning to continue in this field, they could train there...it's no big deal. I know people from Israel that have this knowledge.

[Thelma] Are you working with any other Russian immigrants?

[Joseph] In our company, we have one more person from Russia...and actually before I was working with another guy from Russia.

[Thelma] Is there any advice you would give to a man in your situation, who is coming with a family to-day from the FSU...something that you would have appreciated knowing?

[Joseph] Nothing...you have to live here and experience everything.

[Thelma] Do you miss Belarus?

[Joseph] I miss a few friends, but not so much really Russia. I miss the Soviet atmosphere a little bit...the way you live [lifestyle]...okay? But not specifically Russia.

[Thelma] Have you travelled outside of Toronto since you have been here?

[Joseph] To Los Angeles...to a few friends.

- [Thelma] Have you been to Israel?
- [Joseph] No, not yet.
- [Thelma] Would you like to go to Israel?
- [Joseph] We will probably go one day.
- [Thelma] Are you happy that your children are here?
- [Joseph] Yes, I think they are better off being here. They have more opportunities here.
- [Thelma] How old are your kids now?
- [Joseph] Sixteen and thirteen...two boys.
- [Thelma] Do you have any problems with them in the discipline area because you have different attitudes and different experiences from Russia? Are you running into any conflicts with them?
- [Joseph] No, it's quite good. One is teenager...sixteen...so it is really hard to punish him at this moment, but nothing really...as far as his attitude to learning everything is okay...I don't have problem...just to...I don't know...they are not listening to you, but it's in any culture in any society.
- [Thelma] Do you think it would be the same in Russia?
- [Joseph] Yes, I bet...they just need to learn from their own mistakes sometimes.
- [Thelma] I hear that some Russian fathers are having problems with their teenage kids because they were used to respect...the kind of respect they gave their parents...and the kind of control that their parents also had...and over here the parents even legally don't have the same kind of control that they had before. So sometimes when the kids are getting older and they don't listen to their parents, there is nothing the father can do, which is very frustrating. Have you run into this at all?
- [Joseph] Actually yes, in a way.
- [Thelma] Well, you didn't tell me until I told you. We have different cultural attitudes...and the kids here are very undisciplined compared to other societies, in my opinion.

[Joseph] Academically it was quite good education in Russia and my kids respect that I can help them with their mathematics. My wife helps with the chemistry...I have forgotten that.

[Thelma] Do you ever feel culturally superior to the average Canadian?

[Joseph] No. I may know a little bit more, but it's not like...something that affects your life if you don't know it. When I read in paper about tightening up discipline in the schools here, I think it is mostly political stuff. Once in five years you are reading about campaign against children's poverty...once in five years...with all parties declaring that this will be beaten, okay? It never happens. The same will happen about school discipline...they will do something...but in five years it will be the same...like we saw with the education...in five years they will basically change it back to what it was before. So all the right words that say we should do it this way, if you read, you will see that this is exactly the argument that was used to get rid of the same thing five years ago. Exactly same way. Like they are testing...I read about this exam...one exam at the end of the school...I don't know exactly...but I bet if you look back to fifteen years ago, it was this way. Thirty years ago it was this way. It was in my school in Russia...it was this way. If you open the newspaper from fifteen years ago, you will find arguments against this. Now you see arguments for this.

[Thelma] The French have an expression *the more things change the more they stay the same*.

There are a lot of Russian newspapers around here...more than ten...do you pick them up in the store?

[Joseph] Yes, my wife is bringing them, but maybe I am reading for ten minutes.

[Thelma] Are there any Russian papers here that are interesting and of good quality?

[Joseph] The stories are just news from Russia, they are taking this from Russian newspapers.

[Thelma] All I see is advertisements in the Russian newspapers.

[Joseph] Yes, because people are making money and between this advertising they have articles.

[Thelma] Here in Toronto, do you have a telephone book in Russian?

[Joseph] Not now, but there is one book as far as I know that lists Russian businesses. We had one, but I don't think we have it now.

- [Thelma] When you bought your townhouse, did you use a Canadian real estate agent?
- [Joseph] She was Russian...we knew her just because she was doing same for our friend.
- [Thelma] Was she Russian-Jewish?
- [Joseph] Yes, she was.
- [Thelma] Are there a lot of Russians in the real estate business?
- [Joseph] Well, looking at the Russian newspapers, there is a lot.
- [Thelma] To be a successful real estate person, you have to hustle and you have to be able to sell. This does not always come easy to older Russian immigrants.
- [Joseph] The one that we dealt with was maybe a little older than me [46], but she has been here for fifteen years, so she started when she was relatively young.
- [Thelma] Also car dealerships...From the ads, I think there are a lot of Russian men selling cars.
- [Joseph] We bought both of our cars not from Russians.
- [Thelma] I am not trying to be nosy...I am just trying to understand the transition from communism to capitalism.
- [Joseph] About the unemployment situation...people here really are accepting this...the fact that there is such a period. For people coming from the Russian side, it is very hard if you are in this situation, or if you are looking for work...it is not a natural state.
- [Thelma] It is not a natural state to be unemployed.
- [Joseph] Here...[the attitude is] it happened...you are looking for new job...you are finding new job...this is very difficult for people coming from the other side.
- [Thelma] Unemployment is always depressing. You are suggesting that an unemployed Russian mmigrant would get depressed faster, because unemployment was unusual in the USSR. A Canadian will say, "Well, I'm out of work, but ten-percent of the people are out of work too; in the meantime, I will collect Unemployment Insurance."

[Joseph] Here in Canada, unemployment is a societal problem, but for people who are coming from the Soviet Union, it is more of a serious personal problem because he cannot recognize that this is a problem in the larger society.

[Thelma] It seems like a personal failure.

[Joseph] You recognize it is happening in the society, but it still has much more personal impact.

[Thelma] Unemployment was something you never had to worry about in Russia?

[Joseph] Definitely not. There was kind of a job distribution system. You were sent to certain businesses. You didn't have to look for work. Let's say it was thirty people who graduated from university...they already had thirty locations or places of work for them...so based on your academic results, you were coming to commission and theoretically you were able to request your first choice...you could chose.

But you are interested in the Jewish situation. There were definitely restrictions at this point ...you felt it, okay? Let's say you had the best academic results, and you were the first one to chose...you would not be able to get certain positions...either because the people there don't want Jews, or for some other reasons. So you were limited to where they let you work.

[Thelma] What about our tax system here?

[Joseph] There we didn't have such complicated taxes. Basically you worked in one place and the taxes were deducted at source. Here, at the end of the year, you still have to figure out your taxes. We don't have to fill out any tax declarations in Russia. That was the way it was before. Here we have to think...what to do...how to do?

[Thelma] You are married to an accountant, she can do your taxes! Do you think you are getting value for the taxes you are paying?

[Joseph] I think it's quite good. I don't understand one thing...Canada has a lot of debt...big time debt...and nobody cares about this really. I am reading in newspaper only demands for more money...invest more...invest more. Who will be paying the debt? I personally don't understand; I am not the kind of person who can ignore my debts.

[Thelma] Joseph, you are already smarter than the average Canadian who doesn't understand the difference between the Deficit and the Debt. The government reports to the Canadian people that they have balanced the Budget.

[Joseph] Yes...and everybody's happy...everybody's happy!

- [Thelma] Everybody is happy because they don't understand that the Deficit is one thing and the Debt is something else. The federal budget is year-to-year and Ottawa has finally balanced it...but Canada still owes almost 600 billion dollars...and a lot of our tax money is directed towards the interest on this Debt.
- [Joseph] Just give me more...give me more...forget about the Debt. You are not running a personal business like this!
- [Thelma] What you are saying is that the federal government is not running its business efficiently.
- [Joseph] Each time that someone makes a request for money, put in brackets we owe so much. This will promote financial responsibility.
- [Thelma] A Russian immigrant that I interviewed told me that Canada to-day is more communist than the communists were. He said that this is not a socialist country...this is a communist country...and that this is the only country that pays people not to work and does not make them accept any available job when they can't find one in their own field.
- [Joseph] I know why they are doing this...to prevent a revolution...to relieve pressure on the government.
- [Thelma] Joseph, thank you for your time...this has been very interesting.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**ETLIA JELLA (70)**  
**FEBRUARY 2, 1999**

- [Thelma] You came to Toronto in 1990. With your husband?
- [Ella] Yes, and he died here in 1992.
- [Thelma] That's too bad...he was in Canada only two years.
- [Ella] Oh, he was very, very happy in Canada!
- [Thelma] You came here because of your son and his family?
- [Ella] Yes, my son and his family came to Canada in 1987. They married in the Ukraine and their two children were born in Ukraine. My grandchildren graduated from University of Toronto.
- [Thelma] Are both your son and daughter-in-law Jewish?
- [Ella] Sure, everybody's Jewish. A real Jewish family!
- [Thelma] You say that when you arrived here you spoke no French and a little English.
- [Ella] And Yiddish.
- [Thelma] You speak Yiddish?
- [Ella] *Dee redst Yiddish?* [Do you speak Yiddish?]
- [Thelma] Yes! That'll help our interview. Did you get financial aid from the Federal and Provincial governments?
- [Ella] Yes, sure.
- [Thelma] Did you receive help from JIAS?
- [Ella] Yes. From the first day we was here... we were studying the English...they helped everything...to pay for apartment the first month, and the next month, two months...they were very kind to us.
- [Thelma] Were did you learn about JIAS? In the Ukraine...?

- [Ella] No...when we came here we started to study English in JIAS centre on Bathurst Street and there were a few English groups [Russians] there, and they told us go to JIAS and they'll help you...because we didn't have any money.
- [Thelma] Did JIAS help you find an apartment?
- [Ella] Yes...because my daughter-in-law has cousin in Canada...in Toronto...and he went to JIAS and they helped him...and so we went to them too...and they helped find us an apartment. They helped with furniture. Mr. Perlmutter was a wonderful volunteer in JIAS and he helped us. We lived in that apartment about two years, and then my husband died...and they give me apartment in Seniors' building.
- [Thelma] Did you attend ESL for six months?
- [Ella] No, maybe three years...four years. I studied English in university in Ukraine.
- [Thelma] Are you from Kiev?
- [Ella] No, Vinnytsya [Vinniza] near Kiev.
- [Thelma] Your answer to the question "What was your happiest surprise in Toronto?" is, "Peaceful...and kindness of people." Have you made any Canadian-Jewish friends?
- [Ella] Yes...when I came I was working as a babysitter in Canadian-Jewish family...wonderful family!
- [Thelma] Do you still keep in touch with them?
- [Ella] Yes. When something is happening in their family they call me...something bad, I am going to the funeral.
- [Thelma] In the Seniors' building where you live now...are there only Russians living there?
- [Ella] Oh, no...no. Canadian-Jewish...Italian people...Chinese people live there. One-bedroom apartment...subsidized...comfortable...very good.
- [Thelma] How does your apartment in Toronto compare to the apartment you lived in in the Ukraine?

[Ella] You know, in Ukraine it was a better apartment...I have a good position... Government apartment...and we paid very little rent...ten rubles a month [laughing]. And my *dacha* [country house], I can't compare with any *dacha*...a very big *dacha*, beautiful...on a lake...about 30 km from our city...wonderful. My husband build the *dacha*...parquet floors. Every Friday after the work until Sunday night and then falling into bed...and that's it. Monday back to work for a little rest [laughing].

[Thelma] Your worst surprise in Canada was, "My occupation is not allowed."

[Ella] Oh, yes! My daughter came here with us...she was a doctor too...my son-in-law also was a doctor...oh, it was a terrible time! My daughter, her husband and their daughter came to Canada together with us. The whole family is now here. My son is engineer.

[Thelma] The whole family was united here. Your son brought you all over?

[Ella] I told you, my son's wife had a cousin and her father had a sister in Canada...she's 92 years old...Mania...she's the biggest sponsor for our whole family. My daughter and son-in-law went back to college here and graduated as nurses...and they are working in Baycrest.

[Thelma] Did you think about going back to school yourself?

[Ella] Me? No. I read books. I watch TV..."Days of Our Lives"..."The Young and the Restless" [laughing]...a little too simple, but I watch.

[Thelma] You answer that you attend synagogue "sometimes." Do you go to the Jewish Russian Centre on Rockford?

[Ella] Yes, on Rockford, and [sometimes] to the big school on Patricia. The [Rockford] synagogue is small and they can't manage so much people. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur [high holidays] they can't manage so many people, so we go to the school on Patricia.

[Thelma] Lots of Russians going to shul?

[Ella] Yes, they are going.

[Thelma] Did you go to shul in Ukraine?

[Ella] Oh, no, no. My father used to be a Hebrew teacher in Talmud Torah in Yeshivah in Russia, but they closed it in 1939. I was a child then and I

remember my mother was crying, "What will we do? How will we manage?"

[Thelma] Was your father a soldier in the war?

[Ella] No. Only my [immediate] family lived through the war but my *mishpacha* [family] died there.

[Thelma] Were they soldiers, or did they die in camps?

[Ella] Soldiers...and died in the camps...and died in the occupied territories. My father and my mother take me and we went to Tashkent during the war...but I have sister and brother who didn't want to go to Tashkent...they said that Germany is very high cultured...better than the *goyim* [gentiles]...it will be good...and they stayed in our city and they died...they didn't believe.... My father was a very smart man and we were evacuated in the first three days. He said, "No, we have to go because it is dangerous."

[Thelma] When the war was over, did your family go back to Vinniza?

[Ella] Oh, yes. We were the first to come home.

[Thelma] How did you travel from Tashkent?

[Ella] Trains...like for the horse were for the people [cattle trains] because it was impossible for everybody. So they *shlept* [dragged themselves] back to Vinniza.

[Thelma] When you returned from Tashkent, were your homes still there?

[Ella] Yes. I was a child at that time. Later I got married...I told you about my husband...he graduated from Kiev University as an architect, and we got a good apartment in center of Vinniza. Three, four years after he graduated from university, they sent him to the north of Russia... Murmansk...big port...and he was working there about three years and we came back to Vinniza because my parents, his parents, all our *mishpacha* [relatives] were there.

And I was working in Chernobyl too...in 1986 when it happened...I was in Vinniza but they sent us to Chernobyl for ten days for a trip...and we evacuated the people.

[Thelma] Did they send you to Chernobyl because you were an epidemiologist?

[Ella] Yes.

- [Thelma] That was a terrible thing, and it's still terrible!
- [Ella] Oh, don't talk! If it wasn't for Chernobyl, I would never have come to Canada because my daughter was there with me...but after Chernobyl my son [in Toronto] said, "No, you have to come here...it's very dangerous!"
- [Thelma] How far is Chernobyl from Vinniza?
- [Ella] I'll tell you...we went with an emergency bus...I had a group...ten people...laboratory...we went about 1:00 pm and arrived at Chernobyl around 8:00 pm...around seven hours...near Kiev.
- [Thelma] Do you have a lot of friends who have gone to Israel?
- [Ella] Oh yes! My kids' in-laws...my sister went to Israel...very good..very happy. I was in Israel two months ago.
- [Thelma] Do you like Israel?
- [Ella] Oh, a wonderful...a *mechaya* [a pleasure]...I love it!
- [Thelma] If your son was in Israel would you have moved there?
- [Ella] Yes, sure. My daughter and my son-in-law they complained the first year [in Canada] that if they had gone to Israel they could have worked as doctors and I could have too...and they were very upset why we came to Canada because we can't work as a doctor...but now it's good. In time, you know, the kids they study...they graduate...they work.
- [Thelma] So they are making a life for themselves?
- [Ella] Yes, everybody make a life. I am grateful. Let us remain healthy.
- [Thelma] The Russians that are coming to Canada now from Israel...they have decided they don't want to stay there.
- [Ella] Oh, so much young people...oooh!
- [Thelma] Why do you think they are leaving?
- [Ella] Because in Israel is a dangerous situation. So small country...growing with the cars...with the people...very busy...but wonderful country! I am

impressed. I have only been once...to see my sister...she is eighty-two years old...she moved to Petach Tikva...two years ago.

[Thelma] She is also a new immigrant?

[Ella] Oh yes, and they give her very much good support...an apartment...good benefits...they are very lucky...very good weather.

[Thelma] Was living in Vinniza as a Jew a problem?

[Ella] You know, we had to study the best...we had to work the best...and I told my kids the same and they were trying to do the best.

[Thelma] You had to try harder and do better.

[Ella] That's why for us it was not so bad.

[Thelma] What do you think of the situation now?

[Ella] Oh now, it's dangerous...I tell my friends...they write to me ...very bad...but they can't leave. My daughter's friend writes to her and says, "If I come to Canada what will I do there? I work as a doctor...I have a good reputation...I have an apartment...I would have to leave everything."

[Thelma] When you left Russia, you brought nothing out?

[Ella] I sold my *dacha*, big *dacha*.

[Thelma] Could you bring the money out?

[Ella] No, they didn't allow us. No money...just what we spent on *shmatas* [clothes] ...on garbage. Now, when they come from Russia, they can bring out. From Israel...from Russia...oh, they are rich...they bring money.

[Thelma] Have you heard anything about problems with Jewish-Russian teenagers?

[Ella] I don't hear. No. I know that teenagers can get into trouble but, I don't know, my family and the friends we have here...their kids are studying...they are graduating...they are working...wonderful kids.

[Thelma] Have you had occasion to use our medical system? Are you happy with our medical system? As a doctor, what is your opinion?

- [Ella] Oh, wonderful medical! And drug store...you can take without money...everybody has a card...glasses...all paid for by government. I know...my friends told me...that before [socialized medicine] it was very hard to get something.
- [Thelma] You have a Russian doctor and Russian dentist. Was your Russian doctor born in Russia?
- [Ella] Yes. It is very convenient because he speaks Russian so he can understand me. When I came [to his office] he told me, "You complain about this and this...you used to be a doctor, what is *your* opinion about this? [laughing] I say, "You get salary, you have to think about this and tell *me!*"
- My dentist is born in Russia also...they [doctor and dentist] came as children...they got educated here...they graduated here with Canadian education.
- [Thelma] Do you have some non-Jewish friends here?
- [Ella] Oh, yes, yes.
- [Thelma] You are a very sociable lady! You say the Canadian-Jews are friendly and helpful, and they invite you to their homes. I think this is because you are a very open person.
- [Ella] And they are open to me too. I like them...they like me...they helped me so much when I first came. I am not doing any more babysitting. I am retired.
- [Thelma] Are you getting a pension?
- [Ella] No, no...Benefits...because I am only here nine years...you have to be here ten years to get Old Age Pension.
- [Thelma] Is this [Benefits] from the Federal government?
- [Ella] Yes.
- [Thelma] No problem with anti-Semitism in Toronto?
- [Ella] Oh, no...everybody good to me.
- [Thelma] What about anti-Russian?

[Ella] I don't feel....

[Thelma] You have a VCR...what do you watch?

[Ella] If some of my friends give me cassette, I watch Russian movie...English movie...I watched on Sunday "Angel in the City"...wonderful movie...and Yiddish movies.

No, I can't write and I can't read [Yiddish], but I can understand and talk. I enjoy a Yiddish concert...oh, yes, I like Yiddish music...my mother used to sing to me in Yiddish when I was a little girl. My mother and father talked Yiddish to me and I answered in Russian.

[Thelma] Where do you shop?

[Ella] Basic [Food Basics] and Pricechopper...here, in my area where I live. Very good supermarkets...very cheap...everything available...it's a *mechiah* [pleasure]. No lineups. I am going for ten, fifteen, twenty dollars...little by little, because I don't need too much. Every day...like excursion...to take a look...to meet some people...we are looking for *metziahs* [bargains]. [laughter].

[Thelma] Do you miss Russia?

[Ella] No. Canada is a very nice country.

You know in my second year [in Canada] in 1991...then when my husband died...every newcomer to our school [ESL], I invite to our home...I give some clothes...I give some dishes...and I give something to help for everybody who comes...because I know...when I change my furniture, I give all the furniture from JIAS to newcomers...and they appreciate it.

[Thelma] There are many Russian-Jews in Toronto who are not interested in their Jewish heritage.

[Ella] In Russia, when we was there, no Passover, no *Yom Tov* [no Jewish holidays]...nothing. Only Revolution Day, the Constitution Day...and that's it.

[Thelma] There is a number of [Russian] people that have come here who are "sort of" Jewish...and it would be nice if they could find their way to an organization such as yours.

- [Ella] They have to do it for themselves. Nobody will do for them. We are doing for ourselves...we belong to our club...the Association of Soviet Jewry in Canada.
- [Thelma] You are the President?
- [Ella] Yes, I am President since 1992. Six years.
- [Thelma] How many hours are you spending with the Association?
- [Ella] Oh, my God! Some days ten...twelve hours.
- [Thelma] Tell me a little about your Association.
- [Ella] I told you we have more than 120 members, and we have a musical club...before it was here but it is too small, so we rented a recreation room in a building once a month...and a few days ago we had a very good concert from our volunteers...our members are active...we are all playing piano...we are singing...we write poems...very smart people...very intelligent. A very successful concert.
- [Thelma] Who supports this organization?
- [Ella] The members.
- [Thelma] Do you get funding from the Lubavitchers...or any other Jewish organization? Does anybody help you?
- [Ella] No...nobody...it's very bad...we are thinking constantly about this.
- [Thelma] Have you asked for help from anywhere in the Jewish community?
- [Ella] No. You have to know to whom to apply...we don't know...if we had somebody like a sponsor, it would be very good...but we haven't.
- [Thelma] Have you approached the Jewish Federation?
- [Ella] Ella [Association permanent secretary] she thinks about this...I do my job...I have a club...I have a program...I telephone to people and when they come they are very glad.
- [Thelma] Do people come from outside the organization?

- [Ella] Only people from this area. They don't have money to go with the buses here and there.
- [Thelma] You have cultural evenings...do you have speakers?
- [Ella] Oh, yes, wonderful speakers...political speakers...yesterday was a good lecture about Nobel prize winners...a wonderful lecture.
- [Thelma] The Lubavitchers are just down the hall...do they help you? Do they provide the space for your Association?
- [Ella] We have good communications with them.
- [Thelma] Do most of your members go to religious services at the Jewish Russian Community Centre?
- [Ella] [misunderstands question] Yes. The rabbi comes to us sometimes in our club. Rabbi [Yoseph] Zaltzman...Rabbi [Shlomo] Vorovitch...Rabbi Gersh...very smart rabbis.
- [Thelma] All of your members are from some part of the former Soviet Union. This is probably the first time in their lives that they are affiliated with a Jewish organization. This must be an interesting experience for them. Do you think that this helps them integrate into the community?
- [Ella] Yes, sure...a very positive thing. When we came the first days my son went with us to the synagogue [JRCC], and introduced us to Rabbi Zaltzman...and he was very kind to us...he gave me a job...he sent me for a babysitter to a rabbi, and I was with four or five kids, I don't remember, first time...every day in the morning from eight until five...I talked to them in Yiddish.
- [Thelma] Do you keep kosher now?
- [Ella] No...but I don't eat pig. Milk with milk...meat with meat.
- [Thelma] Do you know anybody in your Association that is now keeping kosher?
- [Ella] My daughter...my granddaughter...because my granddaughter has a friend from school...they are very kosher...and she little-by-little...she told parents no pig...no milk and meat...and when I bake a cake I can't put milk because it is for after dinner.
- [Thelma] Do the rabbis teach your organization about the religion?

- [Ella] Sometime before Passover, the Rabbi's wife comes and she explains the preparation before Passover...and the special meals...and the Passover food.
- [Thelma] Do you think your members were interested?
- [Ella] Sure, they were writing down. This is good...I appreciate it.
- [Thelma] I suspect I will find a difference between people that have this kind of [religious] support, and enjoy some Jewish traditions, and people who don't.
- [Ella] Some people...you know...aren't interested.
- [Thelma] It's a free country.
- [Ella] A very good country...peaceful...kindness...and if you are good to the people, they are good to you.
- [Thelma] That's a nice way to end this.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**SEYMON MAZIN [68]**  
**FEBRUARY 9, 1999**

[Thelma]       Where were you during World War Two?

[Seymon]       During the war I was in Uzbekistan. In a little state.

[Thelma]       How long were you there?

[Seymon]       We were there until September, 1944, and we went there in 1941, in September...three years.

[Thelma]       Three years in Uzbekistan. Did you then return to Bobrujsk [Belarus]?

[Seymon]       Yes.

[Thelma]       Did you discover that most of your family had been killed?

[Seymon]       No. Only killed were my grandmother and grandfather. My father was a soldier during the war. He was wounded...he was at Stalingrad. He returned in September, 1945. I had a brother and sister. My brother died at sixteen years of age; he worked in a factory and he became sick...stomach...and he died...my older brother. He was five years older than me. Only a sister was left; she lives in Israel.

[Thelma]       So you were with your mother and sister in Uzbekistan.

[Seymon]       When the war started, we were evacuated from our city and sent to another area...when it became cold, they sent us to a warmer region. We were sent to middle Asia...it's warm there almost all winter...sometimes falls a little snow. My father left for the war in April, 1942. In June they sent him to Stalingrad. He stayed in Stalingrad until he was sent to Poland. Then he was sent to Czechoslovakia and in Czechoslovakia they finished the war. In September, 1945, he returned to our city Bobrujsk; and we were already living there. I finished school there, and then I left for university...the institute...in Minsk. I became a civil engineer. I graduated from the institute in 1955.

[Thelma]       Did you have steady work?

[Seymon]       I worked from 1955 as a civil engineer and the last seven years I was a teacher in a college in Bobrujsk. Before I came to Canada I was a teacher of construction.

[Thelma] You say your reason for emigration was, "Unstable political and economical situation in USSR." When you emigrated, was it because of these problems or because your younger daughter was here in Canada? If your daughter had not left Belarus, would have stayed there?

[Seymon] If the children had not departed, I would not have left without them. Only with them. I love my children and grandchildren...I wouldn't leave them [behind].

[Thelma] So the reason for emigration wasn't entirely because of problems in Belarus but because your children were already here. What about anti-Semitism?

[Seymon] There was anti-Semitism, but I didn't suffer too much from it...but I was a person of not high quality because I was a Jew. That's why I wanted to leave this land.

[Thelma] You didn't write on your questionnaire that anti-Semitism was a problem.

[Seymon] I didn't write it because I didn't suffer too much from it. I worked good...I was a good engineer...I worked very hard...difficult jobs.

[Thelma] They didn't cause you problems because you were a Jew?

[Seymon] Sure...they got drunk and I worked like a horse!

[Thelma] They got drunk and you worked! [laughing]

[Seymon] I worked hard and the *goyim* [gentiles] got drunk. Thelma, were you born here in Canada?

[Thelma] Yes. My parents came from Lodz, Poland. They were immigrants too...in the late 1920s...I thank God they came here.

Tell me about JIAS. Your wife told me that JIAS was of great help to your family.

[Seymon] Yes. They met us in Vienna. They took us to a hotel. I was travelling with my wife and her mother, her old mother, sick she was, we were carrying her in our arms...myself and my older son-in-law...she couldn't walk anymore, so weak. JIAS gave us nice rooms, good food, and then we remained there three weeks...and from there we travelled to Italy. Everything they did for us...they transported us on buses, on trains...and everywhere they provided us with rooms and food...and we understood that this was a very good organization.

- [Thelma] Did you hear about JIAS in Belarus?
- [Seymon] Yes, we heard about it.
- [Thelma] Did you know that when you arrived in Vienna, people from JIAS would meet you?
- ]Seymon] Yes...before we left we wrote letters [back and forth] and we read and we knew we wouldn't be abandoned...that they would meet us, give us where to live and provide food and everything. Everything was well organized.
- [Thelma] I understand that JIAS helped you in Toronto too.
- [Seymon] Yes. Until we were put on welfare they helped us. Not too much, but we didn't starve...not one day.
- [Thelma] You have a new granddaughter born in Canada. A pretty little girl?
- [Seymon] Oh, yes...a pretty girl! Pretty and cheerful...a sweet little girl.
- [Thelma] What is her name?
- [Seymon] Elizabeth.
- [Thelma] Well, that's a very British name. Your wife told me you became ill soon after you arrived in Toronto.
- [Seymon] I didn't become ill here...I became ill over there. When Chernobyl happened, I was working teaching nearby...and the winds blew in our direction...and it affected many large communities...and where I was there was a lot of nuclear radiation.
- [Thelma] Do you believe your health problems were caused by Chernobyl?
- [Seymon] Yes, yes. They were brought from there...exactly from there. I was already not feeling so good in Italy, so when I came here I went immediately to the doctor. They sent me to Branson Hospital...ultrasound examination...and they saw I had problems. They operated on me. We had arrived in June, 1990, and on October 17, 1990 I had my operation at Toronto General Hospital. A very good doctor. Nice doctor ...nice hospital...I was living like a tourist...I never saw such nice conditions. I was in hospital at home in Bobrujsk. I had a kidney stone...there were ten patients in one room...maybe a little bigger than this [office]. Here I was living like a rich man...before operation I was in a big room and after operation I had a private room.

- [Thelma] Like a tzar! You have to be sick here to live like a tzar [laughing].
- [Seymon] Better to be healthy [laughing]. But if you must be sick, it's better this way.
- [Thelma] Who is your family doctor?
- [Seymon] Dr. Sarah Pliam.
- [Thelma] Your wife told me that three times you were guests of Toronto families at Passover.
- [Seymon] Yes, we were...Mrs. Freedman.
- [Thelma] The same home, three times?
- [Seymon] Yes. Me, my wife and my older children...very nice.
- [Thelma] Did you enjoy yourselves?
- [Seymon] Good time. The English was not yet so good but our older daughter, her English was better, so she translated. This was the first sader in my life! Never before did I know what was a sader...I didn't understand what it was. Our Jewishness was stifled...we didn't know anything.
- [Thelma] No bar mitzvah...no nothing.
- [Seymon] No!
- [Thelma] Do you go to synagogue now?
- [Seymon] I only go on High Holidays...I go to *Yiskor* [Memorial Prayer]  
I go on Patricia.
- [Thelma] I understand you go to the Betel Centre. I am told that you are a good singer, and that your wife plays the piano. Do you like to sing?
- [Seymon] I can sing. Shall I sing a little now?
- [Thelma] Yes, please!
- [Seymon] *Sings a lovely song in Russian and then he sings it again in Yiddish.  
Very, very nice!*

- [Thelma] Oh, I loved it...thank you!
- [Seymon] Yesterday I was at the Betel Centre...there are monthly lectures...international politics...very good lectures...about the United States, Canada, Russia and Israel. Four for the month. I go with my wife.
- [Thelma] Do a lot of people attend these lectures?
- [Seymon] Yes, two hundred and fifty...two hundred.
- [Thelma] Only Russians?
- [Seymon] Yes, only Russians...lectures are in Russian.
- [Thelma] At Betel, when you talk to others, do they talk about Chernobyl? Are many people sick here because of Chernobyl?
- [Seymon] I don't know...we don't talk about this.
- [Thelma] You never worked in Canada?
- [Seymon] No...I am old man. When I came to Canada, I was fifty-nine.
- [Thelma] That's young. Fifty-nine is not old.
- [Seymon] Young? I was post-surgical and I didn't speak the language. I could have worked as an engineer except for the language; to go to work, I didn't have the strength...so I didn't work.
- [Thelma] Canada is taking care of you. Do you like where you are living? Do you like the neighbourhood?
- [Seymon] Yes...good neighbourhood.
- [Thelma] And you have had no problems with anti-Semitism or anti-Russian sentiment?
- [Seymon] No...never!
- [Thelma] Do you have a television set?
- [Seymon] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you watch English programming?

- [Seymon] Yes, I look in English because Russian [programming] is only on weekend...Saturday, a half-hour...Sunday evening, one hour...and on Sunday in the morning one hour.
- [Thelma] That's a lot.
- [Seymon] For Russian television you need to have an antenna [satellite] but my balcony faces north and I need to be on the other side.
- [Thelma] You're on the wrong side of the building. Do you rent videos in Russian?
- [Seymon] No...I have my *machetunim* [younger daughter's in-laws]...they live in Richmond Hill and he receives Russian broadcasts. He tapes them on his VCR and he brings me the Russian tapes...and I look with my wife.
- [Thelma] Do you miss Russia sometimes?
- [Seymon] Not much...my youth and my health I left there...I was young...I got married...I had my children there.
- [Thelma] You are optimistic about your future?
- [Seymon] Yes, optimistic about my future because it's very nice country Canada.
- [Thelma] Have you done any travelling?
- [Seymon] I was in New York City visiting relatives...cousins. I have my wife's sister in New York City also. She came from Israel. She has two sons in New York; she is living with her younger son. She left Israel because her husband was 82-years-old and a very sick person...heart attacks...and in Israel they couldn't always help him...the Sabbath...no doctor...and their older son is a doctor in New York...so he told them to come to them. My sister misses Israel very much because she had a lot of friends and relatives, and in New York she is very much alone. She and her husband and a little dog.
- [Thelma] Do you ever write letters to Belarus?
- [Seymon] To Belarus I send cards at the Jewish New Year...a little letter and "Happy New Year." I have a friend who lives in Germany...my friend from school...my best friend...he had a military career...he was a Major in the Russian army...but he cannot come to America because he has no relatives...only Germany allowed him in.
- [Thelma] He preferred Germany to Israel?

- [Seymon] His children wanted to go to Germany.
- [Thelma] Are they making a living in Germany?
- [Seymon] They have only been there about ten months. The Germans killed very many Jewish people. They feel now, how do you say, regret to the Jewish people...only Jewish people can immigrate to Germany...Russian people cannot come.
- [Thelma] Only Russian-Jews are immigrating to Germany now...that's interesting. Is it easy to get to Germany now if you are Jewish?
- [Seymon] It was not very easy to immigrate to Germany, but it was easier than to immigrate to United States or Canada.
- [Thelma] Did the German government help them when they arrived?
- [Seymon] Yes...they helped...shelter, housing, money, food...everything they need.
- [Thelma] How long will this help last?
- [Seymon] That I don't know.
- [Thelma] Did your friend immigrate to Germany with his children?
- [Seymon] Yes. He has two daughters...one daughter is separated from her husband...she has one child...and the other daughter is with her husband...she is coming from Riga...they are all in Germany...in Cologne.
- [Thelma] Does your friend speak some German?
- [Seymon] Some...and he is learning.
- [Thelma] I think it is interesting that the Germans are helping the Russian-Jews. That is something I didn't know.
- [Seymon] When it was the war in Israel [Gulf War], many people came to Germany from Israel. Many people stayed in Germany...didn't come back to Israel.
- [Thelma] Do you write to Israel?
- [Seymon] I write to my sister...she lives in Israel nineteen years.

- [Thelma] Was she a Refusenik?
- [Seymon] No...no...she not in Siberia...she coming to Israel in 1979...before Perestroika.
- [Thelma] Was it difficult for her to leave for Israel?
- [Seymon] No.
- [Thelma] Is she happy in Israel?
- [Seymon] Yes.
- [Thelma] Does she speak Hebrew?
- [Seymon] Not very well at first, but now is good...she worked in factory fifteen years...she has received her old age pension for two years...she is sixty-two years old.
- [Thelma] She already receives her pension?
- [Seymon] Yes, in Israel women receive pension at 60 years of age. She still works a little...four hours per day...same factory.
- [Thelma] She has a husband?
- [Seymon] Yes...her husband had a very difficult operation...five by-passes the heart...now he is sick...she has two children in [unintelligible].
- [Thelma] A new town?
- [Seymon] Yes, a new town. When they arrived the town had 24,000 people. Now near 50,000 people.
- [Thelma] Mostly Russians?
- [Seymon] Very many Russians...from Bobrujsk is very many people.
- [Thelma] What did her husband do in Israel before he became ill?
- [Seymon] He worked in a factory on military production.
- [Thelma] Uzzi machine guns?

- [Seymon] Not the guns...the bullets.
- [Thelma] He worked in a bullet factory. Do you think your sister's children will remain in Israel?
- [Seymon] Yes. The younger son was in the Israeli military for four years...three years he was in the Navy, three years regular, and one year extra.
- [Thelma] He stayed one year longer than regular service demanded?
- [Seymon] Yes.
- [Thelma] And what is he doing now?
- [Seymon] Now he is an electronic specialist, and every half-year he goes to the military for one month...two months.
- [Thelma] He must be an officer.
- [Seymon] Yes, he is.
- [Thelma] And the daughter, what does she do?
- [Seymon] She works in the same factory as her mother.
- [Thelma] What kind of factory?
- [Seymon] They work on assembly line for computer components.
- [Thelma] Have you used a computer?
- [Seymon] No. When I was in Russia, the computer was only beginning. My grandson has a computer at home.
- [Thelma] The future belongs to the children. When did you visit Israel?
- [Seymon] 1994. Very nice country...beautiful country...but they haven't the peace...big problems...I think there will never be peace there. When King Hussein was alive there was no war with Jordan. With the new king, who knows.
- [Thelma] A lot of problems in the area.
- [Seymon] A lot of problems.

**COMMENT:** This interview was conducted almost entirely in Yiddish. Seymon used some English words here and there but without knowledge of Yiddish the interview would not have been useful.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**SOFIYA [66]**  
**FEBRUARY 9, 1999**

- [Thelma]       Where are your children...Canada or in Belarus?
- [Sofiya]       In Canada...Toronto...I have two daughters.
- [Thelma]       When did they come to Canada?
- [Sofiya]       One...younger daughter came before me one year [1988].
- [Thelma]       And the other daughter?
- [Sofiya]       The other one? Together with me [1989].
- [Thelma]       Was the daughter that came with you married?
- [Sofiya]       Yes...the youngest married and the oldest...both married.
- [Thelma]       The daughter that came with you...did she come with her husband?
- [Sofiya]       With husband!
- [Thelma]       So you came with your older daughter and her family.
- [Sofiya]       Yes...and with my husband.
- [Thelma]       And your husband too. Okay, so everybody came.
- [Sofiya]       And before [us] came to Canada, my youngest daughter with her husband and their child...and they born another child here.
- [Thelma]       A Canadian baby!
- [Sofiya]       Yes, Canadian baby.
- [Thelma]       Did this younger daughter sponsor you?
- [Sofiya]       Our youngest daughter not sponsor...Jewish Community Centre sponsored.
- [Thelma]       Did JIAS sponsor your younger daughter too?

- [Sofiya] No, youngest daughter came to my son-in-law's uncle.
- [Thelma] Let me get this straight. Your family met the JIAS representative in Vienna. When you left Belarus, where did you tell the Russian authorities you were going? On vacation? In Belarus, did you tell the authorities you were emigrating?
- [Sofiya] When I living in Belarus, I never think about emigrating, but when my youngest daughter left my city [Bobruisk, near Minsk] from this moment we think about leaving. Do you understand me?
- [Thelma] Yes, yes.
- [Sofiya] Do you speak only English? Yiddish!! *Oy Zer Gut!* [very good]
- [Thelma] Yiddish will help.
- [Sofiya] My husband speaks Yiddish very good, and our Yiddish is Polish-Yiddish. My mom was a *Litvak* [Lithuanian]; her family was from Vilna.
- [Thelma] How did you get to Belarus?
- [Sofiya] My mother's family came to Belarus in 1914.
- [Thelma] Around the First World War.
- [Sofiya] Yes, yes, around First World War.
- [Thelma] And they stayed in Belarus.
- [Sofiya] Yes...stayed in Belarus.
- [Thelma] During the communist years, did your family practice *a bisel yiddishkeit* [some Jewish traditions]?
- [Sofiya] *I ken nor yedden* [I can only speak Yiddish]...I cannot read or write.
- [Thelma] Did your children marry Jews?
- [Sofiya] *Alle mit Yidden* [all married Jews].
- [Thelma] Do they live as Jews here in Canada?

- [Sofiya] Yes, yes. My oldest son-in-law, every Sunday he is going to synagogue with Rabbi Zaltzman.
- [Thelma] The Lubavitchers...okay!
- [Sofiya] *Undzere einiklech, bat mitzvah und bar mitzvah geven* [our grandchildren had bat and bar mitzvahs.]
- [Thelma] Oh, *mazel tov* [congratulations]!
- [Sofiya] Thanks.
- [Thelma] *Du host a bisel gevisen fun Canada in Belarus?* [Did you know anything about Canada in Belarus?]
- [Sofiya] A bisel gevisen...[I knew a little, not a lot].
- [Thelma] *Host geleint epes fun Canada in Belarus?* [Did you read about Canada in Belarus?]
- [Sofiya] *Nein! Ich hob gehert es iz zer a gutte land...Niagara Falls* [laughing].  
[No, I heard it was a very good country...Niagara Falls]. In school learned about geography.
- [Thelma] When you came here did you receive financial help or social assistance?
- [Sofiya] No...only from Jewish community...from JIAS...and after one year JIAS turned us over to government.
- [Thelma] Did you receive an old age pension?
- [Sofiya] No...not pension...for pension you have to live here ten years...first we received welfare and now we receive family benefits.
- [Thelma] Do you live in a subsidized apartment?
- [Sofiya] Yes...very close to here.
- [Thelma] So JIAS was a good friend to your family.
- [Sofiya] Oh yes! Very good.

- [Thelma] Were you pleased with your treatment by the social workers? Were they good to you and your husband?
- [Sofiya] Oh yes, very good.
- [Thelma] And your children were well treated as well?
- [Sofiya] Oh yes. The children had to go to work immediately.
- [Thelma] Did your children find work?
- [Sofiya] Yes, yes. My son-in-law is engineer.
- [Thelma] Was he able to find a job?
- [Sofiya] Yes...he read the newspaper and found a job.
- [Thelma] I have been hearing about Russian immigrants' great difficulties with finding jobs.
- [Sofiya] No...no. He find job. When we arrived here my little granddaughter was seven months old. Then my husband became sick...prostate...operation...
- [Thelma] Is he better now?
- [Sofiya] Yes. Operation was eight years ago.
- [Thelma] Were you pleased with the medical attention your husband received?
- [Sofiya] Yes...good hospital...then my husband got heart attack...but thank God....
- [Thelma] Did you attend ESL classes through JIAS?
- [Sofiya] Yes, but not with JIAS. We went for many years on Patricia Avenue and now we go to Orah School on Sundays only.
- [Thelma] I thought that the Orah School was for children only.
- [Sofiya] They have very good courses for Seniors...Dinah Pollack...Dina used to teach in Russia...the best pedagogic...the best. In Belarus we studied German...we are very old to learn English.

- [Thelma] If you had known you would be coming to Canada, you would have studied English.
- [Sofiya] Oh yes [laughing].
- [Thelma] Do you know German?
- [Sofiya] I have forgotten [laughing]. The English is coming...a little bit.
- [Thelma] Do you attend synagogue?
- [Sofiya] I go sometimes...only on High Holidays. We go to Russian synagogue at school on Patricia when it is big holiday.
- [Thelma] Is Rabbi Zaltzman there? Does he conduct the service in Russian?
- [Sofiya] Oh yes...he is very good! For Russian people this is the best synagogue.
- [Thelma] Do many Russian people attend on the High Holidays?
- [Sofiya] Oh, very lots!
- [Thelma] Do the children go to synagogue too?
- [Sofiya] Our grandchildren attended Orah School until they had bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah [until age 13]. One day a week on Sundays. After bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah, they left the school.
- [Thelma] Do you belong to any other Senior organization?
- [Sofiya] Betel Centre...lectures...concerts...regularly. We participate in the concerts too. My husband is a good singer and I accompany him on the piano. We enjoy this very much. My grandchildren and my children play piano also.
- [Thelma] You write here that you are interested in all politics.
- [Sofiya] Yes, all politics.
- [Thelma] And you have Russian doctor and Russian dentist.
- [Sofiya] Yes.

- [Thelma] I see you have friends everywhere. Do you have Russian friends who are not Jewish?
- [Sofiya] I have, but the wife is Russian and the man is Yiddish. Mixed.
- [Thelma] Have you socialized with Canadian Jews?
- [Sofiya] When we first arrived one family, Mrs. Freedman, invited us to Passover saders.
- [Thelma] Did you enjoy that?
- [Sofiya] Yes, yes...very nice. Nice family.
- [Thelma] Do you ever see them now?
- [Sofiya] No.
- [Thelma] You saw them only once?
- [Sofiya] No, three times...three Passovers. Now we stay at home and our grandchildren lead the sader...we enjoy our own...our family, may they be healthy, are ten people.
- [Thelma] That's wonderful. The grandchildren are taking over. You say the people are friendly in Toronto.
- [Sofiya] Yes, very friendly.
- [Thelma] Did you ever work in Toronto?
- [Sofiya] No...I am an old woman!
- [Thelma] You are retired. Did your husband work here or is he also retired?
- [Sofiya] He is also retired. We had our granddaughter, so we had work to do!
- [Thelma] You helped with the baby.
- [Sofiya] Yes, we took care of the baby, and our daughter finished business school...she is dental assistant now. Now I help too because they [grandchildren] come to my place after school...the young one is already nine years, God bless her. They eat at our place and wait for their parents to pick them up after work.

- [Thelma] So you are a big help.
- [Sofiya] If we don't help them, who will?
- [Thelma] Nobody will help, if not you. Is your apartment very small?
- [Sofiya] No! Two bedroom...very good for us. Comfortable.
- [Thelma] Did JIAS help you get some furniture?
- [Sofiya] No.
- [Thelma] You bought your own?
- [Sofiya] Yes. First we bought garbage and then we changed....
- [Thelma] You replaced the furniture with good stuff.
- [Sofiya] Yes.
- [Thelma] Have you experienced any anti-Semitism in Toronto?
- [Sofiya] No, no. In Russia I also had no problem. I worked as a vice-principal in a school...and never did I experience anti-Semitism...no.
- [Thelma] So you didn't leave Belarus because of problems with anti-Semitism, but because your daughter immigrated to Canada.
- [Sofiya] Oh now, now it's bad [in Belarus]!
- [Thelma] What do you hear? Are there problems?
- [Sofiya] [Big sigh]Oh, big problems. There is no food to eat...no wages for your work...half year with no salary...how can you live...I don't know...they have a little garden and they plant.
- [Thelma] They grow some food. If people are living in a city, where do they plant...outside the city?
- [Sofiya] Yes...outside the city.
- [Thelma] Did you grow food?

- [Sofiya] No! When we lived there it was good...one could live...now one cannot live...but before...it was very normal.
- [Thelma] Now there is *perastroika*.
- [Sofiya] Thanks to *perastroika*, they let out more Jews.
- [Thelma] Do you think more Jews will leave for Israel now?
- [Sofiya] I believe so...you can't survive there. A piece of bread you slice so thin.
- [Thelma] We are very lucky here.
- [Sofiya] Oh yes.
- [Thelma] Are you optimistic about the future of your children?
- [Sofiya] Our children very good students...first in school...our oldest grandson is at Mackenzie school. He is doing very good.
- [Thelma] What does he want to be?
- [Sofiya] He wants to be a medical doctor. The other grandmother is a doctor. She lives in Los Angeles.
- [Thelma] Is she practicing medicine?
- [Sofiya] No...she is retired also. She came to Toronto for bar mitzvah...very nice woman. She was very, very good doctor...famous doctor.
- [Thelma] Where do you go shopping?
- [Sofiya] I go shopping every day. I walk with my husband and I go into store and look for what I want. Every day.
- [Thelma] Do you like going shopping?
- [Sofiya] Yes...Chopper and Basic...two famous stores. Cheap and good value.
- [Thelma] Pricechopper and Food Basics. You always shop there?
- [Sofiya] Yes! Walk!

- [Thelma] Do you have a car?
- [Sofiya] No.
- [Thelma] Do you take the bus?
- [Sofiya] Sometimes.
- [Thelma] When you go to the Betel Centre do you walk?
- [Sofiya] Walk, yes...near to our building.
- [Thelma] Where do your children live?
- [Sofiya] My children live fifteen-minute walk from us.
- [Thelma] North...Thornhill?
- [Sofiya] No! Area Steeles between Bathurst and Dufferin. Not far.
- [Thelma] Do they have an apartment or a house?
- [Sofiya] Townhouse. They live close to each other [laughs and shows me]... two minutes walk...this is [where] my oldest daughter lives...and this [is where] lives my younger.
- [Thelma] So everyone is in the same neighbourhood and its *heimlech* [cosy].
- [Sofiya] Yes.
- [Thelma] You are happy you came to Canada?
- [Sofiya] Oh yes...very happy.
- [Thelma] Are you a citizen yet?
- [Sofiya] I am citizen...five years. My husband too.
- [Thelma] Are your children citizens?
- [Sofiya] Yes!
- [Thelma] Does your family vote?

- [Sofiya] Yes...both.
- [Thelma] This is a good Canadian group we have here. Do you have any more family in Belarus?
- [Sofiya] No. I have one sister in New Jersey.
- [Thelma] Anybody in Israel?
- [Sofiya] In Israel, my husband's sister and her family.
- [Thelma] Has she been there a long time?
- [Sofiya] Long time...twenty years. She is younger than my husband. We never thought about emigrating until our youngest daughter's husband began talking about leaving...and then they left...and we began to think about leaving too. Our oldest daughter lived in Minsk. Her husband had big job...a very, very talented man. My daughter talented too...a medal winner at school...good student.
- [Thelma] Do you think it was a good decision for all the family to leave Belarus?
- [Sofiya] I think it was a good decision...there is no looking back.
- [Thelma] What did your husband do in Belarus?
- [Sofiya] My husband was a construction engineer.
- [Thelma] And you were a mathematics teacher. And now you are both retired and enjoying your grandchildren in Canada.
- When you left Belarus, you were in Vienna for three weeks. With JIAS?
- [Sofiya] Yes, JIAS in Vienna...JIAS in Italy...everywhere JIAS...so well organized.
- [Thelma] How did you know to contact JIAS?
- [Sofiya] We didn't know...they met us...in Vienna at the airport...and they sent us to Rome...all at their expense...now we are paying them back, but they provided all the money.
- [Thelma] They paid for your trip to Toronto?

- [Sofiya] Yes. For the trip to Toronto we have already paid them back, but we are paying to JIAS what they laid out for our expenses.
- [Thelma] Does JIAS charge you interest? [Demonstrate on paper the meaning of the word *interest*]
- [Sofiya] Without percent [Laughing].
- [Thelma] You took your mother with you when you left Belarus, and in the seven-month period you were waiting in Italy, she died. She died in Rome. Oh, that's too bad! How old was she?
- [Sofiya] Eighty-eight. Very crying. We made the funeral and put the monument in Rome.
- [Thelma] Did JIAS help you with these arrangements?
- [Sofiya] Everything...arranged the funeral...wooden nice coffin... and made the monument and wrote the inscription and put her picture...everything.
- [Thelma] And they paid for all this?
- [Sofiya] Everything. We all drove in a taxi...they paid everything. After the monument was set...we came to Canada.
- [Thelma] You left your mother with the Italians.
- [Sofiya] Such is life.
- [Thelma] She would never have believed she would end up in Rome. Did she spend all her life in Belarus?
- [Sofiya] All her life she lived with us...she loved my children...read them stories...very close...very good...very smart. My father was killed in World War II; he was an officer in Russian army...he was only 31 years old. My mother never remarried. She looked after me and my sister and educated us, and then lived with us the rest of her life.
- [Thelma] She died in Italy, but she was with you right to the end.
- Do you compare capitalism and democracy with communism or socialism?

- [Sofiya] Ahh, the socialism in Russia was good for those that were part of the government...for us...we worked and earned a salary.
- [Thelma] So the people that did well were part of the Party?
- [Sofiya] For them, things were very good.
- [Thelma] Were you a member of the Party while you were in Belarus? Was your husband interested in politics?
- [Sofiya] No, not interested in politics. We were part of the intelligentsia...we were Jews...we understood the political situation.
- [Thelma] Did you enjoy the concerts and the ballets and the theatre?
- [Sofiya] Ahh yes...the concerts...we went all the time!
- [Thelma] Here it is very expensive.
- [Sofiya] It is expensive, but we go.

COMMENTS: The conversation was terminated when Sofiya's husband arrived for his interview. We had been chatting in "Yankee-Yiddish", a dialect spoken by most elderly immigrant Jews of my childhood where Yiddish was interspersed with English, and although it sounded peculiar to outsiders, it was very natural and quite understandable to the children. For example, "It's warm here, open-up the *fenster* [window]."

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**SVETLANA [43]**  
**FEBRUARY 12, 1999**

- [Thelma] You state in the questionnaire that when you left Russia for Israel [1990] you had no idea of what to expect. It was a big surprise...all the different kinds of people in Israel.
- [Svetlana] Yes...cultures and mentalities.
- [Thelma] You are married, and you have children. How old were your children when you left Russia?
- [Svetlana] My oldest daughter was twelve years old...and two kids were born in Jerusalem.
- [Thelma] You had three children when you immigrated to Canada.
- [Svetlana] No, my oldest daughter stayed in Israel. She is married and she has her family.
- [Thelma] So only the younger ones came here. Was it difficult leaving your daughter in Israel?
- [Svetlana] Yes, and granddaughter. She is two years old now.
- [Thelma] Where did you learn to speak English so well...in Israel?
- [Svetlana] No, I learned in Russia at school...and after that I didn't speak English for more than twenty years...and then we came to Israel, I recalled a little bit...and here I studied too.
- [Thelma] Did you study Hebrew in Israel?
- [Svetlana] Yes...I was in Israel five years.
- [Thelma] When did you come to Toronto?
- [Svetlana] In August, 1995.
- [Thelma] You have been here three-and-a-half years. Were you fluent in Hebrew by the time you emigrated?

- [Svetlana] Yes.
- [Thelma] Fluent Hebrew. You have an ear for languages, I think.
- [Svetlana] [laughing]I have ability for languages...and my husband on the contrary...he is suffering to-day...he struggles. It was horrible there [Israel] with his language...five years and he makes the same mistakes as the first year. He has a technical mind, you know, and it is not for languages.
- [Thelma] Your husband is typical of many men, who struggle with new languages. Now he is struggling with English.
- [Svetlana] It is better than his Hebrew.
- [Thelma] Five years in Israel. First you worked as a cleaner; then one year as a physiotherapist; after your children were born, you worked outside the home as a caregiver and homemaker for the elderly.
- [Svetlana] I went to older people...to their houses; I did housework and personal care. Here I am working as a homemaker too.
- [Thelma] You state you liked Jerusalem, and thought it was a very pretty city.
- [Svetlana] Jerusalem is a very expensive city now. It is impossible to live there.
- [Thelma] You state your worst surprise in Israel was [bad] relations between [ethnic] communities, and that it was very expensive. When you say very expensive, do you mean all of Israel or Jerusalem in particular?
- [Svetlana] Jerusalem. It is more expensive than other cities. My parents lived in Ashkelon...it is cheapest.
- [Thelma] Your parents immigrated to Israel before you did?
- [Svetlana] No, we came together with my mother and father...but my mother died last year in Israel.
- [Thelma] So your parents remained behind in Israel with your oldest child?
- [Svetlana] With my sister and her family, and my eldest daughter, and my aunts and uncles...a lot of family.

- [Thelma] You left a lot of family in Israel. Was it difficult leaving all those relatives behind?
- [Svetlana] Yes, very difficult...but I am going to go now to visit in two weeks.
- [Thelma] If so much of your family is in Israel, what was your main reason for coming to Canada?
- [Svetlana] You know, it's everything, and my husband's work, and climate. I couldn't live there...too hot. Leningrad is in the north-west of Russia; it is colder than Toronto. I hated the sun and the hot weather.
- [Thelma] What about the political situation?
- [Svetlana] Dangerous.
- [Thelma] Did you worry about your children in Israel?
- [Svetlana] Yes, sure. Terrorism, we can't go to the bus...we can't go anywhere.
- [Thelma] Were you there when they were shooting the Scud missiles at Israel?
- [Svetlana] Yes, we were there, and we lived in Haifa, so we were north, very close.
- [Thelma] Did you like Haifa?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] Why?
- [Svetlana] I don't like to climb; it's on mountain; we didn't have a car there.
- [Thelma] It's hard work if you don't have a car. Your family did not put pressure on you to stay in Israel?
- [Svetlana] No. My mother told me to go here.
- [Thelma] You say you knew a little about Canada. Was your information about Canada correct?
- [Svetlana] I can't say that it was all not correct, but some of it was correct and some was not. Toronto was bigger than I thought. You know, because the population

in Leningrad is about five million, I thought that it is very compact like Leningrad.

- [Thelma] Do you mean that Toronto is a big, spread-out city and distances are far?
- [Svetlana] Yes...and at first I was scared...it seemed to me everything is so far that I can't reach it [laughing].
- [Thelma] Do you use the public transportation system? The buses? Do you ride the subway?
- [Svetlana] Yes, yes.
- [Thelma] You are more comfortable getting around the city now. Did you receive assistance from JIAS when you arrived in Toronto?
- [Svetlana] Yes, we got help.
- [Thelma] I ask this question all the time but nobody gives me the same answer. Who told you about JIAS? Did you know about it in Israel?
- [Svetlana] I knew that there is such an organization, but I didn't know if I'll apply there, if I want this, or don't want this.
- [Thelma] Before you came, did you have a telephone number, an address?
- [Svetlana] No, no information. I think one of our friends told us about it...I don't remember who...we went there.
- [Thelma] You got a social worker?
- [Svetlana] Yes, a social worker, but I can't say that she helped. No, she didn't help.
- [Thelma] What about her attitude?
- [Svetlana] Her attitude? It was alright. She was friendly...but her help was only to tell the telephone numbers. For example, I told her that I wanted to discuss my diploma; she gave me the number of the university, but I had not such great English ...you know, it was difficult to talk by telephone.
- [Thelma] She just gave you the telephone number and said good luck.

- [Svetlana] She didn't tell me, I'll phone and I'll tell you this information...where, what, and....
- [Thelma] It would have been nicer for you if she would have been a little bit more helpful?
- [Svetlana] Yes. But they helped us with clothes, and they gave a letter to second hand store and it was a big help.
- [Thelma] When you go to the second hand store that JIAS operates, do they give you clothes for free or just very cheap?
- [Svetlana] Some for free...if it's new I have to pay, but not much money...three dollars, four dollars.
- [Thelma] Did you get any rent money from them?
- [Svetlana] No...no, nothing...only furniture, but we had been here almost a year, and after that they called that they have some furniture for us.
- [Thelma] After a year?
- [Svetlana] Our social worker told that they have a long line there and so we can wait...but how can we wait because we had no beds, nothing, so we bought...and after a year they called that they have some furniture...sofa and book shelves, a lamp....
- [Thelma] Did you take anything?
- [Svetlana] Yes, we took some things. A kitchen table...four chairs and something.
- [Thelma] What did you use for a kitchen table the first year you were here?
- [Svetlana] No...I bought kitchen table on garage sale when we came...and after that we changed it because it was bigger.
- [Thelma] How did you find your apartment?
- [Svetlana] Our friend asked us, if we want to have a house for rent...and my husband went and made an agreement.
- [Thelma] You live upstairs?

- [Svetlana] Upstairs.
- [Thelma] Who lives downstairs...the people that own the house?
- [Svetlana] No...it's also rented.
- [Thelma] Is that okay...are you comfortable?
- [Svetlana] You know, it wasn't comfortable because we hear every word...but it is good it is house...because back yard is comfortable for children to play. One of my children is six, she is in grade one, and one will be five in June.
- [Thelma] Does the five year old go to school?
- [Svetlana] Junior kindergarten...Faywood Public School.
- [Thelma] How is your children's English coming?
- [Svetlana] Very good.
- [Thelma] Are you getting social assistance?
- [Svetlana] Yes, now.
- [Thelma] Your husband is going to school. He is taking computer courses.
- [Svetlana] We get social assistance and I am working too.
- [Thelma] Is the social assistance coming from the City of Toronto or from the Province of Ontario?
- [Svetlana] [laughing] I don't know!
- [Thelma] Do they send you cheques or does the money go right into the bank?
- [Svetlana] To the bank.
- [Thelma] So you never actually see the cheques. When you first arrived at the Toronto airport from Russia, did anybody meet you?
- [Svetlana] Our friends. We stayed with them for one week, and then we found this house.

- [Thelma] Were you nervous when you came from Israel?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] You state your happiest surprise was, "I did not expect wild animals in the big city." Are you talking about the Toronto Zoo?
- [Svetlana] No, about raccoons and foxes.
- [Thelma] Have you seen a fox?
- [Svetlana] Yes, sure...in our backyard.
- [Thelma] You don't like our unpredictable weather. Do you like Toronto as a city?
- [Svetlana] Yes...I like Toronto.
- [Thelma] Do you ever go outside your Russian-Jewish community? Do you go downtown? With the children?
- [Svetlana] Yes, with the children. We went to Museum and Art Gallery and to Zoo, and many things...Earl Bales park.
- [Thelma] You say you never go to synagogue.
- [Svetlana] No. I am not religious at all...but I keep some holidays.
- [Thelma] Have you ever been invited by a Canadian family for Passover or other holidays?
- [Svetlana] Yes, for Chanukah, for Pesach.
- [Thelma] Are the people who invite you friends of yours?
- [Svetlana] It's my friends.
- [Thelma] Do you enjoy these holiday dinners?
- [Svetlana] Sometimes.
- [Thelma] What about the children? Oh, they are too young....

- [Svetlana] You know, they are not interested, but they have Hebrew Heritage at school twice a week.
- [Thelma] They do? Hebrew Heritage...at Faywood?
- [Svetlana] At Faywood...two lessons.
- [Thelma] No kidding? Who organizes that?
- [Svetlana] I don't know who organizes it. Maybe parents.
- [Thelma] After school?
- [Svetlana] The lunch time.
- [Thelma] They get some Hebrew Heritage, or Jewish Heritage...do they like it?
- [Svetlana] My eldest daughter, no. Not that she is not interested. Last year she had these lessons, and it was another teacher, and she liked it very much. But she [teacher] was too religious and the parents didn't want her this year; and there were some problems with teachers, and Shelly thought *I don't want to go there*. The little one, she enjoys it, but she doesn't understand much.
- [Thelma] Do you have to pay for this?
- [Svetlana] No. We pay a little money for the activities.
- [Thelma] When do they eat lunch if they have these classes?
- [Svetlana] First they eat lunch, then they have a lesson.
- [Thelma] Do you send lunch with the children?
- [Svetlana] Yes, I send lunch. They have Italian Heritage too.
- [Thelma] This must be part of a Multicultural program. Do you go to the Jewish Community Centre for swimming or exercise?
- [Svetlana] Oh, you mean health club! Yes, we go there.
- [Thelma] What do you enjoy at the JCC. Sports?
- [Svetlana] Sports.

- [Thelma] That's it? Any cultural programs, meetings, lectures?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] Do you belong to any Russian clubs?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] You are interested in all politics.
- [Svetlan...] I am political.
- [Thelma] Do you read Russian newspapers?
- [Svetlana] Sometimes...I read English books...my friends give me.
- [Thelma] You have no Russian-Russian friends here?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] You say you have made some friends of Toronto-Jews. That's great!
- Did you run into any "attitude" from the social workers at JIAS when you needed help, because you had already been helped once to go to Israel, and this was your second immigration?
- [Svetlana] No.
- [Thelma] Do you think you would have received more help if you had come directly from the former Soviet Union?
- [Svetlana] Yes, I think so, because I recall that someone told me there, I don't remember about why, that if you come straight from Russia, you'll get this and that.
- [Thelma] Perhaps they are thinking that if you are coming straight from Russia, you really bring nothing with you, but if you are coming from Israel, maybe you are bringing something with you.
- [Svetlana] You know, we brought nothing when we got to Israel. We came there with some suitcases, and that's it.
- [Thelma] You were working in Israel and your husband was working in Israel...so you had a little bit of money.

- [Svetlana] Yes, we had money. We couldn't come here without money as Landed Immigrants. It's not Refugee or something.
- [Thelma] Did anybody sponsor you?
- [Svetlana] No. Independent.
- [Thelma] Do you ever shop at Loblaws, or just in the stores in the Russian-Jewish community?
- [Svetlana] Pricechopper..sometimes, it's far from us. Sometimes in No Frills...
- [Thelma] Where do you like to shop best...your favourite?
- [Svetlana] Dominion...Lawrence and Bathurst.
- [Thelma] Do you like Lawrence Plaza? Lots of nice discount stores.
- [Svetlana] [Laughing] Yes!
- [Thelma] You have not been able to find work in your own field, so you are working as a homemaker. Do you mind doing that [type of work]?
- [Svetlana] No...[hesitates] I got used to it. In Israel I did it.
- [Thelma] It must be a shock after you come from an excellent profession in the Soviet Union to be doing housework.
- [Svetlana] Oh, I was so depressed in Israel. Maybe a year I couldn't work at all. I couldn't imagine how I can go to people...to clean their houses...to do that...because I worked in a hospital in Leningrad...it was very hard to realize this.
- [Thelma] Are you feeling better about it now?
- [Svetlana] [Laughing] Yes! So many years...nine years.
- [Thelma] If your husband was working steadily, and money was no longer a problem, would you retrain here...go back to school?
- [Svetlana] Yes, I want to go to university...to get some courses.
- [Thelma] In your field? In physiotherapy?

- [Svetlana] Maybe kinesiology...health science. It's always in my mind.
- [Thelma] Are you too tired now to go to night school?
- [Svetlana] Not that I am tired...because I have no time...because of kids...they are too small.
- [Thelma] Eventually...you are young. Look at me...I am still in school...I'm an old "bubah."
- [Svetlana] [Laughing] I am not so young. I am a grandmother. A young grandmother! My daughter was eighteen when she got married. She didn't want to go into the army and because of that she made this decision.
- [Thelma] Is she happy with her husband?
- [Svetlana] Just so, so.
- [Thelma] Do you think she might come to Canada?
- [Svetlana] She wants and I hope so. I am going to go now there and I'll bring her all these questionnaires, the applications....
- [Thelma] Do you think her husband will come with her?
- [Svetlana] I don't know. He is a swimming coach, you know, and he is afraid of his job here [unable to do same job here]. There he is working.
- [Thelma] Is he Russian?
- [Svetlana] Russian-Israeli.
- [Thelma] Are you optimistic about your future in Canada?
- [Svetlana] Yes, I am optimistic. You know, now I feel that I was born here. I feel that this is my country...because I want to come here from the age eighteen...and I couldn't...it was a very long way to Canada...but at least I am here.
- [Thelma] Are you a Canadian citizen yet?
- [Svetlana] Yes.

- [Thelma] Was [becoming a citizen] a happy moment?
- [Svetlana] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you have a Canadian passport?
- [Svetlana] Yes. I can have Israeli passport too.
- [Thelma] Do you think that because your husband was a Russian immigrant in Israel, they took advantage of him at work? Would Israelis have worked as hard as him?
- [Svetlana] No. Israelis never work like immigrants. It's only our fate...because they pay less than to the Israelis for the same job.
- [Thelma] He was earning less for the same work than an Israeli.
- [Svetlana] Because of that he worked extra hours so that we could survive.
- [Thelma] What about yourself? You were doing housework in Israel. Did they pay you the same as a native Israeli, who was also doing homework?
- [Svetlana] I think this job it's the same.
- [Thelma] Did you experience any "attitude" from the Israeli people that you worked for? Did they treat you with respect?
- [Svetlana] Not always.
- [Thelma] This must have been very hard to swallow.
- [Svetlana] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did this have anything to do with your decision to come to Canada? Did you hope that you would have a nicer lifestyle in Canada?
- [Svetlana] Yes...and I have...despite that my husband has no job...I have a nicer life here. I told you that I feel better here [healthier]; I am not depressed; I am psychologically better.
- [Thelma] How about your husband, has he been depressed because of his job situation?
- [Svetlana] I think sometimes he is.

- [Thelma] Is your marriage okay, despite all these stresses?
- [Svetlana] But the second immigration, it's easier.
- [Thelma] It's the first one that's the big shock.
- [Svetlana] We understand many things that we didn't understand before.
- [Thelma] How would you compare capitalism to communism now that you are here and struggling within our capitalist system?
- [Svetlana] Well, it is not complete capitalism in Israel... it's, you know, fifty-fifty. Fifty socialism, fifty capitalism.
- [Thelma] How do you see it here in Canada?
- [Svetlana] In Canada, it's 100% capitalism.
- [Thelma] Growing up in a state-driven communist society, is it difficult for you to adjust your mindset to capitalism?
- [Svetlana] Yes, the state protected us [laughing].
- [Thelma] Do you find that you and your friends are able to make this adjustment?
- [Svetlana] Yes, I think yes. It is possible...it depends on the person...for me, it's possible, I think.
- [Thelma] Do you know of any people in your social circle, who have not been able to make that transition?
- [Svetlana] Yes, we met in Israel some people...they went back to Russia...and some people to Poland...they were from Ukraine and they went to Poland.
- [Thelma] Were these Jewish people?
- [Svetlana] Jewish people.
- [Thelma] They just couldn't cope in Israel?
- [Svetlana] They were depressed, and they drank; I saw all these things.
- [Thelma] How about here in Canada? What about your friends here?

[Svetlana] We have only one couple, who are close friends from Israel; two couples that are not from Israel; and one couple of close friends that are from Leningrad, twenty years I know them. So I can't tell you because we lived among Russians in Israel, and here we live among Canadians. It is better...it is more, more, better...and we enjoy it!

[Thelma] Living in a ghetto is not always a good thing.

[Svetlana] No, no. From the first moment that we came here, my husband told that he didn't want to live among Russians, and so we found this house.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**OLGA [27]**  
**JAN. 11, 1999**

- [Thelma] Your answer to, "What was your worst surprise in Toronto?" was hypocrisy. Whose hypocrisy?
- [Olga] You have to understand that you would have to use the word *mask*. When I was a newcomer to this society, I saw that people were wearing masks...behind that mask was a different look. Russian people don't smile as much, and I think they are more sincere in what they say and what they do. A social mask on the part of Canadian Jews...all Canadians for that matter...but I only met Canadian Jews when I arrived here.
- [Thelma] When people interacted with you, you felt they were not sincere?
- [Olga] I realized it much later. At first I was impressed by how friendly everybody was [laughs]. With Russian people, it's a little bit different...with Russian society...especially ten years ago when you were getting more rudeness, but it was sincere rudeness [laughs], and you were getting sincere smiles.
- [Thelma] You feel that the Russian-Jewish community at home is more sincere?
- [Olga] I cannot comment on the Russian-Jewish community. I am talking about the society that I was coming from...the genuine Russian society...from the Soviet Union.
- [Thelma] You felt they were more sincere in the Soviet Union?
- [Olga] Oh yes, in social interaction there is more sincerity. People like you or they don't like you...usually what you see is what you get.
- [Thelma] So you know where you stand.
- [Olga] More or less.
- [Thelma] More than here?
- [Olga] More than here, yes. I remember I was shocked when women were kissing each other when guests came into the house...through the door...*Oh, my dear, kiss, kiss, kiss!* That is completely unacceptable in Russian society. People don't kiss like that unless they are lovers or something.
- [Thelma] Would you save that kissing and hugging for special people in your life?

- [Olga] Yes. I can give you another example. To a Russian party you invite very few people, just close friends. You never invite people you don't know, or friends of friends.
- [Thelma] What if there is someone new in the community? Everybody can't be an old friend; you have to make new friends.
- [Olga] We have a very different notion of community. It's not like here. There it is a community of people with whom you went to school. There you hooked up and developed close-knit friendships. Some of us went together to the same college or university...and acquired more friends there. You got married, and for the rest of your life, these friends are your friends.
- [Thelma] I see. You have a small group of close-knit, longstanding friendships; whereas over here [Canada], we tend to have more quick and easy relationships, that are not meaningful.
- [Olga] They are not meaningful. Therefore you have more interaction with more members of the broader community.
- [Thelma] When you came here, did you have any friends in Toronto?
- [Olga] No, I didn't have any friends.
- [Thelma] How old were you when you got here?
- [Olga] Seventeen.
- [Thelma] You must have been very lonely!
- [Olga] Not at first.
- [Thelma] You belong to a community centre, a health club and a synagogue. Which synagogue?
- [Olga] The same as Cynthia [mutual friend].
- [Thelma] Shaarei Shomayim Congregation [Orthodox]. You answer in the questionnaire that you have some friends that are from the Soviet Union. Have you made these friends here?
- [Olga] I don't think I have any friends right now in Toronto. They are all acquaintances.

- [Thelma] Oh my dear, you really feel the difference. Do you keep in touch with your Russian friends? Do you write and telephone home?
- [Olga] Oh yes, we write. They telephone....we telephone....we miss each other. One of the reasons that I went back and forth to Russia through all these years is because I miss them.
- [Thelma] How many times did you go back and forth?
- [Olga] More than twenty times. My parents are still in Leningrad. I have no brothers and sisters. My own family is here...my husband and my children.
- [Thelma] Did you meet your husband in Canada?
- [Olga] No...he is the son of my parents' closest friends.
- [Thelma] Oh, you do believe in keeping it all together...you really do! I see that you have some non-Jewish Toronto "acquaintances."
- [Olga] Actually, my closest acquaintances in Russia, who in the past were my friends, were non-Jewish.
- [Thelma] Have you found work in your own field?
- [Olga] I haven't actually looked. When I came here, I was seventeen, so I only had my high-school diploma. I went to university here...University of Toronto...but I did not graduate because of personal circumstances. Instead, I graduated from the state university of St. Petersburg in 1995 with a Master of Science degree in psychology.
- [Thelma] You have not been able to find work in the field of psychology here?
- [Olga] I haven't had a chance to look as yet. I was working in St. Petersburg for one year. I came back here when I was pregnant. Now, I am just getting back to work, but I am not working yet...I am just getting there. Actually, I just finished compiling my résumé.
- [Thelma] You state in the questionnaire that you don't like your neighbourhood. Any particular reason?
- [Olga] Yes. Recently we have been inundated with Russian immigrants...not Jewish...and the whole community has changed so much. It reminds me now so much of Russia. I see garbage...I see the television set from the lobby

downstairs was stolen...I see cigarette butts and empty bottles of alcohol thrown into the children's playground. I see Russian names carved into the benches in the park with different words.

[Thelma] Anti-Semitic words?

[Olga] No, no. It is just that this is what I was trying to escape...the part of Russia that I don't like. My husband and I, we wanted something more. If we are in Canada, we want to be in Canada. I didn't think this was going to happen to this particular neighbourhood.

[Thelma] Well, if you moved from Leningrad to Toronto, you can move away from this neighbourhood too. If you can cross the ocean....

[Olga] That's true.

[Thelma] Have you personally experienced anti-Russian sentiment?

[Olga] Yes. from one of the babysitters.

[Thelma] You like the Russian-language CDs and videos. How do you get them?

[Olga] From my husband. He brought a lot with him from Russia. You see, I have never remained in Canada for longer than a year-and-a-half. I usually returned to Russia every six months, and stayed there. For example, when I was studying at the University of Toronto, I would return for summer vacation and for Christmas vacation. So I never missed the latest videos and entertainment.

[Thelma] Culturally you never lost touch with what was going on in Russia?

[Olga] No. But in the past couple of years, I have had to stay here. I am not going anywhere because I have small children and my husband is working, and I need to find a job. So I am just not thinking about going back. We notice that, having to stay here longer, we miss more and more. To-day, my husband and I were talking about installing a satellite dish with Russian programming.

There is a Russian store just up the street here on Marlee. It's an Open Window Bakery, which is operated by Russian people, *Odessa Deli*, and they sell Russian newspapers. They also provide free Russian papers, community papers, and you can order CDs and tapes from him. I think he gets them from a distributor in New York. We are also receiving a subscription to Exodus, which is an English-Russian newspaper.

[Thelma] You didn't comment on whether you enjoyed shopping in large supermarkets.

[Olga] You know what...now that I think about it...I have no particular feelings about shopping. I just take it for granted that it's there. If I need to go shopping, I go. It's not exciting for me. There is a big IGA store right here, so I shop there because it is close.

Big Russian supermarkets opened recently in St. Petersburg and Moscow...huge... What is exciting about these stores is their variety of European and American products. Russia imports a lot of products from all European countries, and in Canada you just have a very dull variety of local products. The products are more international in Russia...Dutch, French, German...just more exciting because it is like travelling through Europe.

[Thelma] If you have the money, you can buy anything you want now?

[Olga] I can only talk about what was available a year-and-a-half ago. The answer is yes. If you have the money, you have access to all of the European products, and all of the American products...it's all there...anything you want.

It is different than it was before. And a few months ago, it changed again. There was a huge economic crisis in Russia...everything collapsed...people are not getting the same wages as before...imports are reduced to almost nothing...some shelves are empty again. I hear different stories and most of them are not optimistic. I have friends who telephone me and say, "Oh, we are so glad that you guys are there because it would be much more difficult for you to be in Russia right now financially with two kids."

[Thelma] What do you hear from your parents? Are they older people? Are they working?

[Olga] By Russian standards, they are older people. By Canadian standards, they are not old; but I am not applying Canadian standards to my parents. They were born in 1940 and 1944. My father's parents died at this age, so for him it is near the end. I definitely hope that it's not true.

[Thelma] They are not sixty yet...they are in their fifties.

[Olga] Russian life expectancy for men this year is 58, and for women it's 64.

[Thelma] Ten years less than here. Why?

[Olga] Vodka [laughs]. I don't know.

[Thelma] Vodka would do it [laughing]. Olga, you state that only Zionists who immigrated to Israel are totally content with their decision.

- [Olga] Yes. More important, these are the ones that want to stay in Israel. Also, they have nowhere else to go, so they stick.
- [Thelma] On the questionnaire you make comments that suggest you perceive a class difference here in Toronto.
- [Olga] Oh definitely. That is why they are not mixing.
- [Thelma] When you say class difference, do you really mean money?
- [Olga] What else could I mean?
- [Thelma] My thinking was engineered in Toronto in a school system that was basically British. When we talked about a class system, it had to do with social connections; if one's parents and one's parents' parents came from "good" families i.e. families that were well-connected royally, financially or politically.
- [Olga] That is what I mean. I am not referring to the means of production...Marxist theories. I refer to what you mean.
- [Thelma] Interesting...the wealthy Jews in Toronto or in Canada, by and large, are only two or three generations away from poor immigrant roots. Do you believe that when the Russian immigrants catch up economically, they will blend?
- [Olga] Definitely. I know examples of that. There isn't much difference between Canadian-Jewish doctors, who began their practice here, and prominent Russian-Jewish doctors who began working in the Soviet Union, and then came here and succeeded. There is a difference between the first group and the people who came to Canada and have not succeeded, and had to change jobs and professions.
- [Thelma] Some of them have not succeeded because they have not had a chance to work in their own professional fields.
- [Olga] That's true, but if people don't know English, and their education and experience is not fully transferable to the new country, they should not expect to just walk into the same situation they left; and they should not be comparing their level of life, what they had before to what people of their age and experience have here. It's just not possible. It is inevitable that they make this comparison, but I think they are not practical or realistic on that point.
- [Thelma] Do you personally know people who are in this situation and accept the realities of it, and are trying their best to make the necessary adjustments?

[Olga] I think so, and I think I also know people who came from Russia, who were not young and had been well established in that country, who learned English, worked like crazy, and achieved a level of respect and monetary comfort. They have their own homes. They have several children, who go to respectable universities.

[Thelma] Are these people who have been here since the 1980s?

[Olga] 1970s.

[Thelma] So they have had time.

[Olga] They have had time and opportunity. The historical opportunity and the economic opportunity in Canada was also different.

[Thelma] More current immigrants entered Canada during a different economic period with credentials that were not recognized. It is an ongoing struggle. There are no easy answers. Canadians are also struggling.

Do you ever entertain the idea that at some point in time you will return with your husband and twin sons to Russia? Is that something you think about?

[Olga] Yes, but being a realistic person, I just can't do that. It is too unpredictable in Russia. At one time, when I was a single person, and was considering my prospects of finding a proper mate in this country, I decided that I should go back, and not even think about Canada for that particular purpose.

[Thelma] Marry somebody in Russia?

[Olga] Marry somebody that I really wanted to be with, not just for the purpose of marrying. But now that I found out that I could bring my husband here, and he could find work, and we could survive, hopefully, we would like to stay and succeed in Canada.

I beg you to understand that my situation is slightly different from most cases that you will find, because I did not immigrate to Canada as most other people did. It was not a clear direct process. I did not stay here constantly; I was going back and forth. I was living in Russia...I was studying here.

[Thelma] You were here as a student, as opposed to somebody that is coming in as an immigrant?

- [Olga] I was an immigrant first. Then I was a student for a couple of years. And now I immigrated with my husband and my children. Even my dog is a Russian immigrant. So there were three different immigrations.
- [Thelma] What is your status now?
- [Olga] I am a Landed Immigrant!
- [Thelma] Were the children born in Russia?
- [Olga] There were born here.
- [Thelma] Is your husband in "limbo?" Is his status shaky, or is he okay?
- [Olga] Very shaky. He is going to have his Immigration hearing, the second part of it, in a month and a half...and we'll see what's going to happen.
- [Thelma] Did he come as a refugee?
- [Olga] Yes.
- [Thelma] From Leningrad?
- [Olga] Yes.
- [Thelma] Your husband's immigration status is uncertain. This must be a big concern.
- [Olga] It is a concern...but it doesn't matter...whatever happens to him, we [Olga and the children] are not going back.
- [Thelma] I want to talk a little about the Jewish issue. You are one of the few people that I have talked to that actually belongs to a [mainstream] synagogue. Is your husband Jewish?
- [Olga] Yes.
- [Thelma] And your parents were both Jewish?
- [Olga] Yes.
- [Thelma] Do you think that being part of the Jewish community has helped you in Canada?

[Olga]           What do you mean?

[Thelma]        Has it reduced the loneliness? Has the Jewish community been of any benefit to you? Have you enjoyed life here more because you attend synagogue and have a few Jewish friends?

[Olga]           I think its a lot more personal rather than religious.

[Thelma]        It's more about personal relationships with people in the Jewish community than the religion itself?

[Olga]           Yes, I would say so.

[Thelma]        Was religion practiced by your family in Russia?

[Olga]           Well, my father is an atheist, I think, and my mother is a very spiritual person, but I wouldn't call her religious...but in my family, we never practiced religion. I was very much exposed to the Russian-Orthodox life because I had a few close girl friends who were Christian and, of course, the whole life in Russia, although there was no *official* religion there, still revolved around the Orthodox church because of all the little *folk* things; it was all interconnected.

I don't think my affiliation with the synagogue here in Canada has any connection to whether I am practicing or not practicing in my home because when I was seventeen, and I came to Toronto, I was welcomed by very observant families, and they practically taught me everything from scratch.

And I did become a new person. I had a second birthday on the Jewish calendar. I was living for almost a year with a former rabbinical wife, and I was spending a lot of my holidays in Cynthia's home where they practice all the regular traditions. So I learned it, and I was really enchanted by the beauty of it, and especially by the family togetherness that it brings. That was important because in my family we didn't have that.

[Thelma]        It does add a dimension, particularly for children. Do you think that you are going to bring that tradition to your kids when they are old enough?

[Olga]           We started when they were not born yet, and I think it's definitely a good value to give to them. It's an easier way to convey the metaphysical understanding of the world because it has already been studied, it's done, there are rules. You don't have to be an authority; there is an authority; and I think for Eugene and I it's a way to meet other people, get connected to the community. Unfortunately, I think we will have to switch membership to a different synagogue because we can't afford to live in the neighbourhood around the shul that we are attending now. The people are wealthy. Even Cynthia's son,

who lives on the same street that we do, which is pretty far from that shul, he has switched to a different shul closer to his home.

On the other hand, we like some people there, who are not living in the same neighbourhood. They are driving from Finch and Bathurst, but I don't want to drive on the Sabbath...I don't want to do that! So I want to live somewhere that we can afford and be close enough to the shul, so that we don't have to transgress...because it's important.

[Thelma] Have you ever been to the Russian-Jewish Community Centre?

[Olga] My husband has been. He actually met the rabbi there.

[Thelma] If you stay in Toronto, and the children start school here, would you send them to a Jewish parochial school as opposed to a regular public school?

[Olga] Thelma, I promise with all my heart that I will send them to the best school that we can afford.

[Thelma] When you say best, do you mean quality of education?

[Olga] Quality of education...private school...the best that we can afford. We are going to work very, very hard for the next few years just to be able to do that, because it is going to be their future, and it's going to be our relationship with them. If we let our kids go to a low standard school, we will lose them, because my husband and I are coming from very well-educated, quite wealthy families ourselves. It's a pity that we don't have this continuity here, that we have to start ourselves from zero in many ways. But I cannot be of a different class than my kids. They have to be somewhat similar, and I will not be able to stay at home and educate them as my mother did me. She was putting all her knowledge into me. I was her only child. I learned a lot from my mother. We had one of the largest collections of books in St. Petersburg at home. Twenty thousand books in a three-bedroom apartment. I grew up with wall-to-wall books. My husband is coming from a very well known intellectual family. His grandfather was one of the most prominent psychologists in Russia. The thing we miss most is this continuity...that we can't bring our children up in the same old apartment, with the same old books...have the security of that old...it's not money...it's old connections, old knowledge...you know.

[Thelma] Leaving behind the intellectual history of a family.

[Olga] I look at this [little shelf of books] and I have tears in my eyes because this is nothing. Yesterday my husband was putting up that picture, and it's a reproduction of a painting, one of my favourites actually, and I hate reproductions...I want the originals! We never had reproductions in our home. We didn't have Rembrandts, but we had some pretty good painters. So we will have to work, and we will have to buy. But Eugene is a realist;

he says that we will not be able to [afford art], unless we will win a lottery or something. It is very hard to create a home filled with books, paintings, jewellery, cars, and have two children...it's very hard.

[Thelma] Your family in Russia can't help you over here?

[Olga] No. Unfortunately...they were able to help me through my college years here, especially because those were the years of new economic prosperity for Russia, but now that has all changed.

[Thelma] You probably worry about them now.

[Olga] Yes, it's more the other way.

[Thelma] Do you ever think about bringing your parents here?

[Olga] No, they don't want to come. My mother came here last year...she doesn't want to come. She has her summer cottage. She loves her plants. She cares about those things. She has her friends...unless people immigrate together with their friends, it's not going to work.

[Thelma] At their age, it's very difficult. Do they report increasing anti-Semitism in Leningrad?

[Olga] Oh yes. In the past year or so, it has been worse. My father is such a well known Jew...he does and he doesn't [have problems] because he works for the government. He is a forensic psychiatrist...works for the military...so most of his colleagues are Russians obviously. He is very well respected in that way...he has a lot of say. His career has been fine considering he has never been a Party member.

[Thelma] He has stayed away from politics?

[Olga] Always, yes, but he has always been very professional, so he has a lot of respect in the city...but at the street level [anti-Semitism], sometimes, yes. Some drunk comes up to you with threats; you would see a yellow star somewhere on an apartment building; or the neighbours where our summer cottage is would be saying, "Oh that Jew..this Jew has that," you know. But it is also class hatred because they have more money, a bigger house, a better house...he is a Jew...he has that nose. It is a very folk hatred...it's a tradition...I have experienced it too. My husband has experienced it. He had his nose broken twice because he is Jewish...back in Leningrad. By the way, Eugene converted to Judaism. He was born a Jew, but he took instruction and did the whole thing at the age of eighteen...over there...because he felt so strongly that he had to do that.

[Thelma] You are a very unusual couple!

[Olga] We are! In any case, I think we might keep nomadic in a way because he is in the movie industry...his father was a prominent Soviet-Jewish filmmaker ...director.

[Thelma] Does Eugene want to be a Director?

[Olga] He is directing now. He has been doing documentaries here so far. He wants to get into feature movies. To do that, he might have to go to Hollywood eventually. He has been working with America for a while. He feels that the American culture is more receptive to newcomers...it's easier to advance in it rather than in a British-dominated, old-boy club mentality.

COMMENTS: Olga's husband has become addicted to cocaine. The couple has separated. She is on Welfare and is being counselled by Jewish Family and Child Service. The children are thriving and Olga is handling the situation well. Her parents in Russia do what they can and she has the support of a few good friends in Toronto. Eugene remains in contact with his family on an irregular basis. He is now a Landed immigrant. In the light of the above interview, this is an ironic and sad state of affairs.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**LIDYA [40]**  
**JANUARY 4, 1999**

- [Thelma] Your response to the question "Was your information about Canada correct?" is both "yes" and "no".
- [Lidya] I meant, yes, the basic simple information about Canada, about geographic conditions, and the social structure of society and the economy.
- [Thelma] What was not correct?
- [Lidya] Immigration procedures basically...because people who left Israel for Canada believed that everybody who comes from Israel will be accepted by Immigration of Canada.
- [Thelma] You believed we had open immigration?
- [Lidya] Yes, we didn't have any idea how we could stay in this country. So when we came here and encountered all the trouble with the Immigration and with the Refugee Board....
- [Thelma] You came as refugees not as immigrants; you just landed here...you said "we're here," and then found you had to declare yourselves as refugees?
- [Lidya] Yes...and also those people who came here before us as refugees...they didn't realize that they were refugees.
- [Thelma] They didn't understand the difference between an immigrant and a refugee?
- [Lidya] Yes, exactly.
- [Thelma] That was not explained to you in Israel?
- [Lidya] By whom?
- [Thelma] So you didn't go to the Canadian Embassy?
- [Lidya] No.
- [Thelma] You were just listening to hearsay?

[Lidya] Yes. Conversations...but we never checked. It is very funny probably, and a primitive approach, but you see it depends on people as well...those who came from the center of former USSR, of course, they were well informed about this...and probably they tried to immigrate to Canada as an independent immigrant, or were sponsored by somebody, relatives or somebody else, but people who came from the provincial part of FSU, those people weren't informed at all.

[Thelma] You are from Kazakhstan. Where is that?

[Lidya] This is middle Asia.

[Thelma] Your family originated in western Ukraine and during World War Two...?

[Lidya] They were transferred to Kazakhstan, but when the train was moving through Russia some part of the family decided to stay in Moscow, and even in northern Kazakhstan, because they were so scared to go to a completely different environment.

[Thelma] Why did they have to leave their homes?

[Lidya] Because of Hitler...World War II.

[Thelma] Were these Jewish people?

[Lidya] Yes. This is my father's family because my mother was Russian.

[Thelma] So your father was Jewish, and it was his family that were fleeing as refugees.

[Lidya] These weren't refugees. The Soviet government decided to save them. They were evacuated to the south. Maybe the information here [in Canada] wasn't so great. There were also Polish people along with Jewish people from Poland and western Ukraine...the part of this region that belonged to the Soviet Union.

[Thelma] So during the war your father's family went to Kazakhstan?

[Lidya] Yes, the majority of them went to Kazakhstan because they didn't have any other possibility, but some of the younger generation they stayed in Moscow...so I have relatives in Moscow...many of them...but many of them are now in Germany...they decided to go there.

- [Thelma] Really...the Jewish part of the family went to Germany? Isn't that interesting! After all of this history, they wind up in Germany.
- [Lidya] I think so [laughs].
- [Thelma] You are married.
- [Lidya] Yes. He is Russian, but he has some Jewish traces in his blood as well because his mother's father was a Jew, but it was concealed. Actually she didn't know for quite a long time. You know, it was quite interesting, because basically intermarriages occurred all over Russia, and some people just didn't know about their Jewishness.
- [Thelma] They were probably very shocked, particularly if they had spent their life being anti-Semitic, and then they found out they were part Jewish. What a change of attitude that would bring! [both laughing]
- You have two children. How old are they?
- [Lidya] Eighteen and ten. Both boys.
- [Thelma] How long have you been in Toronto?
- [Lidya] Six-and-a-half years.
- [Thelma] The eighteen-year-old was only twelve when you got here. How has it worked out for him?
- [Lidya] It was very hard...changing the countries...in a very speedy way...and the age, he was teenager...very difficult. But now he realizes that it was a better way to do this.
- [Thelma] He had the Israeli experience, and then he had to adjust to the Canadian experience. Where was the younger son born?
- [Lidya] Kazakhstan. When we decided to move to Israel, he was only two years and a half. He was four when we came to Canada.
- [Thelma] It was easier for him?
- [Lidya] Yes, he thought himself just like Canadian.

- [Thelma] If you asked your older son what he thinks he is, would he answer Russian, or Canadian, or Christian, or Jewish....?
- [Lidya] I suppose it is more convenient for him to be Canadian. Because he feels himself this way basically. In our family we don't exercise any religion at all.
- [Thelma] Neither Christian nor Jewish?
- [Lidya] No religion. Nothing. It is more fortunate for him, I would say. [laughs] You know, less problems.
- [Thelma] Lisenko is your husband's name or yours?
- [Lidya] My husband's name. My maiden name is *Zubinska* -- it's a Polish-Jewish name.
- [Thelma] Your "worst surprise in Toronto" was trouble with Immigration. You are referring to your problems with the Refugee Board?
- [Lidya] They kept us waiting for so many years...if we had been rejected at once it would have been much easier for us...at least we would have know what to do.
- [Thelma] If you were rejected by the Canadian government would you have returned to your homeland or to Israel?
- [Lidya] To Israel because we were deprived of citizenship when we left for Israel and, of course, we have only one passport, the Israeli passport. Both my husband and I have Israeli passport. The boys too.
- [Thelma] How long were you held-up by the Refugee Board?
- [Lidya] Four years and a half. Last one year and a half, there was special program designed for Chinese people basically, and luckily we were included in this program. It was called "Two Year Program" and we received our Landed papers only last May. So it took us over six years.
- [Thelma] From the time you get your Landed Immigrant status do you have to wait three years to become citizens?
- [Lidya] No, I can apply now. but I don't have any desire honestly because I don't see any difference of being Landed Immigrant or Canadian citizen.

- [Thelma] You don't think being a Canadian citizen would give you more of a sense of security?
- [Lidya] Only to vote. This is not an issue. It is related to money and we decided to postpone.
- [Thelma] Would it cost money to become a Canadian citizen?
- [Lidya] Two hundred per person and I guess some other fees, I am not sure, but anyway money is involved...\$800 for the family.
- [Thelma] Did you and your husband both attend English language classes?
- [Lidya] Yes.
- [Thelma] Did the boys?
- [Lidya] Boys, in school.
- [Thelma] For your English language classes...at any time did you go to the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services?
- [Lidya] No.
- [Thelma] Never. Not once. Never used the Jewish community social agencies for help. Did you know they existed?
- [Lidya] Yes, I heard from some people, from my classmates from ESL class, but I never done that....I didn't see any point why I should go because when we came here and we started this refugee procedure, we lived for a while in a shelter and then it was quite hard for us...but we got all official help as we needed. And we just didn't ask....and honestly I wasn't sure if I had the right to go there because practically I am Russian and according to Jewish law I am Russian [laughs].
- [Thelma] So according to Jewish law you are Russian and according to Jewish law your husband is Russian. In Israel, were both of you considered Russian?
- [Lidya] Actually I didn't have any nationality. They required me to undergo the conversation procedure...and even now I have it somewhere...an interim passport...and there is no nationality for me...it says "not assigned".

[Thelma] So in Israel temporarily you had no national identity. And they hoped that you would convert and then they would call you Jewish. Did they want your husband to convert?

[Lidya] Yes. And we had a terrible situation with this stuff and a lot of pressure...and we went to the central rabbinate in Tel Aviv and we had conversations with rabbi and you know, it's a very long story...a very oppressing story because I never experienced this kind of stuff in Russia...never! Yes, I was called Jew [in Russia], but it was so minor comparing what we experienced in Israel. My husband experienced no anti-Semitism in Russia because nobody knew he was Jewish.

[Thelma] In Israel both of you experienced reverse discrimination?

[Lidya] Anti-Russian sentiment [laughs]. In a very oppressive way I would say.

[Thelma] Do you think that many of your peers felt the same way [oppressed]?

[Lidya] Yes. I didn't have very good connection with Russian diaspora, but people who I met, to be honest not many at all, two or three families basically...they had the same problems.

[Thelma] You were only in Israel fourteen months. In that time did you make friends with any Israelis?

[Lidya] No. I worked for a Jewish sephardic family...they came from Iran in 1960s, their parents came. They were nice.

[Thelma] Did you do housework or babysitting?

[Lidya] Babysitting, housework....

[Thelma] Did you live in?

[Lidya] No. I was incoming.....

[Thelma] Did they treat you well?

[Lidya] Yes. They were pleased because I was trying to work well [laughs ironically].

[Thelma] Did your husband work in Israel?

- [Lidya] Yes, he worked in a restaurant, in a banquet hall; he was a very hardworking person and they treated him well because they required good workers.
- [Thelma] If there was a number one reason for leaving Israel would it be because of the Jewish identity problem?
- [Lidya] I would say my first reason is political...because of the instability...the every day killing.
- [Thelma] Were you frightened in Israel?
- [Lidya] Yes...because I had to travel to Tel Aviv. We lived in *Holon*, a part of greater Tel Aviv, and I had to travel every day to Tel Aviv to work there. I wasn't sure if I can get home after work because of those bombings. My kids went to school and I didn't know if they can come back after because...the guard was staying in front of the school and when I asked why is he here, and somebody answers that maybe some bomb is on the bench....so you know, it was so unusual for me. At first it was accepted as a joke but after...the pressure was building up.
- [Thelma] You never felt this personal danger in Russia? Even though you were partly Jewish?
- [Lidya] No, no. Never.
- [Thelma] Kazakhstan is a Moslem community. Did you experience religious discrimination because you were not Moslems?
- [Lidya] Yes. That is why so many European people left...not just Jewish people...Russians, Tartars, Ukrainians...there is a statistic number of those people...since 1985, if I am not mistaken, more than seven million people left.
- [Thelma] More than seven million people have left Kazakhstan!
- [Lidya] Not only Kazakhstan...this region...the Moslem region.
- [Thelma] I didn't know anything about that.
- [Lidya] Because they didn't show you anything. There are those special programs about troubles in the Soviet Union....
- [Thelma] So you grew up really in a Moslem environment.

- [Lidya] It is very interesting [religious discrimination] because those Moslems they were so sophisticated, so civilized...some...in some parts [of the area].
- [Thelma] When did you say the pressure started...in 1985?
- [Lidya] Yes, after Gorbachev came and the turmoil started.
- [Thelma] So there was a big exodus of Europeans out of Kazakhstan. Even if you were a Christian, you would have felt the same pressure?
- [Lidya] Yes, it doesn't matter.
- [Thelma] You didn't check off any questions regarding belonging to community centres, health club, music group...you are not a joiner?
- [Lidya] Actually I just don't have time...and money as well.
- [Thelma] You are interested in all politics. You have a Canadian and a Russian doctor and a Canadian dentist. You have some Toronto Jewish friends?
- [Lidya] Only Julia and Joan.
- [Thelma] Do you get lonely?
- [Lidya] I would say I am accustomed to this loneliness. It has been so many years.... It is better to be lonely.
- [Thelma] You have not even felt that you are part of Canada until just recently. You always had this thing over your head that maybe you would have to go back to Israel. Did you worry about deportation?
- [Lidya] Yes, we were worried about the deportation very much because I didn't want to stay in Israel. At that point [if deported] when we decided to do something about moving somewhere else, the first choice of mine was to go back to Russia. First of all I have my mother in Kazakhstan. She is very sick, so I have this kind of obligation...but my husband said no matter that we have relatives...mothers...we have to move somewhere else because Russia will have more troubles -- and he was right.
- [Thelma] I am sure you worry about the family back home.
- [Lidya] Of course. I write to them. It is often very hard to reach them [by telephone] but still I talk [to them] almost every week. My mother has a phone in her apartment.

[Thelma] Do you like shopping? Do you like our nice big stores?

[Lidya] [Laughing] Yes, I like, when I have money. From one hand yes I like it [the variety], but from another hand it drains your money very much. It attracts you and you have to spend more and more and more.... It's impossible for a woman [not to shop].

[Thelma] You like living in this neighbourhood, and you like your apartment. You are optimistic about your future and your children's future.

At the Refugee Board, in your experience, was there ever an acknowledgment that there might be situations in Israel that would result in people fleeing as refugees...or did they always deny that here in Canada?

[Lidya] They always denied -- there is not a single refugee from Israel. And Montreal accepted over 400...I don't remember the exact number of people...probably because they wanted to separate from Canada and they just, you know, they have different attitudes. Still they [Quebec] showed that, yes, there are refugees from Israel. It's a miracle that we are staying here now, because we were allowed to stay here, not as refugees, but as people who stayed here for so many years; and why was it designed, this three year program, when people who were rejected as refugees and stayed more than three years and were under certain conditions...they worked, no criminal activities...they can get this Landed....

[Thelma] In other words you got in that way, not because Canada ever acknowledged that you were a legitimate refugee but because you were here for more than three years, so you got in under a different category.

[Lidya] Exactly. They are playing games with people's lives.

[Thelma] You feel that the countries the Refugee Board accepts refugees from change depending on Canada's relationship to the international political situation.

[Lidya] Exactly.

[Thelma] If Israel would have been less discriminatory, do you think that your children, had you remained there, would have eventually become Jewish?

[Lidya] I don't think so. Yes, they would have been Israelis, but not Jewish...because it comes from the family...this is a way of living...and if we don't obey any Jewish law...how would they?

Actually, it is interesting. It happened to my brother. We immigrated to Israel together and at that point he was seventeen years old and upset with the idea of moving to Israel. When

we left for Canada, he remained in Israel. He went to army, and considers himself as a Jew and as an Israeli person. Still he left Israel, and now he lives in Moscow, and he wants to immigrate here. [This is] because of the political turmoil [in Israel], and I would say the fight between civilian Jews and religious Jews. Even between those related people, there is a mess...and there is no optimism.

[Thelma] Even though your brother was in the army and learned Hebrew and considers himself an Israeli and a Jew, the turmoil in the country was so upsetting that he returned to Moscow?

[Lidya] Yes.

[Thelma] Was he legally able to go back to Moscow?

[Lidya] Sure. He is travelling back and forth because he has established some small business with his cousins [in Israel]. It is interesting about my cousins as well because they are married...they are over thirty years old...and their families, their wives and children, are living in Israel but they are doing business in Russia, in Poland, in Germany...they have this interconnected business...because they couldn't establish themselves financially in Israel...and there is another problem. I don't know if they have decided to stay with their families in the future in Israel, because it is dangerous for their children there. In the meantime, the families are in Israel, but the fathers are working in Moscow to sustain their families in Israel.

[Thelma] The fathers have returned to Moscow to make a living and have left their families in Israel. Do you think that the long term plan is that the families would unite in Israel?

[Lidya] I don't think so. They just need this adequate amount of money.

[Thelma] So what they are trying to do is make some economic progress and eventually either go to the United States or Canada?

[Lidya] Probably...or somewhere in Europe.

[Thelma] I am a little confused. The cousins that went to Israel, are they legally allowed to return to Russia? I thought that once they left Russia they couldn't go back.

[Lidya] Yes. Even we could go back [now] but the situation was different for us who left the FSU in 1991 in May or June. After that, in July, the FSU had established the law -- who is going to leave for Israel, they are not deprived of their citizenship...but when we left for Israel, we were deprived of our citizenship. We didn't have Soviet passport when we left.

[Thelma] Do you think if you went back you could get a Soviet passport?

[Lidya] Actually I can apply even here. I was interested in it because at that time when we were in uncertainty, and we didn't want to return to Israel, I would prefer to go back to Russia. At least it's my country...at least I know what I am going to do there...and at least I can get a job...a decent job for me...more or less paid or even not paid...but I know I can survive somehow. People are still alive there! They go to the theatre! [laughing]

[Thelma] I don't know how they do it.

[Lidya] It's a secret!

[Thelma] That's the real Russian secret...how to survive under terrible conditions...freezing weather...with shortages and political instability...somehow the people go on, and they make music....

[Lidya] And they listen to music!

[Thelma] Do you think that in time you will make Canadian friends and, if things go well here economically and personally, you and your sons will become part of the non-Jewish Toronto community?

[Lidya] You see, I have two sons and they are in different age groups. What I notice for my older son, he is tending to be among friends who came from Israel, because he had this unfortunate experience with Canadian Jewish friends in Forest Hill...basically it was about financial differences. He went to Forest Hill [collegiate] but after he decided to go to Vaughan academy [collegiate] because it is more international [multicultural] now.

[Thelma] Did he run into a "class" thing at Forest Hill Collegiate?

[Lidya] Exactly. It was a very bad experience for him.

[Thelma] Was it money or the fact that he was an immigrant?

[Lidya] No, money...basically money.

[Thelma] He couldn't keep up with the rich kids?

[Lidya] Of course.

[Thelma] Did they treat him differently because he didn't have money?

[Lidya] Exactly. Jokes....

[Thelma] They made fun of him because he didn't have money. Did they make fun of him because he was an immigrant? Because he was Jewish, or not Jewish?

[Lidya] No. Only money. Actually it is very important for teenager to keep up with somebody else who is around him. He had inferiority complex. He transferred to Vaughan because he feels more comfortable there. He is happy there. There are a lot of Russian Jewish boys and girls who came from Israel. Now this school is full of them.

My younger son is oriented more to Canadian Jewish community ...because he is going to West Prep, and he made friends in this neighbourhood...and they accepted him well...and they are treating him well...and he is playing with his friends all the time in their homes and they come here. I don't know why...maybe because they are just young...he is only ten.

[Thelma] Does this son join in any of the Jewish holidays at his Jewish friends homes? Have they invited him?

[Lidya] Yes, they invited him for the Jewish New Year. He is tending to obey these religious celebrations but we don't have this tradition in our home [laughs nervously] and he asked me many times "*We are partly Jewish people, why we don't do this and do that...?*" Because it didn't work in our families, never, even in my father's family which was Jewish family, they didn't practice anything. Probably this tradition was broken during the war because people were busy with their everyday needs and they just forgot about it.

[Thelma] And then there were the Communists...

[Lidya] I don't know. In Asian part of the Soviet Union...to be honest, I didn't feel this Communist oppression. In Russia, in Ukraine, probably yes, because they are center of Soviet ideas, but Asia, you see, Communist leaders were looking at the Asian part of their domain as feudal system and they didn't require much from them. Ideologically we were free, more or less.

[Thelma] Were there some practicing Jews and operating synagogues?

[Lidya] Yes, synagogues were operating, and my grandma and my father and the rest of the family who died, they were buried in Jewish cemeteries. It was normal practice that [during] the big holidays people that were interested in obeying the Jewish traditions, they went to synagogue. Nobody stopped them. They were free to go. But Ashkenazi Jewish people were more worldly, I would say, more intermarriages and more sophistication among them than Sephardic Jews, who are more religious and more traditional. Even though they were incorporated into this Islamic society they kept their traditions.

- [Thelma] Well, you never know, it's a long road. You might have a little rabbi on your hands [laughs]. Wouldn't that be ironic. Children are very unpredictable. Just for the record, what are their names?
- [Lidya] Husband Victor, Michael and Igor [youngest].
- [Thelma] Michael has some Israeli friends at high school. These Israeli friends are Jewish?
- [Lidya] Yes. Michael has a girlfriend who is partly Jewish; her father is Russian but mother is Jew.
- [Thelma] Does Michael's girlfriend think of herself as Jewish? Or you don't talk about it?
- [Lidya] Why? We are talking about it! It is quite interesting conversation. She thinks of herself as Israeli. Probably this new generation of Israeli people, they are not oppressed by religious tendencies, they are oppressed by peace in their country and they are tending to think about themselves as secular. It is more convenient to be Israeli, than to be strictly Jew. There is a difference. It's just before us, you know, three or four million....
- [Thelma] There are a lot of secular Israelis. You didn't have an opportunity to meet any in Israel?
- [Lidya] I didn't have an opportunity...I worked...but I can say yes I did have experience with secular Jewish people for whom I worked. They were sephardi but they were not very religious...they obeyed some holidays and celebrated the traditions but...I didn't find any traces of religious.....
- [Thelma] I find this Jewish thing is a mystery...whether you avoid it, you escape it, you run away from it, you ignore it, you dislike it, you resent it, it seems to always creep back into some part of your life. Somehow or other...
- [Lidya] Yes. In the back of your mind....
- [Thelma] ...and if you have children...there's another level of that going on. I think it's just a reality.
- [Lidya] It's a reality! But still if you have those traces you are carrying them always [laughing] anyways.
- [Thelma] When you have the "traces", you have a lot of the identity problems of being a Jew without any of the good stuff that religious Jews enjoy.

- [Lidya] Exactly. They have their base.
- [Thelma] They have their base...they believe it...they don't question...they know who they are and they don't have any of these kind of problems.
- [Lidya] But you see it's not honest for them anyways, in my opinion, because this religious base looks like very cozy cushion, but it's better to try to find yourself during your life. Still, although they have this cushion, they are not deprived of contradictions, bad images, anyways...and when you encounter this, sometimes it's awful. People often don't know what is going on inside this cushion, and I prefer to be free. Free from everything!
- [Thelma] When Michael first got here he was doing telemarketing...at thirteen years!
- [Lidya] His first money was \$130 and he bought roller blades because it was the fashion...and some Canadian hockey equipment in a second hand store...and he played hockey for three years. Now his younger brother is playing hockey. Two under the same roof, so the tradition comes on!
- [Thelma] We have two hockey players in this immigrant family from Kazakhstan. Amazing!
- Did you say Michael [elder son] bought his own car?
- [Lidya] Yes, actually this is his second car. The first one was Izuzu and he sold it.
- [Thelma] I think you may have an entrepreneur on your hands.
- [Lidya] This is my first year in a three-year accounting program at Seneca. I work two days a week at Centennial Hospital, north of Toronto, Finch West. Michael drives me when I am working night shift and Fridays.
- [Thelma] Does your husband have a steady job? [They are now separated]
- [Lidya] Yes. He is working for a dairy company.
- [Thelma] Thank you, Lidya.

COMMENTS: This was a very emotional interview. The immigration process has taken its toll on this family. Lidya, a very pretty fair-skinned brunette, slim and petite, is making a slow adjustment to her recently-acquired "separated" marital status. She is tired and overworked because she wears many hats i.e. accounting student, hospital employee, mother and homemaker. Her estranged husband is working; he pays the rent and supports the children. She told me that he couldn't take the pressure of what he perceived as "her

unreasonable material demands," which she denies. There were frequent tears when we touched on the personal. Lidya is sad and very lonely. The apartment is spotless and pleasant. There are few artifacts, but the sparse furnishings appeared new. There is a beloved pet cat in residence. The older son Michael is tall, slender, blonde, handsome, and looks Russian. He is careful in his approach and cautious with his words. The younger son is blonde, plump, musical, gregarious and looks Jewish. The brothers did not resemble each other physically, but appeared very lovingly connected with Michael assuming a fatherly attitude.

**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**MICHAEL (18)**  
**JANUARY 21, 1999**

- [Thelma] Your answer to the question "What was your worst surprise in Toronto" is, "*The racism among lower-class families*" What do you mean by that?
- [Michael] Because when we just came in [to Canada] we didn't have funds to go to a hotel, so we went to a shelter. The shelter situation was mainly divorced women, you know, very low-class families...because of the low education, I think.
- [Thelma] Were they mean to your family?
- [Michael] Oh no. Personally, myself I didn't experience much but, you know, just little kids walking around "*Hey, white boy,*"... "*Hey, black boy,*" and the parents themselves didn't do much about it.
- [Thelma] Even though you were all in the same boat, so to speak, all in trouble, they still had time for racism and racial slurs. Is that what you are saying?
- [Michael] Probably.
- [Thelma] Was there any fighting among the kids because of that?
- [Michael] Not for me.
- [Thelma] You don't belong to a community centre or a health club; what do you do for fun?
- [Michael] I used to play hockey in leagues, in MTHL [Metro Toronto Hockey League]; I used to box.
- [Thelma] You used to [play hockey]. You don't any more?
- [Michael] No, it's too expensive. The price had risen. Once you make a team, you've got to pay a season fee.
- [Thelma] How much is it?
- [Michael] Now it's about eight hundred bucks...it depends on the league... so I was going to a higher league...I didn't want to play in a lower league any more...so I had to pay more...it totalled up to about a thousand at the end.

- [Thelma] What about uniforms and stuff like that?
- [Michael] Oh, that's included -- jackets, all that. They made this law now, when you walk into the arena you've got to pay an arena fee which is \$3.00 per game, I think it's actually \$3.50 now, I'm not sure.
- [Thelma] So on top of the eight hundred dollars, you would have to pay something every time you went to the rink?
- [Michael] That's not including tournaments...if you want to go somewhere.
- [Thelma] Yes, then there's travel expenses. It's expensive to belong to a hockey league. It was too expensive for you. Was there no help for you so that you could continue?
- [Michael] Well, my parents offered but....
- [Thelma] Other than your parents, the league itself wouldn't help a kid out if he wanted to play hockey?
- [Michael] You could negotiate the price but...a hundred dollars less.
- [Thelma] Not enough to make a difference. That's too bad. So what else have you done for fun recently?
- [Michael] I used to box before.
- [Thelma] Used to box. Where?
- [Michael] Some Russian coach. A friend of mine found his ad in a Russian newspaper because he reads that stuff...so he gave me the number. I went to a couple of other clubs, but I didn't like them very much. So once I met him...I thought he was a better coach.
- [Thelma] The boxing coach was Russian? Where did he coach you? In in his home?
- [Michael] No. Do you know George Harvey Collegiate...and York University?
- [Thelma] How long did you do the boxing?
- [Michael] Seven, eight months and then I just didn't have time or the money for it again.
- [Thelma] Was boxing expensive?

- [Michael] Oh no...fifty bucks a month...very cheap.
- [Thelma] Were other Russian teenagers there as well?
- [Michael] A couple of my friends from the neighborhood joined.
- [Thelma] Was the instructor a new immigrant?
- [Michael] Yes.
- [Thelma] Was he Jewish?
- [Michael] Ya, he is from Israel. The only reason why he left is because he was getting heart problems from the temperature, I think.
- [Thelma] It was too hot for him?
- [Michael] Ya, something like that.
- [Thelma] He is teaching boxing here. Does he teach privately or was he attached to an organization?
- [Michael] I think he said something about getting a licence...you have to have a licence for that...to be able to safeguard...he had a licence but he didn't have a club, he didn't run a club, he wasn't in a club, he didn't belong to anything. He just had spots and trained people.
- [Thelma] You paid him personally.
- [Michael] Yes.
- [Thelma] You haven't boxed for the last two months. What else do you do for fun?
- [Michael] My girlfriend?
- [Thelma] You've got a girlfriend? Is she a Canadian girl or a Russian girl?
- [Michael] Oh no...well...she's from Russia...migrated to Israel...and came here after.
- [Thelma] Does she go to the same school as you? Vaughan?
- [Michael] Yes.

- [Thelma] Do you like Vaughan Road [Collegiate]?
- [Michael] I like it better than Forest Hill [Collegiate]...yah.
- [Thelma] Forest Hill was too difficult?
- [Michael] Difficult. Other things.
- [Thelma] Were the kids snobbish?
- [Michael] Yah, especially in Grade Nine.
- [Thelma] Did they make you feel uncomfortable?
- [Michael] At times. You know...they are wearing Nike...you are wearing something else...and some of them were, you know, *why aren't you wearing Nike as well*. That's just an example...but they would do this.
- [Thelma] Did you feel bad?
- [Michael] Well, certainly...uncomfortable.
- [Thelma] Kids can be very, very cruel. Are there mostly Jewish kids at Forest Hill Collegiate?
- [Michael] They actually did a survey. When I was in Grade Nine, it was about ninety-eight percent. When it was the immigrant flow, they said it was something about eight-five percent...it lowered a lot but the population of the school had risen, right? So I think the attendance of the Jewish kids from that year did not lower. Cause they live there, they go there.
- [Thelma] Were there many other Russian kids going to Forest Hill Collegiate?
- [Michael] Yes, there are now.
- [Thelma] They've stayed there, do you think?
- [Michael] Yes. Some left. A friend of mine left but that's only because of the different programs offered at Vaughan.
- [Thelma] Not because of his economic....
- [Michael] Maybe.

- [Thelma] Are there many Russian kids at Vaughan?
- [Michael] Yes.
- [Thelma] So you feel more at home?
- [Michael] I actually don't interact with them for some reason...I don't know.
- [Thelma] Are there any Russian gangs at the school?
- [Michael] No.
- [Thelma] Are there Russian cliques. Do some of the Russian teenagers stick together?
- [Michael] Yes. Well, that's because...they are friends with people around school sure because they know them...but I think the reason why they stick is because of the language...and the other differences...you know.
- [Thelma] Do they talk Russian to each other in the schoolyard and hallways.
- [Michael] Yes.
- [Thelma] Are some of the kids fairly new to Canada?
- [Michael] Yah, there's a guy who's going to be coming in second semester...in Canada about two weeks...something like that. There are some people that are fairly new.
- [Thelma] Does the teacher ever call on you to help a Russian student?
- [Michael] No...never.
- [Thelma] Do they even know that you can speak Russian?
- [Michael] No, I don't think so [laughs].
- [Thelma] You're so assimilated now in Canada that they don't even really know....
- [Michael] Yah. [Smiling]
- [Thelma] Would you help if you saw a kid struggling with the language?
- [Michael] Sure.

- [Thelma] What did you do this past summer?
- [Michael] Worked.
- [Thelma] What did you do?
- [Michael] I worked at a dairy company. It's called Four Star Dairy because there are four owners...Four Stars...in Mississauga, right across the street from the third terminal airport.
- [Thelma] What did you do?
- [Michael] Basically driving around a forklift...moving things...bringing things to the refrigerator...because the refrigerator is big, right? So you got to move things in like milk and other dairy products.
- [Thelma] They let you drive a forklift?
- [Michael] Yah, because it's one of the smaller versions...you don't need a licence for it.
- [Thelma] Did they pay you decently, or minimum wage?
- [Michael] No, actually the pay was good. It's nighttime shift and I would probably never have gone back if it was less than what I am getting.
- [Thelma] Are you still working there?
- [Michael] Yes, I am going tonight. I work from eleven to six and then I come back home six-thirty...sleep an hour-and-a-half and go to school.
- [Thelma] Do you sleep on the week-end to catch up?
- [Michael] No...actually I have gotten used to it during summertime. Right at the end of this last summer I was dying...couldn't handle it...but then I got used to it...like I can stay up all night.
- [Thelma] Do you work five nights a week?
- [Michael] No, only Thursday and Friday night. That's 'cause of the school. You know you would obviously get tired by the end of it, and you would fail, right?
- [Thelma] Absolutely.

[Michael] The summertime [job] was six days a week...but I could sleep during the day.

[Thelma] So you made some decent money in the summertime.

What year are you in at high school?

[Michael] Last semester. Actually I'm taking...because I am going to college, I am not going to university...so university [candidates] is taking OACs...so because I am going to college, I could be accepted with either twelve, eleven, OAC whatever.... What I am just trying to do now...I could graduate now, if I wanted, and just take one last course at summer school or at night school to get it over with to get the 38 courses...but I want to upgrade some of the courses that I need...to show the college.

[Thelma] Which college have you chosen?

[Michael] Oh most likely I am going to apply to Seneca. Yah, there are three colleges that you apply to...probably Humber, Seneca and another one...George Brown...something in the city. I don't want to go away.

[Thelma] Any particular area you are interesting in applying for?

[Michael] Yes, accounting. I have shown an interest since grade ten.

[Thelma] You are interested in mathematics?

[Michael] No!

[Thelma] Interested in business?

[Michael] Yah, a little. Economics is one of my strong points..

[Thelma] Do they offer a good program for a kid like you at Seneca?

[Michael] Yah, I've looked in...it looks fine from hiring...people get hired from others, George Brown being the least...Seneca being the most...and so on. So the chances of me getting a job when I graduate are okay.

[Thelma] A lot of computer work?

[Michael] Mom is taking it [accounting at Seneca] right now.

[Thelma] Lots of computer studies.

[Michael] Yah, they do teach programs. I was taking co-op in the field...back when I was in Forest Hill...and to tell you the truth, all the theory you learn, you don't use. Even the workers themselves, including my supervisor, said so, and I was in a big company, like BVDO, you might have heard of it. So they even themselves said you don't use any theory whatsoever.

[Thelma] The machine does everything?

[Michael] Yah. You've got to know the programs, and the way they work. If somebody gives you a piece of paper, you've got to know what it is. Obviously different companies have different formats...all that stuff...but they teach you most of the formats and they teach you most of the programs. That's basically what you have to know...if you didn't take any theory about accounting period, you'd be okay. I think the reason why they teach it, is to give you an idea about what you are going to be doing.

[Thelma] Also to teach you how to think, I suppose.

[Michael] Yah, cause, you know, you can't sit there all day.

[Thelma] Otherwise, they would be graduating "vegetables", which we sometimes do anyhow. How are your reading skills? How is the English coming?

[Michael] Alright. English class I actually like. I like reading. I am reading a couple of books, here and there.

[Thelma] English books or Russian books.

[Michael] English. I can't....

[Thelma] You can't read the Russian books?

[Michael] I can, but I've got to read the story twice or three times over to understand what it's saying...partly because I don't understand some of the words...you know, they are bigger words than I actually use in my home language...also because the way people used to live back there, the way they used to write...I don't know what they are talking about at times.

[Thelma] They are referring to things that you don't know?

[Michael] Yah. Either that or where? Plus some of the good literature was written a way back so....

[Thelma] How old were you when you left [Russia]?

- [Michael] Ten and a bit.
- [Thelma] The Russian that you spoke in Kazakhstan...was it exactly the same as the Russian that they would speak in Moscow?
- [Michael] It's probably...if you make a comparison...somebody who lives in Whitehorse and somebody who lives in TO.
- [Thelma] Have you studied French in school?
- [Michael] Yah, I did. I didn't progress very well.
- [Thelma] You say here that you like international politics. Have you been following the Clinton disaster at all? Do the kids talk about that in school?
- [Michael] Yah...these little jokes. We discuss it in class, but most of the discussions end up being, "Why even bother discussing it?" type of thing.
- [Thelma] Do you follow Israeli politics at all?
- [Michael] No.
- [Thelma] You say, yes, you have experienced anti-Russian sentiment. Was that in school?
- [Michael] Yes, especially in the lower grades...grade seven...not much so in grade eight...and going less towards high school 'cause, you know, the kids are growing up.
- [Thelma] What grade did you start in at when you came to Toronto?
- [Michael] Grade seven. We came during the summer of grade six...grade six had already ended for me.
- [Thelma] You were placed right into grade seven. You didn't lose any grades?
- [Michael] No. The school I went to I considered so low-life because they didn't even ask me if I needed any ESL program. They asked me that in grade eight, the next year.
- [Thelma] Which school was that?
- [Michael] Winchester...on Ontario Street...Cabbagetown.

- [Thelma] It didn't occur to anybody there to ask if you needed some support with your English. They just threw you into the water.... How did you manage? Did you pass grade seven?
- [Michael] Yes. A bunch of Bs and some Cs...something like that.
- [Thelma] That's good! You're a smart kid...and then you went to grade eight...still at Winchester?
- [Michael] I was there about two months...well you could say half a semester or term...then I went to Jesse Ketchum on Bay Street.
- [Thelma] Is that because you moved?
- [Michael] No, my mom thought it was a better school.
- [Thelma] Was it?
- [Michael] Yah...the teachers there were a bit more demanding...because Winchester was, you know, Cabbagetown...so Jesse Ketchum was a bit more civilized, if you want to say that, and a bit more developed...and more expectations of the kids.
- [Thelma] Did they give you any ESL help at Jesse Ketchum.
- [Michael] Yes, my home form teacher insisted on that...right when I came. What she did, she would teach her English class, give them an assignment, and then whatever time we got left, usually it was twenty minutes to a half-hour, she would spend with the ESL people in another room, or just aside.
- [Thelma] How many kids were there with you?
- [Michael] In ESL? Four or five out of a thirty person class...something like that.
- [Thelma] Did you find that helpful?
- [Michael] Yah...because she would discuss the classwork...the homework ..so we would understand.
- [Thelma] That was grade eight. Then grade nine you started at Forest Hill. Did you run into any anti-Russian sentiment at Forest Hill? Or was it a "class" thing? Was it just money or snobbery or Russian?

- [Michael] A little bit of some [all].
- [Thelma] Did anybody ever make fun of you because you were Russian or an immigrant?
- [Michael] Sometimes...yes...but you would always have something back to say. You know....
- [Thelma] You would have an answer for that. Did you get into any fights because of that?
- [Michael] No...nothing serious.
- [Thelma] Just language. No boxing?
- [Michael] [Laughing] No, not yet.
- [Thelma] Did you every complain to the teachers?
- [Michael] No. It wasn't that big of a problem. You know, it got annoying by the end but....
- [Thelma] It kept up all year?
- [Michael] Yah...like at times...it wasn't happening constantly...but I think with the immigrant flow going in...it got better, you know, more respect I think...there are more of them now.
- [Thelma] There were more of them [immigrants] so they [Canadian students] were not so quick to...they were afraid that maybe they would get into trouble if they opened up there mouth...some big immigrant kids....
- [Michael] [Laughing] Yes!
- [Thelma] When you say "immigrant flow"were they mostly Russians?
- [Michael] A lot of Yugoslavians, a lot of Serbs...with the war going on...a lot of those. Some Russians...actually not that many...very recently there is a lot...this past summer a lot are coming in.
- [Thelma] Are they coming from Israel or from...?
- [Michael] Yah, a lot from Israel.

- [Thelma] So they would probably know some English.
- [Michael] Yah, some of them do.
- [Thelma] Do the Serb kids know any English?
- [Michael] Some, some...you know...it depends on the family.
- [Thelma] Nobody ever told the teacher. The immigrant experience was never discussed in class so that the other kids, your fellow students, would have a little more empathy, a little more sympathy, a little more understanding? That never happened?
- [Michael] No.
- [Thelma] They didn't engage the kids in conversations about the struggle of being an immigrant...or the friendships [lost]?
- [Michael] No. Nothing.
- [Thelma] You went to the Jewish Community Centre a couple of times....
- [Michael] Yah, just to play ball hockey; because a friend of mine was doing some ball hockey.
- [Thelma] Somebody took you there?
- [Michael] Yah, I didn't even know about the place. We went to just work out...it was about a year ago.
- [Thelma] Did you ever think about joining [JCC]?
- [Michael] Oh no...because of the large membership fee.
- [Thelma] Too expensive for you. Did you ask if you could get a subsidy, or if you could go for free?
- [Michael] Oh no. I was actually...I wasn't all that interested to start with because I was playing hockey and then I was doing boxing, and sometimes they overlapped at the end.
- [Thelma] So it would have been too much. Would you ever consider joining that "Y" in the future?

- [Michael] I am actually thinking about it now because I am gaining weight...I am not doing anything. Thinking about going to a health club or something like that...because I don't have time for boxing; I need my own schedule.
- [Thelma] Is there anybody in the Social Services that could help you to get a free membership, or a subsidized membership, because you are a student and from an immigrant family?
- [Michael] I don't know...never asked.
- [Thelma] You should ask...it's worth checking out. I hear it's a nice facility...it looks nice.
- You like TV; you like English language movies. What kind of movies do you like the best?
- [Michael] All kinds. My girlfriend loves movies, so I am kind of forced.
- [Thelma] Do you rent videos, or do you go out to the movie theatre?
- [Michael] Both...when there is money...you know...it's a lot of money for a movie.
- [Thelma] Do you like to go out to the movies?
- [Michael] Yah...obviously...the movie theatre...but recently I got a new car so it's kind of a bit tight.
- [Thelma] You're paying off the car. Do you listen to the car radio?
- [Michael] Yah, it's always on. I actually stopped watching television...I've been so busy here and there...the radio is...
- [Thelma] The radio keeps you in touch with the world. You rent Russian language videos "sometimes".
- [Michael] Yah, whenever...there's a video store up north...on Bathurst and Steeles...whenever I'm in the area.
- [Thelma] Your girlfriend...is she Russian?
- [Michael] She's part Russian...part Jewish...she's from Israel.

- [Thelma] What part of Russia is she from?
- [Michael] Latvia.
- [Thelma] You don't miss Russia. You don't miss Israel. Do you like this neighbourhood?
- [Michael] Yah, it's all right.
- [Thelma] And you are optimistic about your future?
- [Michael] Ah [hesitates]...yah, if I can get into college, finish college, can't really say now what I want to do.
- [Thelma] My impression of you is that whatever you decide to do you are going to do it really well. Do you sometimes feel older than the Canadian kids?
- [Michael] Yah, sometimes.
- [Thelma] Do you listen to their problems sometimes and think....
- [Michael] Well, it depends what...you know it depends if it was a female or a male right? You know, the girls, it would be like: "*Oh, the guys, the guys!*" and the guys would be "*Oh, the girls, the girls!*"
- I'm more like: "*I've got a girl, I'm happy; I've got a job, Im happy.*"
- [Thelma] Any other impressions that you would like to share for the record...about Canada? You're happy to be here?
- [Michael] Yah...happier than Israel, that's for sure.
- [Thelma] You were glad to get out of there?
- [Michael] Well I wasn't really glad. I can't really give an opinion about the place. It seems like a long time ago; like a little one-year-old dream.
- [Thelma] Michael, if you could have anything you wanted in Canada...?
- [Michael] Like one of those [questions] "If you had twelve million dollars what would you do with it?" [laughs] *Pay for my college, get a job, get a house, get a car.*

[Thelma] All the nice secure things in life.

[Michael] Yah.

[Thelma] If you could travel anywhere you wanted to...?

[Michael] Probably go to Europe...Germany.... A couple of my friends...they are from Germany. Yugoslavians actually. They got there once the war started and they took off [to Canada] as soon as possible. I never asked why they wanted to leave Germany...it's such a good country, I think.

**COMMENTS:** Michael had a very serious, mature, business-like approach during the interview. He was careful to measure his words and showed little emotion. He did not mention his parent's separation or that he worked at the same dairy as his father. He did not mention his father. He was very realistic about his financial situation. Jewishness did not appear to be of interest to him, nor issues and causes. His apparent primary concerns were his girlfriend, a college education, and getting a good job.