

From Red to Blue: oral histories of recent Russian immigrants to the United States, why they left, what they found, and what they miss

Dennis Shasha and Marina Shron

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1 Why we wrote this book

Why do people emigrate from Russia now and from the Soviet Union earlier? Some fear for their lives. Some want to get rich. Most talk about freedom, a certain freedom from humiliation at the hands of the visible and invisible authorities.

Who are the people we interviewed? Missile designers, film directors, musicians, smugglers, sculptors, entrepreneurs, Gulag prisoners, war refugees, aristocrats, waitresses, priests, and hairdressers.

Some achieve more success than they dreamt of. Most consider their lives to be works in progress. Some return to Russia. Others find the idea frightening.

Why should Americans care?

1. Emigration as an adult or adolescent is an enormous life change. Some compare it to dying and being reborn. We all undergo or contemplate such changes. What does it mean to go through it?
2. Many of us are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Listening to recent immigrants, we see the United States through a lens that shows us a country we may recognize from a grandparent's story.
3. Russia is a particularly interesting point of origin. The Soviet Union promised material security and stability, but was totalitarian to the very end. What does this label "totalitarian" really mean, forgetting what the politicians say? Are there special insights to be learned from thinkers who lived in what they characterize as a slave state?
4. Most of the people we have interviewed came to maturity under the Soviet Regime, witnessed its collapse and the ensuing turmoil, and then left. Their reasons and experiences offer American readers a new way of looking at the question: What is special, good and bad, about our country and our system?

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Dennis Shasha is a professor of computer science in the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences at New York University. His research is in parallel computation and biological pattern recognition. He has published four books, two about a mathematical detective named Dr. Ecco *The Puzzling Adventures of Dr. Ecco* (W. H. Freeman, 1988) and *Codes Puzzles and Conspiracy* (W. H. Freeman, 1992); one of biographies of great living computer scientists *Out of their Minds: the lives and discoveries of 15 great computer scientists* (Copernicus/Springer Verlag, 1995); and one about making databases run faster *Database Tuning: a principled approach* (Prentice-Hall, 1992). Some of these books has appeared also in translation in: Portugese, Spanish, French, Slovenian, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. A fifth book *Pattern Discovery in Biomolecular Data* was published by Oxford University Press in late 1999.

2 Dennis Shasha's Forward

I don't know for sure whether my ancestry has anything to do with Russia. My parents come from Iraq. My maternal grandmother belonged to a family named Georgi, which meant a person from Georgia (the country). This may explain the red streak in my family's hair. I don't know. Nobody bothered about records.

My parents left Iraq as religious refugees in the 1920's and 30's, and I am grateful. Today I'm a professor at New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences instead of an artillery designer or perhaps canon fodder.

I first ran into Russians and other eastern Europeans in graduate school. Superbly trained in mathematics, they came from a society where mathematics and chess were so much part of the culture, comedians made jokes about the foibles of mathematicians.¹

At NYU, the wave of post-perestroika emigration radically changed our department. Some of new students viewed rules as open to negotiation and examinations as opportunities for collaboration. (I learned later that Soviet teachers sometimes took exams for their students.) Others were simply the best students we had.

Here is my first interview with a (then) 13 year-old freshman named Victor Boyko.

Dennis: What do you know about computer science?

Victor: C, C++, Pascal, Prolog, Fortran.

Dennis (a little skeptical): What was the most sophisticated project you did in any of those languages?

Victor: Nothing too sophisticated.

Dennis: Try to give me an example.

Victor: Well, I wrote a package to simulate particle flow in high temperature superconductors.

My colleague Alan Siegel and Victor then had a conversation about the differential equations Victor used. Victor clearly understood the material.

Dennis: What do you know about "data structures"?

Victor: I don't know. What do you mean?

Dennis: Well if I insert a sorted list into a binary tree, what shape does the tree take?

Victor (after 5 seconds): Well, it looks like this I guess (he draws a sloping line to the right, the correct answer).

¹

Non-mathematician: There is a pot on the kitchen floor, a sink, and a stove. How would you boil water?

Mathematician: Put the pot in the sink, fill it with water and then place it on a burner. Turn burner on and wait.

Non-mathematician: Good. Now, how would you solve this problem if the pot were filled with water and were sitting on a burner?

Mathematician: It's trivial. Pour out the water then put the pot on the floor. We've already shown how to solve this problem.

Dennis leaves for a while. Alan and Victor are talking about graph algorithms. When Dennis returns, Alan and he ask Victor to write a high level algorithm to count the number of connected components.

Victor writes an algorithm in set notation. One of the stopping conditions requires comparing two sets. Alan asks him how to do this efficiently. Victor responds that he would use “bit vectors.”

Alan says that marking would be better and then a flag that indicates that something has changed. Victor stares at Alan for a few seconds.

Victor: Yes, I see, but then it wouldn't be so pretty.

3 Marina Shron, co-author and playwright

Why did I leave Russia? It was a need to expand my life, expand my self. I wanted to become a better writer, a freer person. And I could not achieve that in the Soviet Union. I think it's basically the same force that drives – has always driven people – to leave their small home towns and move to big cities, forced them to leave their families... And the Soviet Union was in fact a big family – that what the Soviet propaganda stated, but there is truth to any propaganda.

After living in America for six years, I think it was a dysfunctional family. The truth was that most of us had outgrown the Soviet system long before it collapsed. And when it finally did collapse, I remember a brief glimpse of hope, and a great, greater than ever, despair that followed.

Suddenly, there became the very real danger of being buried alive under the wreckage. Still, I feel connected to Russia, the way one feels connected to his family: there is both love and hatred to this connection. And much more....

Russia is my childhood – despite the fact that I lived there for over twenty years, was formed as a writer there, had some success, got married, got divorced...Despite all that, I never really got a chance to grow up there I did not have to. There were advantages to that particular state of being: one was allowed to dream endlessly.

What I did not realize then was that I was limited in my dreams, too. The Soviet regime did not just deprive us of many material things, it deprived us of many basic human desires. Substituting them with little monstrous dwarf-desires, like the desire to live in your own private room, rather than share one with your parents, and sometimes the parents of your parents. Well, I did not have this particular problem. I shared a two bedroom apartment with my sister. And then with my husband and my sister. And then with my husband and my sister and her husband... A typical geometrical progression of Soviet life.

The other topological feature that I remember was that behind each wall there was always another bigger wall. When I was 17 and graduated from school, I wanted to study philosophy. I wanted to get a degree in philosophy, and maybe, with time, to make my small contribution to the treasury of human thought. Well, I never did it. First of all, I learned that I could never hope to be accepted in the University because I was Jewish. But it didn't even matter that much, because even if I was accepted – the enticing prospect that awaited me with a degree in philosophy, was to teach the Marx and Lenin's theory in public (and secretly trash it to a circle of friends). So, there was no point in wanting to get a degree in philosophy – and I stopped wanting to. The same way that I stopped wanting many other things that did not exist within the framework of Soviet life, or existed in an abridged version...

In 1989 I first came to America to visit my friends in San Francisco. It was my first time outside the Soviet Union. Everything around me was smiling and shining (it was September in San Francisco), but inside me it was gray, my soul was still in Russia. I went back that time, but “the new world” had left seeds inside me. In two years I was back in the United States.... A lot had happened since then: I studied, I made a transition to writing in English, the new language gave me a freedom I may never have

found in Russian.

I think emigration is a unique experience, because it leaves you alone with the world, and with yourself. Death does that too... and there is something of dying in it: you die in one life, you emerge in the another. It's a change... And each person has his own experience of going through it, dealing with it. Some do it superficially, some don't do it at all, some throw themselves into it: then, some emerge, some drawn. I was always fascinated and intrigued by change, its mechanics and its mystery. As a playwright – I believe it's been always my major theme. There is nothing as ordinary and as mysterious as change – be it a change in a person's life, a change of seasons, a change of political and economic structures.

We think we know what it is, but we don't, really. This was my first reason to undertake this project: a book of oral histories of Russian immigrants. It was a chance to explore the subject, this time on other people's material. I suspected there should be some likeness in the experiences of all immigrants.

My first big surprise was –a level of awareness and honesty with which people were rendering their stories The second surprise was: how many unique stories there are out there.

A common motif in many interviews became: "I had pretty good life in Russia, but...". What is 'good life' and why it suddenly becomes not good enough? Eventually, this book is about people who attempted, or were forced to change their life, to search for a "better" good. People who suddenly discovered that what they need and what they were told they need are two different things. It's a book about boundaries, which sometimes are weaker and sometimes are stronger than we think they are. It's a book about people... The world is going through a vast change now. Immigration is part of this process and its mirror.

This book contains many wonderful stories. Many of these stories were surprising for me – I hope they will be surprising for the readers. As a playwright I know the play works the best when the audience is able to recognize themselves, their own experience, in the characters on stage. I hope that American readers will recognize themselves in the characters of this live drama and in their journeys.

One of those 'characters', a doctor from Riga, tells in his interview that looking at his American boss he often could not get rid of the feeling that the boss was his son. He was the first generation of immigrants, his boss was the second. I wonder if the American doctor saw his father-immigrant in the Russian doctor. I wish he would... Maybe, this book will give him such a chance.

THE CLASSICAL ARTS

4 Mela Tannenbaum, red-haired musician

An attractive woman with bright red hair, Mela was always a musician in Russia, but decided to leave after the Chernobyl reactor exploded. She and her family live in a two story house in Brooklyn. They have recently bought the house, and she can't hide her pride mixed with a bit of surprise when she discusses the purchase. ownership. Her experiences are worth several lifetimes.

Questions for Mela: Population of home town? Same as Czernowitz? When did she leave Kiev?

I was born in a very small town, called Chernovtsi. It belongs to the Ukraine now, but earlier in the century it was part of Romania. At another time it belonged to Poland, and later, to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So, it had a very particular culture. Most of the people in this town could speak three languages and were highly educated. Aside from that, Chernovtsi was one of those small Jewish towns that had its own Jewish professor, Jewish shoemaker, Jewish doctor, and even Jewish alcoholic. So, I was raised in this very special environment, and I spent my childhood there and part of my adult life. I studied at the musical school in Chernovtsi. It was a very good school.

All my former schoolmates work as professional musicians now, in different parts of the world – some in Russia, some in Tel Aviv, and some in New York. The cultural differences between my native town and the rest of the country were so immense, that when I moved to Kiev, it was no less dramatic than my emigration to America. For instance, going to a concert was always a big event in Chernovtsi. People would prepare ay in advance, thinking of what would they wear, what they would look like. In Kiev one could easily go to a concert wearing slippers, dressed in a T-shirt – it was much more casual.

It's not easy to explain why I decided to leave Kiev. We used to say it was because we were Jews. In truth, it was the Chernobyl disaster that completely turned our lives upside down. My children became sick after the catastrophe. I thought we'd lose them. My eldest son was twenty-seven at the time, my daughter was twenty five, and my youngest son was ten. After the catastrophe in Chernobyl, the general mood in Kiev was that of doom. People felt really hopeless. At first we expected some measures to be taken to improve people's living conditions, such as new apartments or salary raises. Nothing like that happened. The authorities didn't spend a cent on social benefits. So, we lost any hope of better social conditions. My family lived in a very small apartment and there was no room for me to practice. I wanted very much to leave, but leaving wasn't easy.

I was a soloist in the Kiev Philharmonic. I had wonderful tours playing with the best orchestras in the country. At a certain point, I made a deal with myself: that I'd never regret anything, even if I happened never again to play the violin. In the Soviet Union, musicians were always a privileged caste. The belief was that if you're an engineer, you were trained to become an engineer, but if you're a musician, you were

born to be one.

But after Chernobyl, we decided to leave. I left with my husband and my children. Four days before our departure, I gave my last performance in the Kiev Philharmonic. So, I had all these fresh memories of the audience applauding me. They all knew me and loved me. From the time I was a child I remember myself always surrounded by people, wherever I'd go. Part of it was language: I knew and loved my language, the Russian language, I could express myself with precision, express any slightest overtone of meaning in this language. And now I was going to a country whose language I didn't know at all. I wouldn't be able to ask for a piece of bread in English. I knew German very well. I could have gone to Germany like a lot of our friends from Chernovtsi. In Germany we could receive passports right away. They don't call Jewish immigrants Jews in Germany, they call them "German citizens practicing Judaism." I loathed those words, from the first time I heard them. Anyway, I couldn't seriously think of going to Germany.

We took a train from Kiev to Vienna. It was a peculiar experience. Imagine: you throw your luggage, your suitcases, inside the car through the window and next to you in the compartment is a family of ten people, only three of whom are men. Two women are pregnant, and one of the men, the youngest one, drinks non-stop, and the oldest one tries to carry suitcases, but he's 92 years old so everybody shouts to him to leave the suitcases alone, but there is nobody else to carry those suitcase because the third man has no legs. So, all this: tossing the suitcases, children who're always ill on the road, overcrowded trains, kids looking for someone whose last name they don't know. When we finally arrived in Vienna, we were standing in this long line on the platform with other immigrants, absolutely faceless, because for a Soviet person what matters is his passport, not himself. So, we were waiting on this platform, with children and my son was lying ill on the trunks, and suddenly we saw the crowd coming out of the nearby opera house. The show had just ended. We saw all these dressed up people, talking and not even laughing. Austrians don't laugh, they cackle, they roar. And I began to cry. It was actually the first time I cried in my life. I had this piercing feeling that I'd never again play violin, never again be on stage. But I knew I had made my choice.

We went to Italy. It happened that we spent five and a half months in Italy. We wanted to come to New York, but New York was overcrowded with immigrants at that moment, so we had to wait in Italy. We spoke Italian relatively well. We lived in a house in the mountains, near Florence, with nine other immigrant families. There were all kinds of people there: a shoemaker, musicians, and engineers. There is one observation I made about Russian immigrants. When they had to write their resumes, and describe what positions they held back in Russia, somehow they all turned into "supervisors". If he was a shoemaker, he was a "supervisor-shoemaker." If he was a doctor, he was a supervisor-doctor. I remember, my first English teacher in America, once asking her students "Why have things turned so bad in Russia?" and I replied using whatever bad English I had at the time, "Because all the supervisors have left."

Our Italian friends tried to talk us into staying in Italy. One of them an owner of a photo shop. He often visited us and heard me play. There was a man who belonged

to Italian high society. The man had an enormous estate, and he was an owner of coffee plantations in Brazil. He had graduated from the conservatory in Rome and considered himself an artist. He was a painter and a hunter. Anyway, he invited us to his home for dinner one evening. I'll never forget his mansion, all that land, a huge lake with white swans. He greeted us, dressed in tall leather boots, in a hunter's hat with a feather – a very artistic look. Two tables were set up: one was for the woman who introduced us, his wife, some other couple, and my husband; the second table for himself and me. There were two servants who took care of us. All the women were wrapped in white sheets, like tunics. After dinner, he took a brush and began to paint these sheets, their dresses. I felt I was in a Fellini movie, only it was something much more ridiculous. After he finished painting the dresses, he told me: "Well, now, we can play some music." He sat at the piano. I took my violin. I thought I'd choke with laughter, but I had to accompany him. The women in colored dresses were sitting at his feet.

We came to New York and settled in Brooklyn. We had some friends living in Brooklyn, who found us an apartment. Compared to our tiny apartment in Kiev it seemed like paradise. I had two cousins born here, both doctors. Their father was the only person in the family who had emigrated to America before the revolution. After he emigrated, one of his sisters wrote him about how hard life in Russia was at the time. What she really meant, but couldn't spell out, was the threat of pogroms. But he didn't understand and wrote back, "Don't think that life in America is easy, it's not." Five months later she was killed, buried alive with her five small sons. And he carried a feeling of guilt throughout his entire life. He told his sons was: "If at any time, anyone from Russia tells you that life in Russia was hard, don't say in response that it's hard here, too. Because what they mean by 'hard' is an entirely different thing."

My cousins are wonderful people and they did their best trying to help us. I don't think they understood precisely what were we going through. A lot of Soviet people when they come to America feel very needy. So I think they were scared a little bit. But now, there're the ones who keep calling us, inviting us over, asking why don't we call them. Now, they follow my tours with the orchestra.

From the beginning I decided I'd never be on welfare. I realized that if I said to myself even just once, "Come on, relax, there's nothing bad about it," there wouldn't be a way out. I often recalled this Russian tale about two frogs who fell into a milk jar. One of them gave up immediately, saying, 'There is nothing I can do', and she drowned. The other one started moving around trying to get out, until she whipped the milk into butter. I wanted to be this other frog. I couldn't whip the butter yet, and I may never do it, but at least I'm trying. I remember my first job in America. I was supposed to hand out flyers on the bridge, above the Battery Tunnel. My English wasn't great at the time. I was supposed to give flyers to the truck drivers. But I had never driven a car in my life. I couldn't tell a truck from a cab. My supervisor, an Indian guy, he obviously didn't trust me much. He kept standing next to me on this bridge, watching what I did. One time, a small car stopped next to me. It was so small that even I was able to see it wasn't a truck. And the driver told me: "Can I have this paper?" And I said: "No, this is only for the truck drivers." He reached into his pocket. During the training session,

we had all been warned that if somebody doesn't want to take a flyer, we shouldn't insist, because he could just draw a pistol and shoot. So, when I saw that driver reaching for something in his pocket, I felt funny. But what he took out was a quarter. He extended it to me and said, "Lady, I'm giving you a good citizen price. Take it and give me the paper." So, I took this twenty five cents and gave him the flyer. When I turned around, I saw the Indian guy laughing so hard he had to hold his stomach. Then he came to me and asked, in this quiet, almost intimate manner: "Are you Jewish?" And I asked: "How do you know?" And then he said: "Only a Jewish person can sell something that nobody wants to take for free." Then he added: "If you could sell this piece of paper, you will never be without a job."

That's another thing I came to realize here: If you do something professionally you've got to be paid for it. Otherwise people won't take you seriously. In my first year here I didn't understand this. I remember walking down the street in Brooklyn one day, carrying my instrument. A man approached me and introduced himself as the director of the school orchestra. He asked me to play for them, saying he couldn't pay me because the school has no funds but that they're trying to raise some funds for a musical program in their school. I agreed. My husband and I gave a concert. They invited some people from the board of education. The principal of the school was there, too. After the concert was over, they kept thanking me and hugging me. A year later an old friend told me that he had gotten a call from that school, and they told him they were looking for some professional musicians living in Brooklyn. They told him that about a year earlier two people had come and played in their school and it helped them to raise some money for the music program. But now that they could pay, they wanted to deal with professionals, not with people from the street.

That was a good lesson for us. In Russia we had gotten used to barter situations: you don't pay the doctor for treating you and he doesn't pay you for playing the violin. Or a neighbor asks you to give music lessons to her son, and you refuse the money, so she brings you a box of chocolates instead. But here, it's different: if you don't accept money here, then people think you're not a professional musician. The more money you take, the better they think you play.

I never stopped practicing. And then I met a woman, an organist. She suggested we go to the Chamber Music Society and ask them to organize a concert for us. They asked us to send them a tape, a professional recording. It was very expensive to do the recording, \$50 dollars for an hour of work. For me, at the time, it was a lot of money. But we agreed and decided to split the cost. We found a sound engineer who had a studio. He was a Russian who had lived here for seventeen years. I'll be grateful to him for the rest of my life, and in my future life, too. Everything good that happened in my life during the next five years, I owe to him. We were supposed to do the recording in a small church in Queens. My friend was playing the organ, I was playing viola d'amore. We hoped to finish the recording in an hour, to play non-stop, so that it would not cost more than fifty dollars. We began to play, he stopped us at once. He asked my name. "You don't have to pay me anything, Mela," he said. "I'll pay you – just to hear you play." So, we made the recording and we sent it out to the manager.

Of course, he never even listened to the tape.

But I was lucky. It happened that this sound designer, Misha Liberman, was sitting in his studio listening to the tape when the orchestra conductor I'm working with now was visiting. The conductor heard the tape and asked, "Who is this?" And Misha told him about me. The conductor said, "I would like to meet this woman." And we met. Because I was playing the viola d'amore on this tape he was convinced I was a violist. So when we met he said: "I'm very impressed with your playing. Would you play just a few notes for me?" And I did. After I played for him, he asked if I could play with them in two weeks. It was a Philharmonia Virtuosi orchestra, one of the best chamber orchestras in New York. I didn't told him I could play the violin.

Shortly after I started, I gave solo concerts, playing both viola and viola d'amore. But one day – the way it happens in Hollywood – the concertmaster got sick, there was nobody to play first violin. The conductor said: "It's too bad you don't play the violin". And I replied: "Of course I play the violin." He was so surprised I had kept it a secret for two years. But I couldn't tell him earlierbefore because the competition was so intense among the musicians, and I felt I was, well, too strong for them. I couldn't just say, "Here I am, and I can play violin and viola and viola d'amore". They would've killed me if I did. You have to respect the rules, especially if you're in another country. Anyway, it has worked out well. I've been playing with Philharmonia Virtuosi for five years now.

What I learned in this country is that one has to work hard in order to achieve something. Another thing I learned is that so much is left to chance. As Americans say: being in the right place at the right time. Because the competition is so tough, being good at something is not always good enough.

We travel a lot now, touring with the orchestra. We've been to the remotest parts of the world. What we've seen in these past five years would be enough for a couple of lives. So, we don't have any regrets. Still, I miss Russia terribly. I miss the snow especially. But I have a house in Canada now. I went to Canada two years ago and found this house on an island. I suddenly saw everything I remembered so well from my childhood, only here it wasn't scary. I decided it was time to stop being frightened. There is always a place for snow in your life. It doesn't have to be in Russia.

5 Vladimir Kanevsky, 47 years old, sculptor

An architect then a “parasite” then a sculptor and bureaucrat, he’s had more than his share of run-ins with officials, but ended in a comfortable situation in the Soviet Union, more or less by inventing it. We sit in his loft in Jersey City. The loft serves as both his apartment and his studio. The studio takes over most of the space. He’s in his late forties, but looks much younger.

Questions to ask Vladimir: what year did you emigrate?

I can’t say why I left Russia. For a long time, I tried to convince myself that the only reason I did not leave was that the Soviet authorities wouldn’t let me go. In fact, that was just an excuse. The fact is I had a pretty good life for myself: a beautiful apartment, a car, and I could do what I liked to do. I was mostly doing sculptures — very bad sculptures, as I can see now. But life was good, it was wonderful.

I was invited to participate in new business enterprises, so in addition to what I already had, I could have become rich, too. But there was something in the air — a smell of gunpowder, anti-Semitic gunpowder. Suddenly, it was all right to say out loud things that before one could only hear whispered behind his back, somewhere in a tram, or waiting in line for watermelons. Suddenly, I was reading all this in newspapers.

And it made me feel funny. I remember, one of my close friends, Vova Shaposhnikov, an excellent architect, told me then, “Anti-Semitism in Russia will never take over, because the Communists would never allow it to happen. As long as the Soviet Union exists, nationalists have no chance to win.” And then my wise, clairvoyant friend added, “And the Soviet Union will exist forever, because the Communists would never let it be destroyed.” Well, he was wise, my friend Shaposhnikov, but in this case his prophecy proved to be wrong.

Anyway, I decided it was time to leave, and I began doing a lot of talking. But, my wife preferred action to talking — I would never have emigrated, actually. I recall the morning when we left our apartment holding the visa applications we had filled out the previous night. We were heading for OVIR (the Visa and Immigration Department). It was a moment of truth. Once you submit an application to OVIR, there is no way back. So, it was quite hard for me to leave my luxurious apartment that day, to turn the key in the expensive finished lock on the door, then to press the button calling the elevator — the absolutely noiseless, new elevator in our new luxury apartment building.

It arrived. My wife and I stepped inside and saw two enormous men with enormous bellies. They were probably the movers who had just carried a piano to the apartment upstairs. So we stood there — our heads at the level of their stomachs. And suddenly I heard one of them telling the other, “so he was a Yid, you said?” And he burst out laughing.

That happened right at the moment when I was hesitating about taking the documents to OVIR or not. I think it was God, himself, trying to tell me something. In a moment my hesitation was gone.

Leaving Russia at that time wasn’t difficult. In fact, it was a pleasure. The paper work went so smoothly. I remember I had to get a letter from the Military Commandant’s office giving me permission to leave the country. I had served in the

army. I was a Senior Lieutenant in the reserve.

Naturally, on the way to the Commandant's office, I was shaking a bit. I didn't expect them to be happy with the fact that I was emigrating. When I got there and approached the receptionist, she, without even listening, looked at me, and said rudely, "sit down and wait." I tried again, and then she asked, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, you know I'm leaving for Israel, and I need this letter." At which point she suddenly smiled to me and said, "Oh, yes, of course. Come here, it'll be ready in a second." And it was ready in a second, and handing me the papers she smiled again and said, "Have a nice trip."

Then I had to inform my bosses at work. I had gotten that job through the Police Department. How I came to that job is a story by itself.

I had been working as an architect. It was my first occupation, and I'm still very fond of it. At that time I loved it. I lived in the Ukraine, in Kharkov, where I was an active young architect, I won awards, I was a member of the Union of Architects. I was so good, I was accepted in the LenProject Institute in Leningrad. In one day I went from a promising young talent to a white-collar worker sitting in a room with ladies who spent their working hours knitting. I was bored to death. I tried to entertain myself by making drawings. There was no real work for me. I designed the technical drafts for the Ship Station Building in Leningrad, but nobody needed it. The construction people never even unfolded the plans.

I decided to find a new job. I found a place. It was a third rate institute, not at all prestigious like Lenproject, but it was the only institute in Leningrad where the ad at the gates said *Architects Needed* When I went there, they couldn't believe that a person my credentials would come to work for them. They thought something was wrong with me. They took me. But my first day there, my boss looked at me with a kind of embarrassed look, and told me: "You know... we don't need architects anymore." When the Personnel Department studied my questionnaire, they suddenly discovered I was Jewish. I went to a lawyer and asked, "Can I sue them?". "Of course you can, but you'll lose," he replied. I couldn't go back to my old job.

It was summer time. I got recruited into an archeological expedition that a friend was putting together at that time. I was hired as a ditchdigger, a painter and an architect, all three at once. We were digging out a seventeenth century ironworks.

We lived in the monks' cells of the monastery. The diggers and the restorative people were heavy drinkers. They drank technical alcohol that was supposed to be used for restoration works all day long. The air in the rooms was so stuffy from alcohol and tobacco that I slept with my head sticking out the window. Every day, going to bed at night and waking up in the morning, I saw the same terrifying image: one of the restoration men with a blue face, holding a container of the diabolic mix in his hands, leaning over me, whispering: "Have a few drops with me, brother."

We finished the excavation pretty fast, and began to look for something else to do. There were plenty of old monasteries around, almost all of them turned into mental hospitals. So we began visiting these facilities, one after another, offering our services as artists. Most of the assignments were to paint the entrance signs. I made the signs,

my friends did the negotiations, we were doing well. In addition from profits, it was an incredible journey.

I remember the director of a Mental Hospital, who took us to a basement and pointed at huge barrels of pickles for inmates. He asked, "Well, you're artists, so can you make barrels like that?" We said, "No, we can't." He became very upset, and kept repeating: "What am I to do? There are more and more fools, and fewer and fewer barrels." When preparing to emigrate, I often recalled these words...

I came back to Leningrad, still without a job. One day, soon after I came back, my friend called me and said: "There will be a gathering. A group of people who study Jewish Culture are having this lecture, an underground lecture on Jews in Spain. You want to come?" It was an apartment, somewhere in the outskirts of the city. Three minutes after the lecture began, the doorbell rang. Forty men, some dressed in uniforms, some in civilian clothes, stormed into the room. They had occupied the balcony first to block any possible escape route.

They began to photograph people in the room. The people reacted to that in different ways: some stuck their tongues out, some posed in front of the cameras, and others hid under the sofas. Then the most experienced people, the mature dissidents, said "Take one another's hands, form a circle, men stand in the outer circle, women and children stand inside. Don't let them provoke you." And then they began to sing some soulful Jewish songs. It looked like a scene from an old Soviet heroic movie: Bolsheviki are being arrested by the police. The policemen shouted: "Shut up! Quit singing!" but the singing grew stronger and stronger. One of the girls in the room was, nevertheless, provoked and slapped one of the policemen in the face. They grabbed her, gladly, away by the arms, put her in a car and took her away.

We were all taken outside. By that time, a big crowd of Russian people, mostly neighbors, had gathered. And as Russians always feel compassion for victims of the authorities, the crowd were shouting things like: "Don't give up, friends! Keep up your courage!" But then someone from the crowd asked, "Why are they taking you, guys?" And someone replied: "Because we are Jews."

After this, the crowd immediately changed its opinion. We heard, "You got what you deserved! Should've gotten it long ago!" One old woman was particularly eloquent, I remember her saying: "Go to your Israel and we will stay here to eat bread, drink water and dance." And we were taken to the police station. One of the questions I was asked was: "Your place of work." "Won't tell you," I replied. "OK," they said. "That means - nowhere." And I was registered as a parasite. I was given a month to find a job. Otherwise, I was told, I'd get a year in prison followed by exile forever. I was young and foolish. I spent the entire month without making any attempt to find a job.

The last day, when I was sitting at my friend's apartment, the telephone rang. It was my father. He said, "There's a new Design Enterprise being opened. Do you know how to draw?" "Yes, I do," I lied. The next day I came to the interview. I was waiting in line with other artists.

They were asking for everybody's portfolio. I didn't have any. But I had a badge from the Union of Architects pinned to my chest. And the man who interviewed

me noticed it: “OK, you’re fine.” The next day I came to work and the other employees-painters-alcoholics gave me a lesson on how to mix paint. That was how I began working at that Art Design Enterprise.

It was an absolute catastrophe, because none of my works was accepted by the Artistic Board of the enterprise. The general rule was: you make a sketch of whatever you’re working on, you present it to the Artistic Board, and you get their approval. But I couldn’t make a sketch on my own, because I couldn’t draw. So, mostly I did errands for other painters who worked there, shopping for them, buying vodka and cigarettes. One day, I came to my boss, in a state of complete despair, and asked if there was some work for me. I needed money and we worked on a contract basis, meaning from project to project. She told me that she had an assignment to design thirty six feet high windows at a popular bar. “You can have it, if you want,” she said.

I had to come up with an idea for the design. I thought to myself: why not do the windows in ceramics? Now that I have some experience with ceramics, I would never attempt a thing like that, because I know the amount of work it would take. But at that time I was absolutely ignorant and therefore audacious. I was ready to do it, but I lacked two things: first, space with equipment, materials and a hearth, and second any idea how to do it. So, I put together a team consisting of two friends, one had a studio, and the other could mold. But the team fell apart. I couldn’t bring all three of us together at a single time. While I was chasing them around the city, the months passed by. I began to panic.

One day, in a state of complete despair, I took a piece of clay and began to mold something. Suddenly I made a figure of a man. I had done sculpture before in college, but I always failed. But this time, I molded this little figure, and suddenly I liked it. Then I began to do more compositions, some pretty abstract. My mother, who came to visit me, looked over my shoulder once at what I was doing and said, “Well, this looks pretty good.” I was encouraged. I finished a few more compositions. So, now I had to present them to the Artistic Board.

I brought my work to the building, but I felt quite ashamed. It seemed so infantile on my part. A miracle happened: I was standing in a corner of the room with my work, hiding from people’s sight, and suddenly the Director of the Artistic Board noticed my ceramics and said, “And what is this? Looks beautiful.” He was the one who had kept rejecting my work earlier, and I was convinced then that he hated me. He looked from afar, then came closer, and began to praise my work. In a minute I heard “Approved.” I was shocked. I finished the project. I was paid, I suddenly had lots of money on my hands. But that was only the beginning.

Soon after, I came home one day and found my mother there. She said, “Somebody from your job called, they asked you to come to the Artistic Board Meeting. You’re a member of the board now.” I didn’t believe her, but I went, just in case. They told me: “Here you are. Well, sit down and make yourself comfortable.” In a few days, I turned from the last among the artists of the enterprise in the first one. I felt weird and a little embarrassed in front of the other painters whose errands I was recently running: now I had to approve or reject their works.

Two weeks later, the Director of the Board quit and I was offered his position. I tried to decline, I had never done anything like that before. I went for advice to my uncle, a prominent Soviet architect: he had done most of Lenin's monuments in Russia and abroad. He was a member of all the artistic boards and panels in the country. He told me: "Of course you should accept. It's a big honor." I accepted. The next three years were very productive: I worked a lot, made my first sculptures – and it was great fun.

I had a lot of responsibility. Our company was the major design enterprise in the city, affiliated with the City Department of Cultural Affairs. We were doing designs for all the big political events, including all the anniversary parades. For instance, the design of the Palace Square during the November 7th Parade, the draft of it had two signatures: Romanov, the Mayor of the City at the time, and mine.

One day, I held a board meeting in the conference room: we had to make a decision on one of the important projects. It's quiet in the room. People are afraid to talk too loud. It's such a charged moment. I'm making my directorial speech, and meanwhile, in the next room the telephone rings: it's a call from the police department.

They called to find out if the parasite Kanevsky works here. And then they begin to ask questions, from their questionnaire: Does he work well? How is his behavior? Does he drink? Does he come to work on time? Misses any days? Does he have any contacts with foreigners? In our country the right hand is not always aware of what the left one is doing. Parasite Kanevsky and big boss Kanevsky were the same person, and but nobody knew.

Then perestroika came. I suggested that the Artistic Board should be elected, not appointed. We held the first elections. I can say, with pride, that I was elected the Director of the Board. I should also say, and without any pride, it probably happened because I was a very malleable director.

I decided we should escape from under the wing of the Department of Culture. So, two of my deputy directors and I called on the director of the Department on Cultural Affairs of Leningrad. I had never come across this type of person before.

It took me some time to realize that I was in a wolf's den. I came in and I began to speak about our rights as a collective, I was quoting a new Law on Workers' Collectives that was recently adopted. And he looked at me like I was a fool and said, "Yes, the Law was adopted. But it's not enforced yet. It has no power." And I began to blush, mumbling, "Well, how can it be? The Law was adopted, and published, and signed..." And he was looking at me, listening with a great attention, and nodding, and giggling quietly. I realized at that moment that my previous understanding of the mechanism of the Soviet power was wrong: it wasn't Brezhnev or Gorbachev pulling the threads, it was all this enormous, immovable boulder of bureaucracy beneath them. That was the first time when I could see it with my very eyes, feel it with my fingers: it was right there, in front of me, giggling in my face.

A few days later he came to our meeting at work. After the meeting he took me aside and said, confidentially: "What Gorbachev is doing is rubbish, really, nonsense..." He was talking to me about a General Secretary of the USSR, and in such a manner,

with no apprehension at all. I realized at that moment that perestroika would never succeed. Either Gorbachev would be overthrown, as Khrushchev was in his time or the whole system would come down on our heads. There was no third way.

Because of my position, the KGB wanted me to give them information on other artists. I was offered a studio in exchange for my services. I remember the KGB officer, waiting for me one day after work, near my car, telling me: “Oh, great, you’re driving today, why don’t you give me a ride?” I had to give him a ride. During the drive, he said, “And by the way, the studio we were talking about — it’s right around the corner. Why don’t we come up and take a look?” And I had to go with him and take a look. It was torture for me, because the studio was stunning, it was really gorgeous. The only problem was, I could never agree to accept it.

I could have run into big problems with the KGB. But perestroika occurred and the KGB officer disappeared. He dissolved in the air like a ghost at dawn/

When I came to New York, one of the first thing I bought was a kiln. My second day here I saw an ad on the wall: “Artists to make porcelain flowers and papier-mache cabbage needed.” I decided it might take some time for me to become a famous sculptor. Meanwhile this thing might help to get by. So, I called the number from the ad, and went to Hoboken to see those people. They showed me a picture and asked me: “Can you do it? Do you know how to work with porcelain?” I said, “Yes, of course,” once again I lied. After that I went home and for a month and a half I experimented, learning how to make porcelain flowers with a papier-mache technique. Of course, I could have gone to the library and found a book on porcelain technique and read it, even with a dictionary – it would have made my life much easier. But I decided to reinvent the whole thing.

The technique for making papier mache porcelain was invented in the seventeenth century and the secret was lost after that. I had to reinvent it. So, I made my samples and took them back to Hoboken, to show them to my potential employers. They looked absolutely shocked, and I thought it was because they didn’t like my work. But I was wrong. They had been looking for the right person for four years until I showed up. After I started working for the company, I brought in a bunch of other Russian artists. Soon the entire staff was completely filled by Russians: Russians asked for less money and did more work. Doing those porcelain flowers was my main income, that was how I made my living for years. And in between the porcelain I did my sculpture.

As soon as I got to America, I realized that everything I had done before as a sculptor was provincial and sloppy. I saw a new world and it changed my vision entirely. It was like coming out of a greenhouse into the open air, suddenly seeing the real sun shining. Everything is different here, somehow, the sky is vaster. All things are larger even the soda glasses. All these things affect you.

I learned how to cope with the new world, artistically. At first, I was completely confused. When I look now at the sketches I made at that time, I had no idea what it was I was thinking while doing them. They look so bizarre and crazy. But little by little, I was getting somewhere. In 1992, I finally made my first decent work entitled Kouros. It was bought by the museum of Duke University. It’s still my best work, I

believe, I haven't done anything better.

I'm happy I left Russia for two reasons. The first one is, and it's something I've come to realize very recently: America is a great country, an exciting country to live in. Some Russian immigrants complain that Americans are not intelligent enough, that they are vulgar. They just don't know this country well enough. Or they don't meet the right people. Sometimes people who complain don't even know the language, so, when they complain it's like saying : "We couldn't find any mushrooms because it was too dark in the forest."

I'm glad I left Russia because the tremendous shakeup of moving was the most serious thing that happened to me in my life. Nothing could compare to it: threats of being thrown in jail, or anything else I went through in Russia, and I've gone through some serious stuff. Nothing can be compared to this feeling, when you stand alone, and you own nothing but what's on you. You're not even a citizen, and you have to make it. I believe that only pressure – be it moral, physical, or intellectual – can move one forward. And emigrating involves all three of them. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

We Russians always have to judge everything. Something Americans would never do. Americans classify things, but Russians judge them. When a Russian sees a bad show on TV, he thinks: "This is an awful show. Children in this country watch such shows – that's why they join gangs in the end, kill their parents, etc. This is an awful country, because it has such awful shows on TV." An American watches a bad show and thinks: "Well, this show is pretty bad. I would give it a C." And that's it. (laughs).

This desire to judge makes the life of Russian immigrants here much harder. Being thrown in new surroundings, and not having enough time to get to know them, he immediately jumps to conclusions. It's like trying to guess what's under the blanket by lifting a corner of it. But those of us who read, watch, and listen soon realize that life here is diverse. One of the most important things for every immigrant to understand is that there is no such person as an American, just as there is no such person as a Russian. There are many different people. And a big country like America has everything in it, you can find anything for any taste. One just has to find his own niche. And after you've found one, you discover it's much deeper, cleaner, intellectually and ethically cleaner, than the most comfortable niche you had in Russia. Because this society is much more honest, despite all the lies one has to listen to here, it's more honest than Russia ever was.

FILM AND THEATER

6 Mark Kopelev, film director turned tailor

He lives in Washington Heights, New York City. His first-rate photographs hang in abundance on the walls of his big, comfortable, studio apartment. They are mostly portraits. A few faces are familiar: Brodsky, Baryshnikoff. He was a film director in the Soviet Union, but then became a tailor with the help of the KGB.

Questions to answer: need to find out his age? When did he come to NY?

To be frank, in the seventies, when everybody around me was talking of emigrating, I wasn't thinking about it at all. I was doing my job, I was directing films. Of course, I had some friction with the KGB. That was inevitable for any more or less intelligent person. Because an active mind in itself, a sense of irony in relation to what was going on around, that was already a potential threat to Soviet power. No jokes on these grounds were acceptable. And I happen to like jokes. During my college years I used to participate in what we called then "cabbage shows," very popular satirical shows, quite biting at times. I moved to Ryazan (140 miles outside of Moscow) after my graduation. The Ryazan Children's Theatre requested that I be assigned to them. I directed a couple of shows in the Ryazan Children's Theatre. All of them were closed down by the city authorities.

All my work for theater seemed to have some kind of ideological flaw. One of the shows I did was *Konyok Gorbunok* (The Little Horse-Hunchback) by Ershov. It's a fairy tale, and as such seems pretty harmless. Well, I guess it's not as harmless as it seems. I remember reading a quotation from Belinsky: "A tale reflects the soul of a nation." I began thinking about the tale from this particular point of view: what does it say about the nation's soul?

Take *The Brave Tailor*, a German tale. The tailor there is doing his work, then he sees the flies on the table, hits them and kills seven flies with one blow. So, he thinks for a while and comes up with a slogan "Can kill seven with one blow", embroiders it on his belt and takes off for a journey. Or, take a French tale: *Jan -the simpleton*. Jan is working on the mill. His father dies, three brothers divide the inheritance: one gets the mill, another one - a donkey, and Jan gets a cat. So, he's out of business, what's the use of a cat? He goes off on a journey with his cat. And, along the way, the cat helps him, but still, he does everything on his own.

Now, what does Ivan the Fool from Russian tales do? He's sitting on a wood stove. That's all. He's a good fellow. When asked, he will bring water or look after the fields. He won't take any initiative, but he will do what he has to do. And while doing it, while taking this one time action, he manages to catch fortune by the tail: be it a Horse-Hunchback or a Pike Fish or the Gray Wolf, or Vasilisa-The-Wise. The essence of any Russian tale is to catch the bird of luck by the tail, without putting any effort to it. Then, there's this thing about brothers. You see, Jan's brothers don't try to harm him. He's doing his thing and they are doing theirs. In Russian tales, Ivan always has two malicious brothers: the envious and smart one, and the envious and dumb one. And they do all kinds of bad things to him, like stealing his magic horse, and so on. They

never leave him alone.

Ivan, himself, as usual, doesn't do anything. The horse does everything for him. All Ivan does is cry, or make trouble: like picking up the Fire Bird's feather when the Horse tells him not to. So, that was my concept: The Horse is working for Ivan, and Ivan is making a good career, moving higher and higher, to the very top, and getting more and more spoiled along the way. Because, like any career that wasn't earned, it leads to degeneration. That came across very clearly in my production. Ivan was becoming increasingly presumptuous and impudent in using his Horse's services, losing any shame. And in the end, when Ivan was sitting next to the Tzar's throne, the Horse was forgotten and forsaken. It had done its job, Ivan didn't need it anymore. When the show opened, there was a big scandal in the city, and the theater broke into two fighting parties – those who supported the show, and those who opposed it.

I decided it was time for me to leave Ryazan. I thought I would go back to Leningrad, where my parents lived at the time. But then I was summoned by the KGB and was warned that I could live any place except for major cities like Moscow and Leningrad. So, I couldn't go back to Leningrad. I went to Chita (eastern Siberia) instead. I started working on a television station. Chita was a small city, and soon I became a big person there: I was a TV director, a rare profession at that time, I came from Leningrad. People knew me. Soon, the director of the film and Television Committee transferred me to the Film division. He liked me or at least valued me as a good professional. That was always the case in my relationships with authorities: they never liked me, but respected me.

So, I began making films – mostly, documentaries. I liked it. Unlike theater or feature films, making documentaries allowed me to do what I wanted, without making particular compromises with my conscience, to do it quietly, so to speak. Because the authorities controlled documentaries less strictly than other media. I was getting prizes for my work. Then one day, I was taken to the KGB right from the studio. I was held there for the rest of that day. At first, I couldn't understand what was going on. They were asking me some questions like what do I think about Solzhenytsyn, or is it true that I was talking about anti-Semitism in Russia. I was giving answers: yes, anti-Semitism exists among some people, but not as a state policy. I had read Solzhenytsyn's works, but only those that were published in the official press. But all the while, I could sense that there was something else.

When I was about to leave, they suddenly asked: "Have you seen Litvinov lately?" Litvinov was a dissident, whose trial had just happened. He happened to be married to my cousin. I was making a documentary around that time, a film about miners. We were shooting it at some small mine, near the village called Ussugli, a deserted place, surrounded by prison camps. And it happened that Litvinov was doing his time in one of those camps, right near the Ussugli village. But the thing was, while he was serving his term in this camp, in a place so remote that you can't get there by plane or any other regular transportation, there is no direct road leading to the place, so while he was there – the Voice of America, a radio station, was giving daily updates on his life in the camp. So, naturally the KGB suspected information leakage, and was

looking for the source of it. I didn't know anything about that. But they made the connection right away: I was doing my film in the Ussugli, Litvinov was in the camp in the Ussugli, and he was my relative. It could not have been a coincidence. Anyway, I was interrogated. again and again. After my first "visit" to KGB I was fired from my job. I mean, I was asked to resign. That's the way it was done at the time.

I went into amateur theater. I suddenly started making big money. I worked with a group of students of the Professional Technical School. We had a musical director, a choreographer. I was writing scenarios and directing shows. We put together a couple of shows, performed them in six, seven locations at once. At amateur art festivals, held at big local factories.

It paid very well. A regular salary for any professional at the time was about 100 rubles a month, 150 was considered big money. While directing amateur shows I was making about 300 rubles for each show. We did about five shows in different places, so I made 300 in the first month, 400 in a next month. When the amount reached 1000 rubles a month, I decided it was time to move on. I mean, I did my job well, I brought our group to the level of national competition, but it wasn't a very exciting job.

Another factor made me want to leave Chita. – my marital problems. Common infidelity on her side. She had been working as a musical editor at the radio station in Chita. I was often out of town. One day I came back from a trip and found her in bed, bruised and injured. She told me she went for a ride with some Slava, on his motorcycle, they had an accident. I thought – who was this Slava, anyway? I had never heard his name before.

We kept separate archives at home for correspondence. One day, I discovered a strange letter in my box. It was from her lover. It got into my box by mistake, she had misplaced it.

The motorcycle crash they had was so bad that he had broken both of his legs. Now I had a dilemma: what to do next? I could have divorced her, but at that point it would have made me look ridiculous: I was a deceived husband, whose wife was cheating on him. Anyway, I made the move that, I thought, was the most appropriate in that situation. Slava had a wife. She was a real beauty. She looked like Raquel Welsh. So, I went after her. Soon, I discovered she had had her own suspicions about her husband. Anyway, we started having an affair. You see, first I was just trying to seduce her to get my revenge, but when I actually achieved my goal, I realized how silly it and malicious it was.

So, I told her everything one day while we were in bed. She had suspected her husband too. Maybe, that was part of the reason why she was so cooperative. It wasn't just that I was so irresistible. Anyway, I showed her the letter, she recognized her husband's handwriting. And I said, well, at least we got our revenge. But she said, no, this is not revenge yet. Let's do it for real, without hiding. And we began partying. Chita was a small town, it didn't take long for the rumors to spread. We were collecting the apartment keys from four friends at a time, although, in fact, we didn't need any keys, I had my own apartment empty. We made sure to be seen at all the restaurants in town, together. So, eventually, everybody knew. Everybody, but Slava, who was lying

at home with casts on both legs. My wife happened to be in a hospital, too. The day when she came out, I was home, expecting Ludmila. My wife showed up unexpectedly. I got a call from work, so I had to go out for a while. And Ludmila was coming. I couldn't reach her. Anyway, I told my wife: "There will be someone coming, tell her to wait for me." And I went out. When I got back I saw my wife and Ludmila sitting at the table. When Ludmila had rang at the door and my wife, Olga, opened, she recognized Ludmila, of course. But she thought she came to talk to her about Olga's affair with her husband. When Ludmila asked for me, she understood everything.

It was a scene from vaudeville. I took Ludmila and we went out. So, I spent some time with Ludmila and she went home. I went home, too. Now, imagine the parallel scenes going on: I'm telling my wife: "Let's talk in the morning," and we go to bed. Ludmila is at her home, with her husband, Slava, who's grown more and suspicious by that time, because his wife is coming home later and later each evening, and she looks exhausted, etc. So, he calls his wife a slut, and asks "Who is he?." She replies: "Mark." He's stunned, of course. And she tells him she knows everything. Then Slava asks the most ridiculous question a man can ask in this situation: "Was he any good?" And receives an answer: "Yes, better than you'll ever be."

Enraged, he picked up a hammer ran out on his broken legs, intent on killing me. He took a cab, but gave the driver our old address. While he was confined to bed, he didn't have any communication with my wife, she was in the hospital and she couldn't call him because they didn't have a phone installed. Chita was a province. People rarely had phones there. Anyway, he didn't have any idea we had moved. He went to our old address, waking up the neighbors, and so on. And Ludmila, at this very moment, knocked at the door of our apartment, she wanted to warn me. Slava eventually found our new address, got into the cab again. While he searched the neighboring yards with his hammer, trying to find me, Ludmila ran to the military headquarters – we lived right near the commandant's house – and brought two soldiers, who managed to take the hammer away from Slava. The next day I left for Novosibirsk.

I had made some job arrangements with the Film Studio in Novosibirsk (the major research and advanced industrial city of the Soviet Union). I was given my first film to do about an industrial process. After I completed it successfully, I was given a second film to do, this time a serious documentary. I shot it. Then, when we got to editing, something happened. I was refused a camera. It had never happened before. I realized that my bad record with the KGB had finally caught up with me. It took some time for this information to reach Novosibirsk, but finally it did. That was in December, 1976.

There was a TV station there. When I had first arrived at Novosibirsk, they had invited me to work there. But working in Film was more interesting, so I refused. But after the KGB had notified the authorities at the Film Studio, I called the guy at the TV station and asked if the job was still available. He said it was. The KGB didn't come after me immediately. That happened three months later. And I was immediately fired for being "unlawfully hired to the job," that's how they phrased it. Then I took a step that seemed absolutely insane for that time. It was 1976. long before perestroika.

I sued them. And I won. The issue didn't even reach trial. I went to the lawyer, she looked at the papers and said "That's nonsense, it's completely illegal." She called the district attorney, who called the studio. I was restored to my position the same day.

They left me alone after that. I worked in TV for another nine years. In 1985 perestroika came. Aside from my direct responsibilities as a TV director, I was producing discotheques. I was one of the first people in Russia to realize that Soviet rock music was a serious thing. In 1985 it just started to emerge from the underground. So, as an expert, I was invited to the conservatory, to give a couple of lectures on Soviet Rock. First I refused, I knew it might cause some problems: Soviet rock was interesting then for ideological reasons rather purely musical reasons. Finally, I agreed. They talked me into it. I gave a lecture, and there was a discussion afterwards. I was asked a question about the DK rock group, a popular punk rock group, famous for their obscure texts.

One of the old people in the audience asked me if I thought their texts were appropriate to listen to. I replied that appropriateness is a relative term, it depends on a situation: it would not be appropriate, for instance, to show up in the conservatory dressed in a swimming suit, at the same time such an outfit would be entirely appropriate on the beach. But after I mentioned the word "relative," the old woman continued: "But there're some absolute, unconditional things. Like, fascism, for instance, it is unconditionally bad." I said, yes, of course, fascism is unconditionally bad, I agree. But if the entire country once had adopted this ideology and followed it for more than twenty years, that means other points of view are possible. Out of this small discussion the whole case was fabricated. I was accused of trying to teach fascism to the conservatory students. The letter was sent to the Central Party Committee of Novosibirsk. The letter was signed by 40 people, although the lecture was attended only by 15 people. I was told later that a lot of students were forced to sign that letter. It was written in the best traditions of writing of that kind. It wasn't meant to be read by anybody but party officials, who read it and took the appropriate sanctions.

I was expelled from the Union of Journalists for "being ideologically immature" and the recommendation was given to the director of the studio to release me from my responsibilities. The recommendation, in this case, was an implicit way of ordering. I decided not to wait to be fired and left my job.

The situation I found myself in was quite bad. There weren't that many directors in Novosibirsk, maybe twenty, total. And they were in the public eye. So, people knew me. Which meant I couldn't find a job anywhere. Not a professional job, anyway. What was I to do? My second wife was a seamstress. I could sew a little, too. So, I decided to become a dressmaker. I started making trousers, a Russian version of jeans. That was the time when the first private enterprises were allowed. My wife and I made a bunch of trousers every week, selling them on the weekend. It was a good income. I somehow turned tailoring into an exciting process. I made jeans, later coats, and sold them at the flea markets. I liked the process of making more than selling, I felt a little ashamed of selling. But I was making good quality stuff. I believe people in Novosibirsk are still wearing the coats I made. They looked like coats manufactured by prestigious foreign firms. I created my own label and put it on each item.

I studied the Criminal Code carefully, I knew it was important to have your own brand. My business was going well, it was growing. The monthly circulation was about twenty five, thirty thousand. First I worked on my own, later I engaged other people into the business. Soon, I obtained a license. Now, when I was picked up at the flea market by the police and taken to the police station, I knew how to protect myself.

There were four articles in the Criminal Code under which I could have been arrested. The first one was speculation. The coats I was selling were expensive, about 500 rubles each. That was how they usually started: “You’ve been caught while speculating with consumer goods.” “Wait a minute,” I’d say, “I wasn’t speculating. I made these coats myself. Here’s my license.” They wouldn’t believe me. Once they called for an expert. And the expert said after studying my coats, “Yes, these coats are made by foreign manufacturers.” I said, “Maria Ivanovna, look at me – do you remember me from the time when I was a director? Remember – you invited me to direct a show for you once.” She said, “Yes, I remember.” And I said, “You’re an experienced person, you know how to tell a manufactured coat from a handmade one. You should look at the waistband.” And she looked at the waistband and admitted, “Yes, this coat is handmade, but very well handmade.”

The next thing the police would try was, “This is a fraud, then. Because you deceive your customers by making them believe those coats are foreign made.” And I’d say, “No. I never told anyone the coats were imported.” And that was true, I never did. When asked by the customers if it was a foreign made coat, I usually replied, “Can’t you see?” or “What do you think – I made it myself last night.” Then the policemen would try a new thing: “You forged the brand of a foreign firm,” they’d say. And I’d say, “No. This is my own brand. I invented it.” “Then why hasn’t it been registered?” And I’d say, “Who said it hasn’t been?” So they’d call the National Copyright Agency and received an answer: “Yes, we’ve got an application for this brand. We didn’t know how to register it yet, but the application is here.” Well, the law was on my side. So, the police could do nothing but let me go. After a while they asked me to make coats for them. Without charge.

Perestroika was taking its course. That was a time of repentance. I was suddenly termed a person who had suffered under the regime, a fighter for human rights.

A film was made about me. A documentary entitled *The Tailor*, it was produced at the Novosibirsk Film Studio. And this film took a couple of prizes at the first International Non-Feature Film Festival, it was sold abroad, shown on TV. I was reinstated in all the societies and unions that had earlier expelled me. But the thing was I was already fed up. I began seriously thinking of emigrating. I realized, despite my success in business, that difficult times were coming. The mafia didn’t exist yet, but I could sense it approaching. Nobody touched me in the flea market. I was one of the first. People took it as an honor to make deals with me. But I could see another generation coming into business – people who didn’t care much about anything, who were capable of everything.

I mentioned I was restored to the Professional Union of Journalists. After the participants of the meeting voted to return me my membership, somebody stood up

and said: “OK, he got his membership back. But now, what shall we do about his membership dues – for the five years he was absent from the Union? Shouldn’t he pay this money back somehow?” And they began to discuss, quite seriously, how to obtain these dues from me.

Then I stood up and said: “Let’s do it this way: I was reinstated in the Union today. Now, when is your next meeting? Thursday, next week? So, I suggest, next Thursday, let’s vote to expel me from the Union for the systematic failure to pay my membership dues over a period of five years.” And with that I walked out. I realized nothing had really changed in my country, nothing was going to change. Shortly after that I made my final decision to leave.

When I arrived in New York I came to NYANA (New York Association for New Americans). It is the organization that helps Jewish immigrants to settle, to find jobs, etc. When my case worker asked me what my occupation was I told him that I was a tailor. I didn’t tell him anything about directing, I thought it was unnecessary. I was starting my life anew, and I had a good profession on my hands: I was a tailor, a dress maker. Soon after that I bought my first TV. And when I turned it on, imagine my surprise, the first thing I saw was my own face looking at me from the screen. PBS was showing the documentary *The Tailor*. Of course, I wasn’t the only one who saw the documentary. People from NYANA saw it, too. The next day my case worker called me and said: “Why didn’t you tell us you were a famous film director.”

“I used to be one,” I said. “That was in the past.”

Then they called the Metropolitan Opera, the costume shop. They pointed out I was a theater person, and, on top of that, a tailor. We went to the Metropolitan Opera, for an interview, me and my wife. They said they didn’t have jobs at the moment, but if something came up – the usual story. Surprisingly, in a week or two they did call us and asked us to come start right away. They offered us 17.50 an hour, which is pretty good money for anybody. To us, at that time, it seemed a fortune. So we started working. Of course, I didn’t have proper training in couture. I was self trained. But I can learn really fast. Anyway, they took us on a temporary basis, but after a couple of months offered us permanent positions. That was how my life in America started. It was a good start. I’ve been working at the Metropolitan costume shop for six years now.

Back in Novosibirsk, when I was preparing to leave the country, the team of filmmakers that made *The Tailor* decided to make the second part of the film *The Tailor 2*. They shot part of the material in Novosibirsk, including my preparations to departure, etc. They also picked another character for the film, my old time friend, Gennady Alferenko, who came from Novosibirsk and became a big political figure in Moscow after Perestroika.

The film was supposed to end with a scene of me and Gennady meeting each other near the fountain at the Lincoln Center in New York. The idea was like this: Look, one (meaning myself) is doing his job, a free person in a free country, and another one (meaning, him) reached the very pinnacle of power, but found himself completely dependent on his own position. Gennady had problems with his wife and with his daughter. Like any functionary of the highest rank, the first thing he did was to send his daughter

out of the country. He had connections with American senators and millionaires. So, one of these people offered to take Gennady's daughter into his family. So, the girl was taken into this really wealthy, waspish American family. She went to the best private school, dressed in the proper clothes, bought in the most expensive stores, her English was exquisite. And then, imagine, her parents come from Moscow and they speak bad English, they're not dressed neatly, and they smell bad. She came to be ashamed of her own parents. Anyway, the moral was, Gennady had achieved something he dreamt of, but he hadn't found happiness. And, I, on the contrary, coming through suffering had eventually found peace and happiness. And here we are, meeting on this square.

When my friend, the director of this film, decided to come to New York to finish this film, he called me and asked me to buy a professional camera for him. He said he was going to try himself in photography. So, I bought the camera. He happened never to use it. But I decided to give it a try. Being a film director I knew a thing or two about photography. Very soon I began making good photographs. Now I am mostly known in the Russian community as a photographer. My photographs are used in publications in Russia and the Russian-speaking publications in America. The recent collection of Joseph Brodsky's works had the photograph of Brodsky I made. I have participated in a number of exhibitions. I have even had a one-man show. Photography is an expensive occupation. Almost all of the money I make at my regular job I spend on buying materials, buying equipment for my dark room. I don't have an agent, I'd like to have one, to have somebody help me because he likes what I do.

One of the big discoveries I made about myself as an immigrant is that I can live without recognition. In Russia, if you were an artist it automatically made you an exceptional person. A person who wrote one play in his life expected to be known by everyone. Here, in America, artists expect and get recognition, but only within a small professional circle. It's the other side of freedom. There is too much of everything.

There are not that many good photographers in America for a number of reasons. First, America is a pragmatic country. Most of the photographers specialize in the one thing they know how to do the best: like taking pictures of a left boot, exclusively or, of a right boot, exclusively. They can be really good with that boot. And they know that if there's a demand for photographs of a left boot, or of a right boot, they will be called. do it. So, there is a narrow specialization in photography. One can't make money on art, on doing what he wants to do. One can make money only in commercial photography, on doing what he was asked to do. Of course, there are big masters, like Avedon. He manages to bring something new even into commercial photography. But, generally, art is commercialized. That's why there are not that many great works. There are plenty of technically excellent works. They impress you the first time you look at them.

After a second look you discover that there's not that much in there. They're technically well done, but nothing really touches you, surprises you. Often when I go to a photo show, I feel intimidated after taking the first look around. But the second look brings a relief: I realize I can probably do something they can't.

7 Aaron Kanevsky, film director in his 70s

He puts a bottle of vodka on the table fresh from the freezer. He fills a plate with salami some cheese, and a few delicacies from the Russian shop a few blocks away. Once he starts to speak, we are transported away from his Washington Heights apartment. This table, this man - it seems they can't exist anywhere else but Russia. He talks about making comic documentaries and fighting alongside Brezhnev.

I was deprived of many freedoms in Russia and I couldn't always do what I wanted. But who cares what a person wants? After all, all great literature at all times is based on that conflict between the desirable and the possible, the struggle between what one wants and what one can do. So, of course, being a film director, I suffered from not being able to always shoot what I wanted to shoot or to show my best films to the public. Of course I had to wage the never-ending war with authorities — all that was true. But the other truth was: there was a thrill in that struggle. I actually enjoyed it ... And often, my best films were born from that struggle.

I've never done anything but documentaries in my life, I never was able to do anything else. I started doing films pretty late in my life. I did not have a professional education in film. I had a degree in engineering, in automobile making. But I abandoned my first profession after World War II. During the war, I happened to work as a reporter, writing for a field newspaper, and I stayed a journalist after the war.

Journalism led me to film-making. I worked in a TV station, in Kharkov. I headed one of the film groups, was a senior editor. Once, I picked the script for a new documentary, but it just happened that the director of the film had to travel to Moscow. The deadlines were approaching, so I suggested I'd try to shoot the film myself. And I tried, and the result surprised everybody. Ironically, my first experience in film making happened to be a film about Lenin, meant for his 100th-year anniversary which was celebrated that year (1970).

I was so engaged in a process of making my first film, that it came out fresh and alive. Because nothing else done in the connection with Lenin's Anniversary showed any signs of life, my film was noticed. After that, I was allowed to do my second film — I consider it to be my first one. It was an eighteen minute film titled "Two times two makes X". That one was noticed by Kapler, the host of a popular TV program called Kinopanorama. She showed the film on TV as part of her program. It was to teach first grade children algebra. However, the film was not about algebra, it was about how kids learn how to think. The next day after the film was shown on TV I woke up famous. My next film became an even a bigger hit. Which didn't prevent my new boss, who came to the TV Station in Kharkov in 1974 from laying me off. In a way I'm grateful to him for doing that, because it pushed me to leave Kharkov and move to Leningrad, where my career really took off. It happened that the Leningrad Film Studio announced the availability of two Film Directors' positions for its staff around that time. I applied.

I got it. The only problem was: I had no place to live in Leningrad. Trying to exchanging my apartment in Kharkov for some apartment in Leningrad was a hopeless venture. So, for about six months after I got the job I could not really start it. The director of the film studio offered me a deal: he promised to give me an apartment in

Leningrad in exchange for my making a documentary about a tractor, the K-701 tractor. The film was meant as a personal gift to Brezhnev. The Leader of our Party happened to be a big fan of this mighty machine. Part of it was that he worked as a tractor operator in the beginning of his career. Later in his life he made it his hobby to collect automobiles. (By the way, that was not the first time when Brezhnev's and my paths had crossed. During the war, when working in the field newspaper of the 18th Army, I worked under Brezhnev directly. He happened to be the Commander in charge of that particular division.) Anyway, I made the film, titled "The champion of the fields", and to my big surprise, I got the apartment. I had not quite believed my boss would keep his word, but he did. Moreover, that film was shown on TV, on the central Moscow channel, and not just once. When my wife saw the film for the first time, she called me to say: "If I ever see anything like THAT again – I'm filing for divorce."

The film was recommended to the First National TV Festival in Vladivostok. I went there with the film. I remember the announcement of prizes before the festival began. The first prize was a crystal vase of an enormous size, the second prize –and it caught my eye right away – was a cube of Plexiglas with blue coral inside, unbelievably beautiful! I remember I told my friend sitting next to me, jokingly: "Well, you know I can live without the first prize, I can settle for a second one." And guess what? I got the second prize for that tractor! I, myself, was amazed. But, I guess, the members of the festival jury had to take care of their careers, too. Right away, I went to a post office and telegraphed my wife, "Darling. Got the second prize from the festival: you don't understand a thing about art." Such are the tales of my life in Russia.

It's been always that I had to throw one bone to the Bolsheviks, and for that was allowed to make two or three films of my own, films that I really wanted to make. I invented the genre of a documentary comedy in Russia. And, of course, these comedies were always aimed at this or that ridiculous side of the Soviet reality. It was a very creative time because of the many tricks I had to come up with!

When making a film about the book subscription boom [subscriptions took place when there were acute shortages of published books], I announced – through one of the book stores in town – a subscription for the works of the three writers. Olga Forsh was the first one, a Soviet writer, not widely known. Alexander Dumas was the second. And the third one was "Rasinant, the distinguished French novelist" [who turns out to be Don Quixote's horse]. Eight out of ten bookfans subscribed to the works of Rasinant. Only one of the subscribers, a young man in glasses, came up to me and said: "Don't put me for Rasinant – I don't have a stable."

Another time I was shooting part of a documentary about the situation with stores in Russia in a kindergarten. As soon as I shouted, "Store!" – all the kids formed a line.

Another film was about the ridiculous job discipline campaign that Andropov started. During the day, people would be stopped on the streets, in restaurants and stores, or in buses and subways. Their papers would be checked – all that to detect absenteeism. Here, I came up with another trick. We were filming the line of people near a beer kiosk. I dressed some of the crew members in working clothes, so they could

pretend they had just sneaked out from work. I put them at the head of the line, right next to the kiosk window, and made them address people in the crowd: “Brothers, let us buy a couple of beers – we have to be back at work right away.” And the chorus of voices from the crowd replied – as I was filming: “Just what do you think we are doing here? You think we don’t have to be back at work?”

Despite all these problems, I never considered emigrating. After all, I kept working, I was never without work. But it just happened that my only son Vladimir emigrated to the US in 1989. And as reluctant as I felt about leaving Russia, my wife and I decided to follow him. The idea that we might not see him again was simply unbearable. Still, leaving Russia was a tragedy for me. It was 1990 when we finally got all the papers together. I just finished yet another film, a documentary that many of my friends consider my best film. And suddenly I had to leave. It was a real tragedy.

My friends warned me when I was leaving: “What are you doing? You’ll spend the rest of your days on a bench with other old Jews like yourself, recalling how much you were cherished by the Bolsheviks!”. Thank God, that didn’t happen. From my first days I tried to lead an active life, writing for the Russian language newspapers in New York, organizing a movie club, first in Manhattan. There, we show old and new Russian films – it is maybe the only place where people can see them. Then, there is a Russian TV station. Two stations, in fact, formed shortly after I arrived here. Of course, I was there from the start. I am doing my own program, once a month. It doesn’t bring lots of money... It’s not something I can live on, but it’s something I can live *by*, it keeps me alive.

I wasn’t surprised by America. I had a chance to travel before I left Russia, I’ve been at many film festivals around the world. It’s still a mystery for me, why I got such a privilege, being a Jew and an artist. Maybe, my association with Brezhnev played a certain part, after all. I remember an interview before my first trip abroad, to Hungary. After many questions related to the situation in Russia, I was asked to tell a little about myself. “What did you do in your life? “ – the man asked. “Well, – I said. “I did many things...I was fighting with Germans, next to Brezhnev.” “That’s enough.” – he said. “No more questions. I believe you’re prepared enough to go on this trip.”. And after that, I was never denied a visa to a foreign country (laughs). My friends used to asked me about Brezhnev: what kind of man he was. Well, he was a nice man, actually, good natured, pleasant. He’d be a real find as a head of some collective farm, I’m sure. I never saw him after the war, never talked to him. Once I almost did. I was invited to the reunion of the veterans of the 18th Army held in the Kremlin. He loved these kinds of events. He was very proud of his heroic past.

I happened to be in Moscow at the time, so I was invited. After a few drinks, I decided to come to his table and chat a bit, about how we fought together, you know. His table was in the center of the room... So, I took a start, and immediately, I was approached by the two veterans, suspiciously young looking. They took me by the hands, and whispered sweetly: “Where are you heading, brother? To Him? How about another drink, first?” So, our conversation never happened...

8 Yevgeny and Larisa Ryzhik, late forties

He is in his mid forties. He lives with his wife, Larisa, and their daughter in Houston. Once an Artistic Director of a company in a small town, he left his job to move to St. Petersburg. Then he emigrated and lives as a translator, mostly for oil companies. He misses certain freedoms from his work life Russia. He doesn't miss certain fears.

Yevgeny: The first year of immigration is a very curious experience. You feel vulnerable, completely insecure, in a new country, surrounded by new people...with unfamiliar customs. It's a shock. Then, little by little you begin to adapt.

Larisa: In Russia we used to judge people by the way they talk. The test of someone's intelligence was his ability to express himself. And I think that's how Americans judged us, too. So, I can imagine what they thought of us.

Yevgeny: Being inarticulate is a burden in any language. Because we all think in some particular language. And when you can't speak the language, to some extent, you lose the ability to think, too (pause). And then, there was a powerful factor which entered our lives here: fear. Fear of not finding a job, fear of being fired. Fear of not having a place to live, to pay your rent. In Russia our life was free from this anguish. In Russia, we could argue with a boss, contradict him, make jokes without fear of being fired. Here, an invitation to a supervisor's office makes you tremble with fear: "What did I do wrong? Am I going to be fired?" Because, there's no stability. That feeling of hanging over a precipice never leaves the immigrant. In Russia, there was a different kind of fear. I remembered a story that late Georgy Alexandrovich Tovstonogov (a celebrated theater director in Leningrad), told his students. It happened when Stalin was still alive. Back then, they used to organize those big concerts, attended by Government members: all the ministers, their wives, and sometimes Stalin himself. The show was usually followed by a party, with food and dancing. It was a big deal, everything was supposed to be right. So, at one of these shows Tovstonogov served as a kind of stage manager: he opened and closed the curtain, making sure that the performers were on stage on time. He was a very young man back then.

One of the groups performing that night was a new Dance Company recently formed by Igor Moiseev. It was one of their first big public presentations. So, imagine: they've just finished their number and the audience applauds wildly. It's a huge success. The program director of the show asks Moiseev "Do you have another number?" Moiseev shows him the piece. It is a burlesque dance piece whose score is some foreign pop music. The director thinks, then says: "No That won't do." and leaves. Tovstonogov, a stage manager, and Moiseev, stand backstage in confusion: they don't know what to do. The audience is waiting. Stalin, himself is clapping from his box, waiting for the dancers to do their encore. So, finally Moiseev decides to perform the number. "On my responsibility..." he says. The piece is performed – to the audience's great enjoyment.

And right away, the party begins: music plays, people dance. But behind the curtain, Tovstonogov witnesses the following scene. The program director appears from out of nowhere, furious, runs to Moiseev, and begins to shake him, yelling: "Just who do you think you are? What is it that you allow yourself? I'll show you! You'll rot in prison for that... You'll go to Siberia for that!". At that moment, from another wing of the

curtain, stepping quietly in soft Caucasian boots, enters Stalin. The two men don't see him. Red and sweaty, they keep shaking each other, yelling. Moiseev keeps repeating: "What was I supposed to do? You didn't say anything. I had to do something." And the two are almost reaching for each other's throat. So, Tovstonogov sees Stalin walk past the two men, turn to them, and say something quietly. The two men give the Leader of People a stony look, and suddenly they embrace each other tenderly and begin waltzing. "I had never seen anything like that in my life", Tovstonogov said. "After the party, I approached Moiseev and asked him: 'What was it that Stalin told you?' He told me that Stalin said: 'Why argue? It's better to go and dance...'" (pause) Fear is inside us. People create it themselves.

I think here, in America, people live within boundaries that are much more strict and narrow than in Russia even in the worst of times. They live in constant fear, they wear themselves out with hard work. Nothing is stable here, they think. The competition is high, no work lasts forever.

One of the painful realization you make after coming to America is that you are not the citizen of the world, you thought you were, but a product of a particular system, with its generations and generations of slavery. And this slavery shows itself in tiny little things like scent, for instance. Russian people are not concerned with personal hygiene that much. There are other things: the way you behave, the way you laugh. Our jokes are not acceptable here. You suddenly feel like a boor – even though you've read all of Dostoevsky, and millions of other writers that Americans have never even heard of. With all that cultural luggage, in your behavior you are nothing but a gorilla.

Larisa:

Americans are often called insincere. But I personally prefer American insincerity to Russian sincerity. I remember when our daughter, in our first year here, performed at a school concert, playing the piano. And after the concert, other kids' parents were coming to us, complimenting her, saying how well she played, and how much they enjoyed it. And we replied, saying: "Oh, no, no. Don't say that. She wasn't good at all. She made this and that mistake...". And they looked at us as if we were idiots. They couldn't understand why parents would talk badly about their child's performance. And in Russia it is the natural thing to do. (pause) We all were used to humiliating each other.

YEVGENIY:

We all were spoiled in a way by a peculiar work ethic known as 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. According to that ethic, a simple workman had the power to scorn his supervisor, tell a workshop foreman to go to hell, etc.. Supervisors, on the other hand had much less freedom, and were burdened with more of a moral responsibility than workers of the lowest rank. Anyway, the work relationships in Russia were democratic, there was no strict hierarchy – the way it exists here. Here different levels of the hierarchy are even physical separated, situated on different floors. In the company where I work, there is a ninth floor where I have never set foot, and probably never will. Everything is different on that floor – the length of the legs of the receptionists, the thickness of carpets, the suits people wear. It's a different world. (pause) And this

is hard for a Russian to take. You begin to think – is this really a free country? What kind of freedom is that?

Larisa:

Friendship for Americans is a different thing. Here, family always comes first, and friends come after. Family is more important for an American than any friend... In Russia it was the other way around. Friends was always the first priority. But I am getting used to new, American ways, in friendship, too. And I actually like them. Most of my American friends are simple people, not particularly sophisticated intellectually, but with all that, they are much happier than we are. Happiness has become my religion, lately. Because you see, I have lived more than half of my life in Russia, I have read all the books one can think of, I learned things that I maybe don't even need to know. But so what? All this knowledgem did it help me in the end? Did it make me a better person, a kinder person? Did it make me happier? No. And, here, I am beginning to get some feel for it, the happiness. It's still very blurry and maybe that's how it will remain. Maybe, that's how it should be. At least, I can touch it.

PRIVILEGE, PRISONERS, AND WAR

9 Vadim Shron, Ideals and the System

His father was a party boss till Stalin decided to purge him. Vadim preserved his dreams and idealism about a system he believed in, even after his father's arrest and torture. Father and son both mourned Stalin's death. He lives in Washington Heights, New York, with his wife and 16 year old daughter. They left Russia two years ago. He is 68 now. He is a man of ideals. That was not always a safe thing to be.

I have never talked much about my life. That's been a tradition in my family. My father never told even his children much about his life. Partly, because he wanted to protect us. We grew up as very well-to-do kids. We were Pioneers (organization of children who aspired to be in the Communist Party), then later, committed members of the Komsomol (League of Young Communists). The period during which we came of age was an extremely difficult, controversial period for our country and its people – as we came to realize much later. I'm talking now about the period of 1930s and 1940s. Our father didn't want us to live under a burden of a double-life. Because what happened to him contradicted everything that we had been taught at school or heard around us, everything we knew about the Soviet regime and country we lived in.

He was born in a small town near Warsaw, called Vishkov, in an orthodox Jewish family. His father, my grandfather, was a Hasid, and he devoted all his life to studying Torah. That was all he knew from a very early age, and he came to be a quite intelligent, scholarly person, although at the time I met him, I didn't give a damn about his knowledge. I considered him an almost ignorant man, because he believed in God. That seemed very stupid to me, a young pioneer and an atheist, who knew for sure, already in the first grade, that God didn't exist.

So, anyway, while my grandfather was studying the Torah and Talmud, his wife was keeping a small store which supported the family. They had six sons and two daughters. A couple of other children died in infancy.

Even though they were born in such a strict, deeply religious Jewish family, three out of six sons became Communists. For a religious Jew, communism was the biggest insult. For my grandfather, the fact that his three oldest sons joined the communist party was like spitting in his face. He condemned all three of them. After the revolution in Poland had failed shortly after the first world war, the eldest son ended up in Argentina. Another son, a communist, emigrated to Chile. My father, who was the youngest of the three, left Warsaw with the Red Army in 1920 when it was chased out of Poland by Pilsudsky, and he crossed the border to Russia. He didn't really speak Russian – only Yiddish and Polish. Right away he went to study at the Communist University in Moscow. The Communist University, with its two branches – one for Peoples of the West and the other for Peoples of the East – was, in fact, preparing Soviet agents to infiltrate their native countries. But my father had some health problems, which saved him from being sent back to Poland.

Instead, after graduation he stayed in the Soviet Union. He started working for the party. His first position was in Kirovograd, Ukraine. He was twenty-two when

he was sent there. And he was only sixteen when he left Poland. In a small town called Bobrinets near Kirovograd he worked as the director of an orphanage. He met my mother, the daughter of a local tailor. They got married. They both were very young: my father – twenty-two, my mother sixteen. Soon they had me: I was born in Bobrinets. The next year my father was transferred to Kirovograd (Zinovievsk at that time, named after a popular party leader Zinoviev, soon to be executed). There he worked first as the director of the Workers' University (an institution of higher education particularly meant for workmen) where my mother went to study and got her degree in chemistry. Soon my father was promoted to director of a big local plant called Red Star – one of the major manufacturers of agricultural equipment in the Soviet Union. And along with that, he served as a member of the City Soviet (the governing body in the city) so he was a quite prominent figure in town. A very committed communist, nearly a fanatic, he was also good in what he did. People respected him. I remember as a very little boy calling him at work. All I had to say was: "Father, please", and I'd be connected to him instantly. I was very proud of him as a kid.

I had a very happy childhood, "bright and radiant as the sun" as one of the Soviet songs of that period put it. The people surrounding me, whether at home, at school, or at the summer camps I'd be sent to as a kid, were all good, kind, and very reliable. Because of my father's position, we lived very well. We rented a spacious apartment with a huge living room, four other rooms, and a kitchen. (The kitchen by itself was much bigger than my entire apartment in Leningrad many years later.) I remember the ham hanging from a ceiling in that kitchen, emanating the most delicious smells. We had a housekeeper. We were very wealthy. I was a very happy kid.

All that lasted till 1937, when my father suddenly was arrested. That was his first arrest, and I have a very vague recollection of it: I was only nine at the time. I remember some people came at night and searched the apartment. I wasn't frightened, because I had no idea what was going on. Even after my father was taken away, our life, at least from my perspective, didn't change much. I kept going to school, every day, as before. The only thing that changed was that now my mother would visit the Internal Affairs Office building every day, making inquiries about my father. A little while later, a new girl came to live with us, both her parents had been arrested. We continued to live in the same apartment. My mother continued working at the same place. She was actually laid off from that job at first, shortly after father was arrested. She then went to the Internal Affairs officer and said: "If my husband is an enemy of the people, then you should arrest me as well. But if you don't arrest me, give me a chance to work and support my children." And she was soon reinstated in her job. I found out about all that much later. At that time, I didn't understand a thing. I remember that there were the so called 'heights' near the city – the hills, on which the prison stood. We'd go every day – me, my mother, and my younger brother – and stand there, for hours, along with thousands of other people, waving to prisoners behind bars, and trying to catch a glance of them waving back. My father had a red handkerchief and I tried desperately to see it, but I couldn't. But mother swore she could see it and that meant he was still alive. (pause) I believed my father would be released in a couple of days, and when,

after a couple of weeks he was still in prison, I wrote a letter to Ezhov, the Commissar (minister) of Internal Affairs and the Chair of KGB. “My father has been arrested,” I wrote. “It must be a mistake... Oh, I understand: it is a test. You’re testing his commitment to the party and people. But I’m sure, once you realize what a devoted communist he is, you’ll let him go.” I truly believed all I wrote. I believed my father was simply undergoing a ‘test’ – what else could it be? (pause)

What I found out later about my father’s arrest, which was one of the many happening around that time², was that he was accused of being a Polish spy. To support this ridiculous accusation, some kind of testimony was needed, some ‘facts’ showing exactly what it was that he did. Two such ‘testimonies’ were obtained by interrogators: one was the testimony of a Mechanic-in-Chief of the plant (where my father was a Director). He said that he knew for sure that my father had planted a bomb in the basement of a new plant’s Energy Station. Of course, the bomb was never recovered, nobody ever even looked for it. The second testimony came from someone in the family.

My uncle, the husband of my mother’s younger sister, wrote a letter to the KGB accusing my father of being ‘an enemy of the people’. He did it out of envy for my father who was a big figure in town, and was probably getting a lot more respect within the family, too. Uncle was a hairdresser. Somehow, this difference in their positions made him feel humiliated and eventually hostile towards my father. Anyway, who can know the human heart? In his letter to the KGB he wrote that my father was spending so much money that he must have been paid from some foreign intelligence services for his anti-Soviet activities. He wrote that my father was ‘an enemy of the people’. That magic formula alone was enough to get anybody locked up at that time. No further proof was needed.

The only reason we ever found out about the letter was that in prison, during the interrogation, my father was put face-to-face with my uncle, who, at that point, felt very uncomfortable. It was one thing to write the accusation, another to face the man he accused, his relative. (pause) My father was also incriminated because of his connection to Pyatakov – a former Minister of Industry executed in 1936. As a director of a big plant my father had to regularly report to Pyatakov in Moscow. They also knew each other’s families, although they weren’t close friends. I should probably explain something about that period. Beginning in 1933, Stalin began a methodical extermination of all the top communist figures, people who participated in the revolution with Lenin, and later occupied key positions in the government, industry, army, etc. They all were accused of being enemies of the people. In fact, their only fault was that they knew the past too well. They knew the real – not blown up out of proportion – role that Stalin played before and after the revolution, “this little Georgian man” as Lenin used to refer to him. That made them dangerous to Stalin, who at the time was beginning to revise and rewrite the history. They were dangerous for other reasons, too: as competitors, as political figures with power and influence. They all had to be replaced by people loyal and committed to Stalin personally, because that was the only commitment he could trust.

²1937 was the first year of a huge wave of arrests of party officials

He first got rid of all the top figures in the Politburo. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin (close associates of Lenin, all) were executed one after another following their tumultuous public trials. But that wasn't enough. People who were working under their leadership – Communists of the so-called second level – had to be eliminated, too. The situation in Russia turned to be handy for Stalin: the hunger of 1930's, the poverty in the cities and villages, devastation and, often, really poor management. So, Stalin's policy served two purposes at once: he was getting rid of the people for his own reasons, and, at the same time, using them as scapegoats. That process of elimination had layers within it: first Stalin would remove his enemies, then he would remove the people whose hands had done the initial elimination. For instance, Ezhov who was placed by Stalin in charge of the KGB, was directly responsible for all the massacres of 1930's. People called him 'an angry dwarf' because he was a very small person. For a while, he was the most powerful person after Stalin. But at the end of 1937, when the greatest part of 'cleaning' work was done, Ezhov suddenly disappeared. His name was simply never mentioned again. To replace Ezhov came Beria, transferred from Georgia to Moscow.

People expected a liberalization when he first became the head of the KGB. He started by reviewing a couple of cases, and releasing people who weren't dead yet were not in the Gulag yet, because nobody had ever returned from the Gulag.³ But those who were in between got their chance. And my father happened to be one them. Maybe my mother's persistence had played a certain role: she never stopped traveling to Moscow, making calls to people, appealing. My father was on his way to the Gulag, when suddenly an order came for his release. He was sent back home. I remember the day when he returned: in the winter of 1938. He returned in the evening. We were all sitting in a living room, near the fireplace when suddenly I heard noise in the hallway, and a second after I saw my father standing at the doorway. He had his old military coat on, from which that particular scent was coming, a scent of prison: a mixture of strong disinfectant and something else. He seemed an old man to me at that moment. Now I realize, he was only thirty-five back then. We didn't expect his arrival. Nobody told us he was released. The next day, he shaved himself, dressed up, took me and my brother, and we went out. We walked around the city: he first stopped at his plant, then other places.

Everywhere people were congratulating him. Everything seemed to be again as in the old days. The only thing was that he had not been reinstated to the communist party. At we first didn't worry about that, convinced it was just a matter of time. But days and days passed. He never got his party membership card back. And without it, he could not return to his old job. He could not even hope to occupy a leading position.

He found some job as an office worker in one of the small offices in Kirovograd. He never told us much about what he went through in prison. He told things to mother, but not to me and my younger brother. He protected us, maybe, himself, too. He didn't want us to feel of hatred for the regime, because he himself didn't have any hatred. Even after his arrest, he remained a devoted communist and believed what happened to him

³The Gulag was a vast prison system described in Solzhenitsyn's book *The Gulag Archipelego*. The word is an acronym for Chief Administration for Corrective Labor Camps.

was the doings of some enemies who had infiltrated the KGB (pause).

In 1939, when World War II began, my father's family in Poland spent forty days in Warsaw during its seizure by the Germans. They escaped to Warsaw from Viskov when the Germans invaded Poland. They experienced all kinds of terror: bombing of the city and artillery shelling. During one such shelling, my grandmother was killed by a shell. Finally, the Germans took over the city. The first thing they did was to begin hunting the Jewish population, placing them in a ghetto. What saved my father's family from almost inevitable death was the pact between Hitler and Stalin that divided Poland into two zones of influence: German and Soviet. And the people in both zones were allowed to cross to the other side, if they so desired. My grandfather, his two young sons, and a daughter crossed to the Soviet side.

There was one more son in the family – the only one who became a capitalist, not a communist. A very rich man, he didn't want to leave his property behind, so he stayed in Poland. He was killed there by the Germans. But the rest of the family emigrated to the Soviet territory. One day, our father gathered us all at the table and announced that his family from Poland was coming to join us. And in a couple of days after that, my grandfather, himself, appeared in our luxurious apartment, dressed as a typical Hasid in black, with a long beard. Well, his beard was actually cut short by the Germans, a humiliating procedure they made old Jewish old men undergo (a beard is great treasure for any religious Jew). My first impression of my dzyant – that was how we used to call my grandfather – was that of wonder. He seemed to appear from another world. Well, for one thing, we, children were raised in atheism, and suddenly, there was my grandfather saying prayers to God, referring to God at every occasion. The day they arrived, once the big family dinner was over, my grandfather took my father to the side and whispered something to him. Then, accompanied by my father, he went to the living room.

The door of the living room was closed after that, and my father warned us not to go there. Of course, that warning only increased my curiosity. I approached the living room quietly, slightly opened the door, glanced inside and almost screamed out in fear: what I saw looked like God himself. I had never seen the Jewish prayer ritual before. dzyant was dressed in a black tallis with some red on the fringes. There was a cube with David's testament on his forehead, some leather belts around his arms. I was terrified. I ran to my father, told him what I saw and asked him to stop whatever it was that was going on. Not without difficulty, he managed to calm me down. Later he explained things about prayers, he explained that my grandfather believed in God. I couldn't comprehend how an adult could believe in such nonsense. I tried to convey the scientific truth to him. Once I went so far in my desire to demystify the religion that I decided to cut his beard short in his sleep. My logic was simple: if the beard was supposed to bear some mystical powers, once he sees that my act of blasphemy doesn't make the Earth break open and swallow me or him, he would realize that God doesn't exist.. That was the kind of atheistic logic I learned at school. So, I took the scissors, and under the cover of the night, I tiptoed to the dzyant's bed...

Fortunately, my mother caught me by the hand, before I could do any serious

damage to the beard, although, I did manage to nip out one or two strands. Soon after this incident, dzyant with his family moved out and got their own apartment. That was the year 1940. Only one year was left before the war broke out.

In 1941 the Germans invaded Russia. I remember that day very well, June 22, 1941. I was playing with other boys in the court yard. Our first reaction to the news about the war was a boy's kind of excitement. And surprise, too.

It seemed so strange to us that Hitler would challenge our country – it was obvious that it wouldn't take more than a couple of hours for our army to completely destroy the enemy. We had no doubt that there would be a quick and triumphant end of the war. After all, that was what all of the Soviet songs sang. When the night came, I learned for the first time what an air raid was, and an artillery shooting. We lived very close to a military airport. When the shooting started, we all went down to the first floor. There was no basement in the building, so people would hide on the first floor, under a stair case. I heard the bullets smacking outside on the pavement. Suddenly I threw up: it sounded so scary. We expected our father to go to the front as a volunteer. Instead, three days after the war started, he was arrested again. That second arrest I remember very well. The KGB came in the middle of the night. They searched the apartment.

They checked out my brother's and my room, too. We had a huge map of Europe on the wall, and on that map we would mark with little flags the movements of the Soviet and German troops. After the search was over, they told my father to say good-bye to his family. One of the men laid his hand on my father's shoulder. I remember father turned to him and said, "Don't worry, I won't run away." Then they took him down the stairs to the car waiting on the street. We were watching from the window: father waved to us, from the car. (pause) And again, we'd go to the prison on the hills every day, to wave. Soon, the trial was held, a tribunal. We weren't present. We stood outside the court building. We saw father led from the car into the building. Then, a little while later, he was taken by convoy back to the car. He made a sign to us: showing '10' with his fingers, meaning a ten years sentence. He was put in the car and taken away. (pause) Meanwhile, the city was preparing to evacuate. A couple of days after the trial, my mother went to see a public prosecutor to find out where father was sent. He told her that she could forget about him. He was executed by firing squad.

That is what we believed for quite some time. In fact, he was not. For the second time, a twist of fate saved him... (pause) When the Germans were about to enter Kirovograd, all the prisoners were put in columns and sent walking under convoy to the closest train station. It was a long distance to walk under the burning sun. Some of the prisoners were old and sick. When they'd get exhausted and stop, not being able to walk any further – they were shot by the convoy right on the spot.

In the line with my father walked Dr. Dashevsky, our former family doctor. He used to treat us as kids. By the time he was arrested he was already a very old man. He was shot right in front of my father. When the prisoners reached the nearest station, they were crammed all in one compartment and sent further to the East. That ride was a complete horror: the prisoners had to go without – or almost without any food.

And the worst thing was – there was no toilet, and they weren't allow to go out...Soon, dysentery spread, and people were dying, one after another. Corpses were only taken out by the convoy once every few days.

The dead lay next to the living — the sick kept infecting the healthy. They traveled like this for about a month all the way to Aldan, in Siberia. My farther survived the trip. (pause) In Aldan, he was supposed to work with other prisoners in the gold mines. But it happened that around that time a Polish Liberating Army was beginning to form. One of its divisions was drafted on the territory of Soviet Union out of the former Polish citizens – most of whom were in locked in camps, or sent to Siberia, accused, not unlike my father, of being Polish spies. And suddenly, all these people stopped being spies and enemies of people and were released, so that they could join this newly formed Polish legion. Among them was my father. One day, he found himself outside the gates of the camp in whatever he had on: a puffy cotton prison robe trousers, and that in the freezing cold.

He had no money to buy clothes. Once again, he was lucky. Standing on that street in Valdan, not knowing what to do, he was discovered by a man, his former student from Kirovograd, who happened to work at the mines as an engineer. He recognized my father. He gave him shelter and money. And my father started searching for us.

My father was not reinstated in the Communist Party till 1956. After the 20th Communist Party conference he was invited to Moscow, where, ceremoniously, he was given his party membership card back. Right away, he became one of the oldest and most estimable members of the party – his record dating back to 1920. In 1956, he was only 52 and still full of energy... although he had had two heart attacks by then. Only in 1956, did he finally tell us the whole story of what he had been through during his first and second arrests. He told us how, during the interrogation, he was put in the same cell with criminals who had beaten him almost to death; how his interrogator in order to make him sign a confession, showed him a copy of a local newspaper with the text of my mother's public denunciation of him.

The copy was fabricated, but for a while my father believed in my mother's betrayal and even refused to accept the food bales she was sending to him in prison. Maybe the only thing that saved his life after that first arrest was that despite all the tortures he never signed a confession. (pause) And he never stopped being a communist, faithful to party and to Stalin. He did believe that what had happened to him, and was happening to other people, all this was the doings of enemies who had infiltrated the KGB. After he was released for the first time, he kept sending letters to Moscow trying to expose those 'enemies', demanding that they be tried. Those letters may have played a certain role in his second arrest. During his second trial, they were referred to by a prosecutor as 'lies meant to discredit our security organs' and led him to demand a death penalty for my father. It was the same prosecutor who later told my mother that father was in fact executed.

While my father was going through his ordeal, our family was experiencing the ordeal of evacuation. The Germans were approaching Kirovograd at great speed. The situation in town was quickly getting out of control. The city authorities had not

issued an order of total evacuation although they were evacuating their own families. The population of the town was beginning to panic. One day, hundreds of people streamed to a train station looking to escape the city. The station got packed with people; trains that were leaving overflowed. Then the authorities issued an order: anyone who attempted to leave town without special authorization would be shot. And the people returned from the station...

It seemed like nobody was defending the city. The German bombers were coming every three hours with frightening punctuality, one could almost set his watch by their arrival. We had to leave our apartment because it was dangerously close to a military airport. One day, mother sent me and my brother to pick up some things we had left in the apartment. As we approached the building, an air raid began: the house was hit by a bomb and destroyed before our very eyes. (pause) We kids watched the bombings with fascination.

The war was still pretty much a game for us. I remember when the Red Star plant was struck by a fire bomb and went up in flames: the view was so amazingly beautiful that we stood there, watching, couldn't take our eyes away from the blaze. One day, the city was left without supervision: all the authorities seemed to have fled the town. The last traces of order were gone. I remember a militia soldier on the corner firing at the German plane with his pistol, trying to shoot it down. (pause) That was when mother decided it was time to leave, no matter what. We found a wheelbarrow, loaded it with our stuff, and rode to the train station. When we arrived there, we found out that no trains were running. The station was being bombed every three hours. And besides, because of its location, it was open to artillery shooting. There was no place to hide. People would hide behind some thin cardboard sheets on the platform. Of course, those could give no protection against bullets. Then my mother did something I will never forget: she took me and my brother by the hands, and holding us on both sides of her, she stood in the middle of the platform till the shooting was over. (pause) So that if we got killed at least, we'd be killed together, not just her... or us. We couldn't survive without her, and she wouldn't want to live without us – she knew that. I was crying through the whole thing, trying to break away, but she held my hand tight. (pause) We spent three days at the station, waiting. Not a single train left the station, the trains stood right there, but there was nobody to give an order for them to move. Finally, when the Germans were already entering the opposite side of the city, a rumor spread that one of the trains was about to move. And thousands of people rushed to that train. Our family did, too. 'Our family' included twelve people. Besides my mother and us, there were my mother's parents, dzyant and his family with us.

So, we got to the train and climbed on the platform. Still, nobody gave any orders. People were throwing their last possessions onto the train – bicycles, sacks with food: only move! Finally, the train took off. (pause) We were on a bare flatcar, one of those used for transporting coal. We were open to all the winds, unprotected. As soon as the train left the station – a German fighter appeared from somewhere. It was circling above us, and we sat, quietly, waiting for it to shoot. There was nothing we could do on that platform, there was nowhere to hide. But the plane simply accompanied us to

all the way to the next station, there he waved with his wings and turned back. It was a spy-plane. (pause)

For nine days we rode on that train, on the same flatcar, bearing the heat, and rain, and hunger. We had no food, except for a bag with zwiebacks (dried bread) which my grandmother had kept since the civil war. This old bread, spotted with dung – she kept the bag in a barn, with her chickens, for 20 years – saved our lives. For two weeks we were on wheels. Finally, we arrived at a small station called “A Pit”, near Rostov-on-Don. There, we got off the train. We were put on an arba – a wheelbarrow dragged by two bulls – and driven somewhere. The road seemed endless; we didn’t know where we heading. The sun was unbearable and the bulls walked slowly. In the evening, we reached our destination. It was a small Kazak town. We went to the management building, my mother introduced us to the Chair of the Collective Farm, who looked somewhat puzzled. “Who are you?” he asked when my mother finished her introduction. “We are evacuated persons,” my mother said. She was doing all the talking. Her answer only increased the man’s confusion. He had no idea what the word “evacuated” meant. But because he didn’t know, it sounded impressive to him, it created respect. And when my mother produced an accompanying letter given to us by local authorities at the station, it confirmed his assumption that we were some ‘important’ people sent to his care. So, we were accommodated in grand style: put up in a big farm house and fed with lamb, milk, honey. After the days of starvation, it was too much. The next day we all laid flat with sick stomachs. So, we began to live in the stanitsa. And at first, it seemed we’d stay there for good. My mother was thinking of getting herself a job at the farm. The chair of the collective farm was nice to us... he particularly fancied my mother: “You’ve got a spirit, Faina.” I remember him saying. But a couple of days later we saw a German spy-plane in the sky again. That meant the Germans were getting closer. “Let’s not take any chances,” my mother said. And the next day we left the farm. (pause) My mother’s instinct was really quite extraordinary. A couple of days later that entire area came under German control. So, we boarded the train again, and headed east again. We arrived in Stalingrad. There, we stayed with a German family. A lot of Germans lived in that area, around the Volga river, descendants of the 17th century German settlers. They were known as Volga Germans. They were very hospitable people. We lived in their big wooden house with a terrace overlooking the Volga river. But after a while, the Germans planes arrived there, too. We left Stalingrad. That was September of 1941...

This time, my mother decided to move further into the East. Somebody mentioned a city called Chelybinsk to her – a big industrial center in Ural. That’s where she decided to go, hoping that we wouldn’t only be safe there, but she would be able to find a job for herself. So, we went to Chelyabinsk by ship, down the Volga river. We traveled for 10 days surrounded by the most beautiful scenery... It would have been a gorgeous trip if not for the hunger: we had no food. I was used to hunger by that time and took it stoically – after all I was 12 – and the only man in the family. But my younger brother cried all the time.

When we arrived at Chelyabinsk, my mother laid out blankets and pillows

from the bags right there on the street, and – as we had done many times before – made beds for us. We woke up in the morning surrounded by people staring at us. To them, we must have looked like a gypsy camp. We had no idea where to go from there, but, again, a coincidence helped us: among that crowd of strangers happened to be a few people who knew my grandfather back in Bobrinets. They took us to their place, and gave us refuge for a couple of days. From Chelyabinsk we were directed to a small local village, called Malushevka. A couple of months later, we moved to a district center called Yesaulka, thanks to my grandfather, who was a tailor – a profession rare and valuable, particularly in the country. In Yesaulka we stayed for a couple of years.

There I went back to school, to seventh grade, and after completing it, I started on my first job: rolling felt boots in a local shop. In Yesaulka, I heard the word 'Yid' for the first time and learned what anti-Semitism was. The first day we arrived, I overheard a conversation outside the house where we stayed: "Have you gotten evacuated persons in your place?" "Yes. We've got some Jews, too." "Jews, really? And what do they look like?" That was how I discovered I was a Jew – a fact that together with my being a city boy, made me the target of hostile jokes from my schoolmates at a village school. Despite that, I keep the warmest memories of Yesaulka, the place where I came of age.

My being an urban boy gave me certain advantages in the village life. I was a very bookish boy, I had always read a lot and we had had an excellent library at home back in Kirovograd. I remembered a lot of what I'd read, and I was good in retelling those stories. When I started working at the felt boots shop, that provided me with a certain status – that of a story teller. Often, while others were working, I was entertaining them by retelling the books I'd read. Sometimes I felt guilty about not doing enough work, but my supervisor, the shop's manager, an old villager, would say: "Don't worry, you'll catch up with the work. Now it's time to tell the stories." So, I told the stories, and my coworkers listened.

In 1944, we received a letter from my aunt Raisa: she and her family were evacuated to a small town near Alma-Ata, in Kazakhstan. She was inviting us to come over: "It's warm here, and we've got a lot of food... You'll be much better off here." she wrote. "Semyon got a job, we'll be able to help you..." Semyon, her husband, was the man who had reported my father to KGB back in 1937. But during the war, the families made up, the past was forgotten. In our family council it was decided to go. And so, we all went – except for my father who stayed in Chelyabinsk. He had gotten a job there, but couldn't bring us over because there was no place for us to live. So, we went to my aunt's in Kazakhstan, and stayed with her and uncle Semyon, who was particularly nice to us. I was fourteen and my family wanted me to continue my studies. A School of Technology was opening in Alma-Ata, it seemed like the right place for me. So, I was sent to check it out. My grandfather accompanied me: together we walked all the way to Alma-Ata, about 30 kilometers – there was no transport. I was accepted to the School with no difficulty. I was placed in a dormitory with other students. There, in Alma-Ata I got to know real desperate hunger. The daily ration for students consisted of 200 grams of bread and a broth. It was hard to survive on such a ration, let alone to study. All we could think of was food. In search of something to fill our stomachs, we

students, would wander around the city, taking small jobs here and there – like unloading beets, and hoping to snatch a piece or two that would fall on the side. In the evening, we'd come back to the dormitory, which was not heated, like most of the buildings in Alma-Ata. So, we lived with a constant feeling of cold and hunger, and those were hard to overcome. The few parcels with food I received from home never lasted for long – I shared them with my roommates who had no relatives at all.

With all that, there were some enjoyable sides to my life in Alma-Ata. It was the first time that I lived entirely on my own. And unlike other places I lived in, Alma-Ata was a big city, a capital, with all the attractions that a big city has. It had an opera house, where we could go for free, the mother and father of one of my fellow students worked in the theater. His father was a fire inspector and his mother was a cleaning woman. Their positions provided us with unlimited access to all shows. We didn't miss a single show – and true, it was a bit warmer in the theater, than in the dormitory.

While in Alma-Ata, I was admitted into Komsomol (The League of Young Communists) there. I was fifteen. Of course, I myself wanted to be admitted really badly. When writing an application I didn't conceal any facts in my biography, including my father's arrest. I held on to the interpretation of events I made up as a child: that my father's arrest was merely a test he was put to. Surprisingly, the fact didn't create any problems and I was recommended to join Komsomol. To complete the procedure, a general meeting was held, and I stood in front of the committee. Once again, I had to repeat my biography. "I was born in the city of Zinovievsk..." I started. I was not given a chance to continue. "What city?" the chair of the committee asked. "How dare you to even pronounce this name. Don't you know who Zinoviev was?" I knew, of course. He was an enemy of the people. But what could I do? That was in fact the name of the city at the time when I was born. (laughs)

After a year of preparatory studies, I was accepted to the newly formed Technological Institute. I was a regular first-year sophomore, except that I was two or three years younger than the majority of other students.

In my first year, I was expelled from the Institute for smoking in the auditorium. Maybe it was a bit of bad luck, too. Because, believe me, I was not the first or the worst smoker in school. Here is some background. Our first year there was marked by an air of complete, unlimited freedom, unseen by any of us before. We could attend lecture or not attend as we pleased. There were jazz concerts and parties every night. And that was true for entire country during that one year at the end of the war. Foreign movies brought from Germany were shown everywhere. They would have been considered obscene, ideologically unacceptable just a couple of years ago, but now they were OK. The country was loosening up. The general mood in that year of 1944, beginning of 1945 was of relief and hope. Everybody expected the future to be different and radiant. Soldiers were coming back from the front. After what they had been through, after facing death, and coming out of it all alive, they were not afraid of anything. They brought with them a special sense of freedom. The atmosphere in the country was intensely political: the Komsomol meetings in our school would go on till 4 AM in the morning, in hot debates. And often we would come up with resolutions not at all agreeable to the First Secretary

of the City Komsomol Organization. People suddenly felt unconstrained. But that freedom didn't last long. By the end of 1945, order was being reinstated everywhere – including my school. One day, coming back from winter vacations we discovered a new director's order posted on the wall prohibiting smoking in auditoriums. Well, we didn't pay much attention to it: orders like this were issued every day and then completely forgotten the next day.

So, during the following lecture I stretched out on the bench of the auditorium and puffed a cigarette. When the director walked in, I didn't even turn my head towards him. It was one of those good student traditions: not to show any respect to authorities. I wasn't the one to invent that tradition, but I was one of its most fervent followers. "Have you read my new order?" director asked. "Do you know what it says?" "Yes." I replied. "So what?" "Come with me," he said, and I followed him, smiling. We came to the Dean's office where he told a secretary to prepare a letter expelling me from the school. He dictated the letter very calmly. I stayed calm, too. I was not worried: orders expelling students from school were not at all uncommon. Posted on the wall in great numbers, they were usually replaced next days by orders restoring the named students back to school. I was sure that would happen. But I was wrong: this time things turned out differently. The administration decided to use my case as a warning to other students. When after a couple of days I was still not reinstated I became frightened. Despite all my bravado I was still just a kid: the possibility of being kicked out of school for real frightened me terribly. The director suggested a bargain: he would reinstate me but on the condition that the Komsomol organization of my department would give me an official warning . I accepted the bargain gladly. I couldn't care less about a 'warning'. But, the Komsomol organization showed much more moral integrity in that regard: they took my side against the director and refused to give me a warning. I can't say I was grateful to them for that: my last chance to be reinstated in school was vanishing. I was ready to cry... I almost begged our Komsomol secretary to 'warn me' – and he wouldn't, out of principle. (laughs) Finally though, I was given the warning and reinstated to school.

I graduated from the Technological Institute, being 20 years old, with a degree in tank manufacturing. After my graduation, I was assigned to a famous tank manufacturing plant in Nizhniy Tagil (Ural). I was hired as an engineer responsible for testing new models of tanks. It was an interesting job, and I was quite good at it. I developed procedures for testing the tanks, then took the tanks on a testing run, myself. It was an exciting job, particularly for the young man that I was. I worked closely with many famous designers, like Morozov, who designed the T-34 tank used during the war. Of course, my position was highly classified. Clearance usually took some time – a couple of months, at least.

After I had worked at the plant for a while, I was suddenly invited to the administrative office and told: "We like the way you work. We want to offer you a promotion. How about if we make you a senior engineer?" I said: 'Sure...'. It turned out they were offering me a Senior Engineer position in a different division – in the office of Mechanic-in-Chief. The plant had two production brunches. The official one was

manufacturing trains and its official name was UralVagonZavod (UralCarPlant). Tank building was a classified branch. Being transferred to the Office of Mechanic-in-Chief meant to be removed completely from tank making. Of course, I resented that. But there was nothing I could do. Right away, my special work pass was taken away from me. Now, I couldn't even walk into the building where I used to work. My documents hadn't gone through clearance. I never found out the reason: maybe it was my father's arrest, or maybe, the fact that my father's two eldest brothers had emigrated to South America, many years ago. He had never heard from them, didn't know their whereabouts, but maybe the KGB knew more about it than he did. In any case I felt humiliated, even though I was not fired but offered a promotion. I wanted to work with tanks, not with trains. I was a tank builder, as my Diploma stated. Restless, I sent a couple of letters to Moscow, directly to the Ministry. After that I was fired. (laughs)

And so, I returned to Chelyabinsk, feeling that I was a failure. I started looking for a job and soon found a position of Engineer designer in the Institute of Metalurgy. It was not strictly my occupation, but I came to like my new job – it expanded my horizons as engineer. My life went along peacefully for a while. But peace didn't last for long. In the winter of 1951, the country learned about the Case of the Doctors.

First, vague information appeared in the press about a few doctors of Jewish nationality in Moscow caught in terrorist attempts to poison our party leaders. This 'information' began a huge anti-Semitic campaign. The propaganda was so severe that in many health clinics and hospitals in the country patients were refusing to see doctors of Jewish nationality. And there were a lot of Jews in this particular profession. Many doctors were fired right away. From physicians, it spread out to other professions, including engineers. The campaign went under a slogan of "struggle against Zionism".

The press never actually used the word 'Jew' – only 'Zionist', or 'agent of Joint'. But most of the population had no doubt of what that word in fact implied. (pause) In my institute, I worked next to highly qualified engineers, because the nature of our work required people with high qualifications. Many of them were my friends. Yet, when the whole thing started, they changed. The Institute facilities were located outside of town. A special bus brought employees to work in the morning, and drove them back to the city at the end of the day. One cold winter day, I stepped inside the bus, and the other people – who had been discussing something animatedly – fell silent immediately. I could read in their eyes that they had been talking about me. Nobody said 'hello'. I walked between rows of seats in heavy silence. Even people of the intelligencia were not immune to the anti-Semitic virus.

As a kid, I could always come up with seemingly convincing reasons for my father's arrest, such as that he was put to a test, and so on. I was pretty good in making up these rational explanations for things my mind refused to comprehend. I would do anything to avoid seeing the truth. My imagination refused to go beyond a certain point. To force it to do so would make me step over myself. But the time came when no rational explanations worked anymore. The anti-Semitic campaign was handled so shamelessly and aggressively. It left me no chance to believe in any 'righteous' logic behind it. One of the first victims of the campaign was my friend's father, a doctor. A

professor of medicine, a renowned pediatrician, he was arrested and accused of poisoning his little patients. I knew him: he was the loveliest, kindest person I had ever seen, a big lover of jokes. It was impossible to imagine him doing any of the horrible things he was accused of.

Then Stalin died. I remember that day very well... People were overwhelmed with a grief, a genuine grief. I was, too. When my father announced, "The tyrant is dead." my brother and I confronted him furiously. Well, my father knew what he was talking about. But even he felt lost. Life without Stalin was simply unimaginable to us. We didn't know what was about to happen. In the last years of his life, Stalin was not even perceived as a human being anymore. He was a God, an omnipotent creature, soaring above us. And suddenly he was gone. It was a shock...We didn't see any figure capable of taking his place. In addition, the anti-Semitic campaign had just approached its peak. In all that time, when it was unveiling, we saw Stalin as the only one who could protect us in the end and not let worse things happen. Now we could only expect the worst.

Before Stalin's death, rumors were spread that all the Jews would be sent to Siberia or to Biribijan (a desolate region that had soon after the revolution been established for Jews and was called the Jewish Autonomous Republic). My memories were fresh of a communist party conference at the Metallurgical plant in Chelyabinsk – one of the biggest in the country. It was held a couple of months before. The conference came up with a resolution: recommend to the Central Party Committee in Moscow to place all the Jews in a ghetto, as 'untrustworthy elements'. Stalin seemed to us to be the only person capable of preventing that from happening – even my father believed that. Stalin was the last hope for all Jews in the country. And when he died, in addition to the general grief that we shared with the rest of population, we had the feeling that we had lost our last protection and hope. We were now defenseless.

But two weeks after Stalin's funeral, came the news of the complete rehabilitation of doctors accused in connection with 'doctor's case'. All accusations were found to be lies; the guilty were to be punished, etc. This was all published in the press. You should've seen the city next day after the publication. All the Jewish population of Chelyabinsk poured out on the streets. It was a sunny bright day of April – and people were laughing, embracing each other, kissing. I saw joy like this only once before: the day when the war was over. Only then, an entire population was celebrating; now only a small part of it.

There was one city I always dreamt of living in: Leningrad. I had been there once before, with a short visit, and I fell in love with the city right away. In 1956 I moved to Leningrad. It took some time for me to find a job, but finally I did. I got a position at the Institute of Fire Resistant materials. My life went on pretty smoothly after that. The Leningrad period in my life – the late fifties, sixties, seventies – for me, as well as for entire country was relatively calm and free of turbulence. It was a period of stabilization, both in politics and in social life. I worked, I wrote my dissertation and received my Ph.D. degree. I got married, had kids...Of course, there were some unpleasant factors: I always knew that possibilities for my professional and career growth were limited by

the fact that I was Jewish.

The employment policy in Russia was such that it was very hard for a Jew to reach top positions in science, or anywhere else. I had very little chance of ever becoming a Head of a Laboratory, for instance – and that was the only way of conducting independent research, selecting its themes and subjects, etc. But I accepted those limitations, as all of us did, I guess. I learned to live with them. Then Perestroika came. The first years of Perestroika, from 1986 to 1989 approximately, were actually quite promising. We never were paid big money before for our work. The range and amount of our work was determined by five year plans. After Perestroika came, for the first time, it became possible to look for projects on your own, to make contracts with clients independently, agreeing on deadlines, budget, and pay. We finally began making some money. At the same time, official anti-Semitism began to decrease, too. For the first time, the results of work became the most important criteria for any kind of promotion. And suddenly, I was offered by the administration to head the laboratory where I had worked for many years.

I had been performing the head's duties for many years simply due to my influence and strong position in the lab, but without its ever being acknowledged... Now I was offered to occupy the position officially, with all the rights it implied... In 1992 a law of major economic reform in the country was finally adopted. We anticipated it with big hopes. The previous period, 1989 to 1992, the country's economy was in a state of limbo: the state was still very much in control, but the government funding was significantly cut down. In 1992, the decisive step was taken. We now were on our own – we had to look for clients, make contracts with them; we were supporting ourselves.

Our clients were mostly metallurgical, or machine making enterprises. But the reform made the prosperity of an enterprise depend directly on the quality of final product. And that quality was often not too good. Take the machine building industry: most of the products in the Soviet Union couldn't compete on a world market. When Russia opened its gates widely to foreign cars and machinery, the demand for machinery and cars dropped. And that meant that somewhere down the chain, the demand for metallurgical production, like steel, dropped, too. And, further down the same line, that caused demand for fire resistant materials to drop, too. So, the freedom of a free market turned into failure for many. Most of the enterprises weren't prepared to it. We couldn't find clients... Nobody could. A lot people were laid off... Some started their own businesses.

I actually tried my own business too, and turned out to be pretty good in it. Creating joint ventures with foreign investors become the style of the day and I formed a joint venture of my own out of our lab. All the work our lab did now passed through this company, which meant we had to pay much bigger taxes to the state, but our earnings became significantly higher, too. We did some work, on contract, for Chinese, British, and Egyptian companies. Here is a typical story. I received a memo from the director of my Institute with the technical specifications of a fire-resistant press for one of the metallurgy plants our country was building in Nigeria – the specs were sent by some German firm producing the machine. I was supposed to give an evaluation and report

back to the ministry. Suddenly, it occurred to me: why do we need to buy this machine from Germany, when we have been designing similar machines in our lab? So, why can't we offer one to the ministry of metallurgy? It seemed like a good thought, a simple solution. I went to Moscow and called on the ministry of metallurgy. I told them my idea: along with the fact that the German machine needed some technical adjusting to the specific conditions of work. It was also twice as expensive as ours. I suggested that we'd supply Nigeria with our domestic machine that my lab had developed.

To that, they responded: "We don't want our machine. We don't trust our machines. Nigeria is a developing and wealthy country, it deserves a better machine."

Nigeria fell apart shortly after that, but at that time it was still considered wealthy. Anyway, I figured right away what stood behind their refusal: the bureaucrats from the ministry had their own interest in purchasing a machine from a German firm – the firm promised to pay them big bribes for the contract. Still, I didn't want to give up.

I came up with another idea: "All right." I said. "You don't trust Russian machines... What if I offered you a machine manufactured by some other foreign firm... for instance Norwegian?"

"If it's a foreign firm," they said, "why not give it a try?" I knew a Norwegian businessman who was doing business with Russia, I met him earlier on some business occasion. So, I went back to Leningrad and arranged to meet the guy right away. I offered him a deal: we would make the machine, but it would be sold to the ministry by his Norwegian company. The terms I suggested to him were very attractive. At first he hesitated – but finally agreed. We went to the ministry in Moscow together. To my big surprise, the deal went through. Nobody even objected to the price – \$400 000 – that seemed astronomically high to me. Still it was half the price Germans were asking for their machine.

They even increased the price a little, suggesting that the final seller of the machine would be the original German company, which would contract with the Norwegians and the Norwegians would contract with us. The only reason for that one more intermediary was that people in the ministry didn't want to be left without any payoff. And getting a bribe from the Norwegian was too risky, because they didn't know him. Anyway, we made the machine in time, and everybody were pleased: the Nigerians, my lab, the ministry, and the Norwegian who received almost \$100,000 dollars practically for nothing. (pause) Despite this and other successes, things were changing for the worse. The entire institute was on a brink of closing down. Out of its 1,500 employees only three hundred were left by the end of 1995. And the number kept decreasing. So, I knew I was running out of time.... And I had to think of my family more than of myself. I am sixty-eight... but my family, wife and daughter, are much younger (I am married for the second time). I had to think about their future. It was time to move on...

I left Russia with a heavy heart... I didn't know what to expect in a new country. I realized I wouldn't be able to continue working, professionally, and I always liked my work. I was preparing myself for the worst. So when I got to New York, and saw the apartment that was waiting for me: nice and clean, and twice as big as the

apartment I left behind in St.Petersburg, I calmed down. I like my new country. I like New York, even though I felt overwhelmed by it at the beginning, overwhelmed by its largeness. I wouldn't call this city beautiful – in the sense that you call St.Petersburg beautiful, or other cities in Europe. But I am fascinated by it. It has everything, and it has the best: be it book collections in a library, philharmonic concerts, even fireworks. I like the people here, the feeling of calm they emanate (sic). particularly in a crowd. There is none of the nervousness that marked any mass gathering there. People seem to be good natured... They may not care too much about each other but, at least, on the surface, they come across as nice and welcoming. People smile at you and that smile alone fills me with gratitude. It's mere civility, of course, but we weren't used to it in Russia.

10 Alexander Bolonkin, engineer, missile designer, prisoner

It's an early afternoon, but the room is dark, because the heavy curtains (drapes) on the window are drawn. In Russia, he was an engineer, designing first airplanes, then missiles, always working in top secret laboratories. He later turned into a dissident and spent years as a prisoner in Soviet camps partly for inventing a printing device.

Upon graduation, I was sent to Kiev, to the Lab of Airplanes Design led by Antonov [a leading Soviet aircraft designer]. I did my Graduate Thesis Project there (a hydroairplane with underwater wings). They liked my ideas, and after I completed my degree, they hired me. I participated in the development of many new airplanes, from the AN-8 to the AN-225. Two years later I left Antonov's lab and attended the Post Graduate Program at the Moscow Institute of Aviation, Department of Dynamics of Flight and Aircraft Control Systems. My scientific adviser, Ivan Vasilievich Ostoslavsky, was a famous scientist and the author of many published books and text books. I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on "The Optimization of Trajectories for MultiStagestep Rockets." After I received my Ph.D., I worked with Glushko, a member of the Russian Academy of Science, in his Lab of Aviation Design. It was the major Soviet Lab designing missiles. Although I liked my job, I wasn't happy with the practical nature of it. Soon I left Glyshko's Lab and began teaching, first at the Moscow Institute of Aviation and Technology and later at the Moscow Institute of Technology in 1970.

It was around the same time that I met some dissidents. It happened accidentally. My wife and I were moving to a new apartment. One of the movers helping us to load and unload the truck, looked somehow different from his pals: he was too intelligent and didn't ask for a tip. I was curious enough to ask who he was, he told me he was a former university student, expelled from the University for his interest in dissident literature. He gave me some books to read. Later on, he came to me and asked if I could keep some of his literature, as his apartment was about to be searched by the KGB. He brought a suitcase filled with all kinds of dissident literature and I read all of it in the two months it was stored in my apartment.

Soon after, I formed a group with other dissidents. I invented a simple printing device that allowed our new dissident group to print and make multiple copies of all kinds of materials. It was a very simple and portable hand made device, easy to hide from KGB in the event of a search. We made eight such devices. Just one of them allowed us to reproduce about 150,000 pages of printed texts, including texts by Sakharov, Robert Conquest, and some underground magazines. Our group published its own underground magazine, called "Free Opinion". I wrote a number of articles for this publication, analyzing and comparing the quality of life in the Soviet Union and the Western Countries. We also printed other Soviet dissident groups' publications, such as "Democrat", "Light of Freedom", "Veche (Parliament)".

We were printing flyers, too... About 3,500 flyers were printed in the period our group was active. In 1972 we made and distributed flyers on the issue of price increases. Prices were raised back in 1962, and at that time Communists claimed this action to be a temporary measure, saying that it wouldn't last more than two years. They promised that as soon as the situation in agriculture improved, the prices would

go down. It didn't happen. The prices continued to rise in the following ten years. So, we printed and distributed thousands of flyers, telling people the truth.

Of course, our action was noticed by the authorities. The KGB grew alarmed: they confiscated hundreds and thousands of printed copies from people, instead of two to four typed pages as in the past. Yakir, one of the dissidents, showed our flyer to some foreign journalists in Moscow. Soon the mass media and newspapers in the West spread the news that flyers demanding social, political and economic reforms were being distributed in Soviet Union.

The Central Communist Party Committee gave an immediate order to the KGB: find and smash the culprits. Our flyers were distributed in June 1972, and we were arrested in September 1972. I believe Yakir betrayed us. The materials of his case prove it. He was arrested in July 1972, and he was an alcoholic by that time; he couldn't live a day without vodka. Well, of course you're not served vodka in jail. The KGB promised him tons of vodka if he agreed to cooperate. He started talking and couldn't stop. Thousands of volumes of confessions. We were among the people he turned in to the KGB. So, in September everyone in our group were arrested. I was already under suspicion by then. I had given some literature to a relative in Leningrad, a book called "A Daughter of the Despot", about Stalin's daughter. He showed it to his wife, and she took it to her office. Not long after she realized that one of her coworkers had an uncle working in the KGB. Soon, my relative was called to the KGB for interrogation and he gave them my name. He didn't have to. His wife had burned the book by that time, so nobody could prove anything but people were too scared.

My own transformation from a regular citizen to an active dissident wasn't that sudden. My mother used to tell me about the thirties, about the infamous black cars, "ravens", taking people away at night. But I had no idea of the scope of events. We didn't have any information. So when I started getting some critical information, I began to question things. Let's take a simple fact: I read that our famous five-year economic plans were never really fulfilled. It was 1971, and the 1965-1970 five year plan was just completed. Our officials praised its success everywhere, saying we accomplished and overaccomplished, etc.

I took the newspapers from 1965, with the economic showings we expected to have by 1970, and compared them to the reports published in 1970 by the Central Bureau of Statistics. I was horrified with what I found: out of sixty-seven economic areas, we succeeded in three, and the least significant ones, like furniture sales, for instance. The plan was to sell furniture in the amount of 50 million rubles, and in fact 60 million rubles worth were sold. But the only reason for that "accomplishment" was that furniture prices had risen significantly during those five years.

As for the other industries, the plan was fulfilled at a 10% level in some of them, on 20% in other, the average being 50%. So, half of what was planned was actually achieved. It wasn't just a lie, it was a shameless lie, daring to call a complete failure an "over-accomplishment". When I started to explore the subject, I found exactly the same situation with the previous five-year plans. I was surprised nobody had really noticed that before – none of those wise old men sitting in academic institutions, making

their economic analyses, summarizing and praising our achievements. How could they not see... well, of course they did. After that, I grew more and more interested in the materials of the past party conferences, meetings, and so on. I looked at what was promised and what was in fact done. The gap between the two was tremendous. It was especially ridiculous, because not only were promises made, but exact deadlines given. All this was a sham. For instance, in 1960 the Communist Party Conference had adopted the program according to which pure communism was supposed to be built in Russia by 1980. According to this program we were supposed to achieve the economic level of the USA by 1970, then exceed that level, and by 1980, live in a communist paradise. Of course, it was evident by 1971 that the program was a complete failure.

So, in September of 1972 I was arrested. I spent 15 years in concentration camps and in exile in Siberia. The investigator on my case was Anatoli Trofimov, a simple KGB investigator at that time. He was promoted after my trial. Initially, I was given 4 years in camps plus two years in exile. But after I had served my term, they fabricated another case, just to keep me there. They accused me of receiving excessive wages. I was working in a factory while serving my term. So, they gave me another four years for that "crime". I told them, "If you paid me more, take the difference out of my salary. It's not my fault, it is the fault of the person who does payroll." They told me, "It's you who we need to keep locked up, not him." It was a madhouse. Earlier, during the trial, they used my notes quoting Party Conference's resolutions against me. They used the words like "anti-Soviet rubbish and lies." When I asked my investigator why did he call the Communist Parties' resolutions "anti-Soviet rubbish and lies," he replied: "Bolonkin, you're not stupid. Why did you have to dig into the old promises? We've got new conferences and new promises."

So, I spent nearly 15 years in camps... I was constantly harassed by the KGB officers on duty. They wanted to see my redemption. For three years I was held in the prison inside the camp. Conditions there were particularly hard... For 400 hundred days – more than a year – I lived in a cold cell with frozen walls. I was kept on water and bread for days. It was hard to survive all that: hunger and cold, constant terror or being attacked by the inmates-criminals. But the psychological tortures were even harder. I wasn't allowed any correspondence. They wouldn't send my letters out for six months. They confiscated the letters I wrote to my family, friends, calling them anti-Soviet...

I did an experiment. I spent a lot of time in the camp's library. I was supposed to read books by Lenin, Marx, and other fathers of Communism. So, I started writing down some paragraphs from Lenin's letters to Krupskaya, his wife, and to his friend, Armand. Then I gave those letters to the camp censor as if they were my letters to my friends. I never added a word of my own; I kept them true to the original texts. None of those letters ever got through. They were confiscated as slanderous, anti-Soviet, cynical. Finally, they took me to psychiatrist convinced that only a mentally ill person could come up with letters like that. (Laughs)

I was released from the camp in 1987. I immediately applied for a visa. They turned me down. I wrote a very harsh letter to authorities saying: "Don't try to keep me here. I hate you, all of you, I'm your enemy forever." It was the time when perestroika

had begun. They let me out.

At that time one could leave Russia only with an Israeli Visa. This was possible for me because my wife is Jewish. The authorities took away my Soviet citizenship, my wife's and my apartments, and we had to leave all our property behind. Not only did they take away our citizens' rights, they made us pay compensation – 700 rubles for each of us, 1400 rubles for both – a ten month salary for an average soviet citizen at that time. The tickets to Vienna were also pretty expensive... So, basically they threw us out of the country without a penny...

[Until 1989 Vienna and Rome were the transit points for all emigrants. In Rome they had to decide whether to go to Israel or America as their final destination. After that, emigrants had to get visas for their particular destination before leaving the Soviet Union/Russia.]

After I came to the United States, I worked in the Courant Mathematical Institute at New York University for a while. Then, for two years, I worked in the Central Research Laboratory of the Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. I worked as a senior researcher for NASA (Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards, California) for two years. I published about eight articles in scientific magazines, I participated in three congresses on astronautics, in some national conferences on aviation and space ships. The work I did here, as well as in Russia, was important work, related to military secrets. Presently I'm teaching at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Soon after I came here, my friends and I founded the International Association of Former Soviet Political Prisoners and Victims of Communism. We have about 31,000 members presently. One of the things we demand from the Russian Government is to compensate former political prisoners. The dissidents who left Russia up until the late eighties, unlike new refugees, were giving up all their citizens' rights and property. We demand all this to be returned to them now. I don't see that any real democratic changes have taken place in Russia. The former Communists still have the power, only now they call themselves democrats. But they are the same people... The investigator on my case, for instance, Anatoly Trofimov, was recently granted a rank of General Colonel, which is the highest military rank in Russia followed only by Marshal. He's a Deputy Director of a new Russian KGB, which is called the FSB (the Federal Security Service)...

After perestroika came, I was officially rehabilitated by Soviet officials and cleared of all charges. But when I wrote to Yeltsin and asked to return to my family at least one the apartments confiscated when we left Russia, I didn't receive any response. I think they should restore the rights of all dissidents, give us back apartments and pensions. I'm saying it not because I want to go back and live in Russia. I would want to go and take a look and then decide where to live. I like America. But I want to have a right to return, I'm entitled to it. A new regime in Russia became possible due to the efforts of people like me, it was built on our blood. The least they can do is to return to us our rights, to apologize for all that was done to us. And to invite us back. That would be fair. What I want is justice.

11 Lidiya Sechkina, war refugee

She lives in Boston. She emigrated here from Dushanbeh, the capital of Tajikistan. A calm privileged life as a Russian academic in a southern republic turns into a chaotic nightmare. It's remarkable what losing a few pieces of infrastructure in an atmosphere of violence can do to a city and to people's lives.

In October 1990 the bloodshed started in Dushanbe. It started with Armenian refugees arriving in the city, victims of the earthquake. They settled in the outskirts of the city.

The city authorities gave them a few buildings that had just been completed. Then somebody spread the rumors that Armenians were taking over the city, a huge crowd of Tajiks gathered and marched towards the new Armenian settlement. That's how the whole thing began with Anti-Armenian riots. So, the Armenians just packed their stuff and rushed to the airport. There were planes waiting for them – the Armenian government had sent the aircraft from Erevan. Right away they were put in the planes, boarded without tickets, and were taken away immediately. But the Tajiks, once they realized they were feared, they could not stop. The dark times had begun.

They soon turned their national rage against the Russian population of the city. When we moved to Dushanbe, the Tajikistan population seemed to be adopting Russian culture and language without any resistance, willingly even. The official language in the republic was Russian, so schools taught students in Russian. All the textbooks were written in Russian. Nobody really had any objections against that at the time. But with that riot, a real war began all over the republic. Historically, Tdzhikistan was subdivided into large provinces, kind of like states, with a so called Bey (leader) in charge of each province. Each Bey was responsible for paying the dues to the Emir of Bukhara.

These different provinces differed in language and custom. The differences were small, but still, when this war began, they turned against one another. Tajiks from Pamir came to Dushnabe. They put their tents in the central square and simply lived there: cooked their meals on fire, ate and shat right on the same spot. They didn't have any intention to leave. Forty tanks were sent into the city to scare these unwelcome guests away. Transport stopped functioning, the buses and trolleys stopped running. Walking on the streets was dangerous. Soon there was no natural gas supply. The containers with gas used to be kept on the streets, each building had a container, a box in which the gas was stored. Each container was locked with a padlock. Once every twenty, thirty days, when you ran out of gas, you'd call the gas service, they'd come and bring new gas. That was how it used to be.

A couple of days after the riots started, all the containers with gas were gone, they were simply stolen. People lost their gas supply, so there was no hot water in the apartments, and no way to heat a stove. Most districts had no electricity. We were in a better position than others, because we lived on Central street, where all the city authorities had their apartments. That meant the electricity could not have been turned off in our building because that would leave the leaders of the city without light.

The most terrible things began when the bread supply in the city was ex-

hausted. Then the bread was sold right at the baking factories, at nights. A big crowd would gather and form a line near the truck with bread. You'd have to grab your five loafs and run. There were a few instances when the trucks were robbed and bread stolen, after that soldiers with machine guns guarded the trucks. People were fleeing the city. Entire families, with all their possessions, were taking off. Selling an apartment was difficult.

Then the railroad track was blown up. The trains filled with refugees got stuck in the train station – each compartment occupied by a family or two. So, these people remained to live in the trains – they did not have apartments: they had sold them, their furniture was packed, so they had no place to go. They just lived in the train compartments, and not for 1 or 2 days, for a month and a half, till the track was fixed. And it was cold, too, it was already January when they finally left the city. Traveling by train was dangerous, too. We heard stories of trains being stopped, passengers killed and robbed. The railroad track in that area ran through a desert, without a human being for miles around. The train ran for two days that barren land.

Anything could have happened in these two days: the train could be attacked, the train operator shot and every single passenger robbed. So, people were afraid to travel by train, afraid to leave the city. But some did, because staying was even more scary. It was like committing yourself to death. The planes were not flying, because there was no gasoline. The airport authorities expected gasoline to be brought by air. We waited. My husband spent nights in the airport, waiting in line. Every night he would go on a shift there. Finally, on December 15th, they started selling plane tickets. The ticket prices went up. Before it cost 300 rubles, now the price jumped to 800 rubles. We were not able to sell anything. Apartment, furniture, everything stayed where it was. There was nobody in the city to buy it. Everyone was leaving. We hardly managed to get on the plane – a big crowd gathered in the airport, the passengers were boarded ten at a time.

Later I found out that the same day we left Dushanbe, on December 15th, 1992 the nationalist troops entered the city. At the very moment our plane took off from the south side of the city, the rebels entered the city from the north. The war went on for a long time after that, with the power shifting from one side to another and back. I don't have any friends left in Dushanbe. Everybody who could leave left.

My husband's his brother, sister-in-law and daughter had emigrated to America. They lived in Boston. My brother-in-law sent us invitations. And we went directly to Boston. We could not have stayed in Russia, even if we had wanted to. There was no one there for us to go to, no place to stay. My daughter lived in Leningrad, we stayed with her for a couple of days. But she lived in one room in a communal apartment, we could not stay with her much longer. We had no money, too. We left all of our property in Dushanbe, and could not sell anything. And even if there was a place for us to stay in Russia, we could not stay. It felt too scary.

Recently a Tajick woman came to visit Boston, I knew her back in Dushanbe, because we used to work together. She was a wealthy woman with a beautiful apartment in the center of the city. Very strong and motivated, she used to be a member of a

communist party. She always wanted to get married. She finally did. I asked her: “Aren’t you happy?” She said: “Yes... but, you know, I’m a second wife.” So, her husband, some kind of merchant, has two wives, and she’s the second one. The first wife is superior to her. She’s the Assistant Director of a Research Institute in the Republic of Tajikistan. But she’s the second wife. And her husband can get himself a third, and a fourth wife, if he so desires. Polygamy is officially restored in Tajikistan.

And I would not want to go back there – even for a day. Even if I was offered a free ticket to fly to Dushanbe, take a peek and come back the same day, I would say: “No.” Because I don’t want to see the ruins of what I once loved. I’d rather never go back.

PENS AND BUTTER

12 Roman Kaplan, owner of the “Russian Samovar” restaurant

Before emigrating from Russia to the US in 1977, he lived in St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time). He was exiled from there because he had contacts with foreigners. Among things he enjoys in life are a good meal and a good conversation. It is not an accident that he became an owner of one of the most popular New York Russian restaurants: the “Russian Samovar”.

Questions for him: his age?

It always seemed a miracle to me – the fact that I’m managing somehow to survive, that I’m still alive, that I even make some money. It’s a miracle because I was always convinced that only people who can actually do something, who possess certain skills, who have a profession, are able to make money. I don’t have any skills, I am not good in anything in particular. In Russia knowing foreign languages was a big deal. And I knew a couple. But here nobody needs that. Here it’s the professional people who are in demand. I’m not at all prominent. Well, there is my restaurant. It turned out to be a neat place. But even the restaurant is not such a huge success, at least not commercially speaking. People love it, that’s true. But that’s pretty much it.

I came to New York in 1977. The idea of living all my life in one place, in the Soviet Union, without ever seeing any other place seemed strange to me. For all of us living in Russia the notion of ‘abroad’ was a very significant notion. All foreigners seemed like Martians to us. They were an entirely different breed of people. And for us, young people raised under a very strict and very brutal regime, the possibility of traveling, of seeing the world seemed very exciting.

I was always fond of foreign languages. But any communication with foreigners was strictly forbidden in Russia – so you can imagine what difficulties it created for people like myself, who wanted to know and practice their knowledge of languages. There were no publications in foreign languages, except for a few books in paper cover, sold in only a couple of book stores in town. That was in Leningrad. There were no magazines, no newspapers in foreign languages. So, for curious people getting some information about the “West” - which seemed to us like a single monolith, the West with a capital W – was not easy, and the information we were getting was often dated and not accurate. I remember that my friend and I regularly bought the ‘America’ magazine. A woman at the newspaper stand at the Moscow train station often secured a copy of the magazine for us for a special fee. She had only a limited number of copies in her kiosk. We studied this magazine carefully, almost caressing each page. I remember the feel of the paper – heavy, glossy paper. I remember photographs in that magazine, photographs of cars that nobody in Russia could even dream of. Now every child is familiar with it, but back then it was a big rarity. The magazine itself was just an ordinary propaganda magazine, but for us it was a great treasure.

I remember once I noticed a group of tourists, black tourists, on Anickov bridge in Leningrad. They were studying four horse statues on the bridge and they were gesticulating very expressively. They were dressed in some unbelievable clothes, bright

and colorful: yellow sweaters, green scarves, light colored overcoats. Amidst the gray street, with dirty melting snow on the ground – a typical Leningrad misty landscape – there was this bright, beautiful spot, with a prevailing color of yellow. And they had these extravagant hats on their heads. I never saw more a beautiful picture in my life. I approached them: they were Americans, artists, they came to Leningrad with a touring theater company, brought Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. I don't remember which year it was exactly, probably 1956. And they were talking among themselves, in English, laughing. And I stood there, looking at them absolutely stunned. I thought: "America, what a country!"

Because they came from America. I did not know too much about America at that time. I did not know that in America these people would not be admitted in the same restaurants with white people, or the same hotels. I remember looking at the glossy page of America magazine with a photograph of the unemployed person, and a sign under it saying "An unemployed American receives \$400 a month in unemployment benefits". And the guy on the picture was dressed in jeans pants and jeans shirt – clothes that were objects of desire for many young people like myself. So, we thought to ourselves: "What a luxurious life those unemployed Americans have!" Of course what we did not realize was how easy our life was compared to life in America.

Easy and cheap. True, we did not own anything, but life did not cost much, either. It was possible to live in Russia with almost no money – which many people did, in fact, do.

When I decided to learn English, I went to a bookstore. The only books in English I was able to find was *By the Path of Thunder* – a book about apartheid in South Africa, and many novels by Dickens. I chosen Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Maybe because I myself still had some expectations at that time, I was young. And I began to learn English — following the technique I had read about in some book. I read the entire Dickens novel three or four times, at the first read I would write down on a piece of paper the words I did not understand, then I would try to memorize them, then to use them in the right context. I learned other languages this way, too. I always had a big interest in languages. I loved reading dictionaries.

Foreign language was a window into another culture. I loved reading poetry in other languages. We read a lot back then. We copied our favorite poems by hand and passed them around. We copied poems by Brodsky, and other poets and writers. We discovered Russian poets of the early century: Mandelshtam, Tsvetaeva, Ahmatova... They all were suddenly discovered, and this discovery made life so bright. The people in my circle at that time were people who possessed an ability to express their thoughts in the most condense, energetic, profound way possible. They were real poets. Looking at those people prevented me from becoming a writer. I knew I could never do it the way they did it.

I was born in Leningrad, but I had to leave the city at some point and move to Moscow. The same people who organized Brodsky's trial in 1964 had fabricated a case against me a year earlier. It's not like I was a dissident or anything, but I guess people like me were too different from the prevailing masses. We were more educated. We knew

other languages. We were listening to the Voice of America, Music USA. We attended all kinds of underground art exhibitions and screenings. We even spoke a particular slang. Anyway, I don't know why these people picked on me. The word *stilyaga* (a stylish person) was in use at the time. A typical filthy Soviet word. Of course, we dressed differently from other people you'd meet on the streets, we were very much into everything Western. We tried to copy the Western style in everything.

I remember once my friend and I were sitting in Under the Roof restaurant in the Europe Hotel and a group of foreign tourists suddenly walked in. We were dressed in some checkered jackets which my friend who knew how to sew made for us, made out of some cheap material: old blankets, or something like that. They were too warm, these jackets, and very awkward looking. And suddenly I saw these people walking in and sitting at one of the round tables in the room. They were dressed in some light slack shirts and checkered jackets – light checked jackets, and they wore all these with such elegance and such nonchalance. And they look so fresh so clean, these people, so free. They looked like a living reproach to us, to the misery of our life. So, I always wanted to go and look at what life was like there... America interested me the least. I was fond of Europe, I dreamt of going to Italy, France... America just happened to be the most free country out of all. You can come here, stay, you can leave whenever you like – nobody cares much. Still, everybody want to come here. It's the last refuge in this world.

I mentioned I had to leave Leningrad. I was a post-graduate student at that time, I studied Art History. I was harassed for having contacts with foreigners. My persecutors would not leave me alone, they published nasty articles about me in the newspapers. I was accused of disclaiming secret information. I did not have an access to any secret information. What I was interested in was getting some information about art, about new books published in the West, getting the information first hand. Foreigners were people from the entirely different world separated from us by seas, rivers, and iron grids. Everything about their life was incredibly interesting. So, even after I was warned by the authorities, I did not stop seeking contacts with foreigners, I did not react to the threats. So, they took their revenge. My brother who was a post graduate student at the Mining Institute, was expelled from the program.

Finally I had to flee Leningrad – my friends, Brodsky among them, found me a job in some geological expedition. I was leaving the city in absolute distress, after the expedition I ended up moving to Moscow. I took a Foreign Language Teachers School course, my English was actually quite good. I graduated, I began making my living by teaching English and doing translating jobs. It did not make me rich, but it was a reasonable income. I was a regular person, not too wealthy, not too poor. I remember back then, in Moscow, we used to gather in a restaurant called Eastern, it was a popular hangout for people like myself. You could always find some friends there, could join them at their table, sit and chat... you could travel from one table with friends to another. Coming to that place saved you from feeling alone in the city. When I was opening my restaurant in New York, much later, I was thinking of the old times in Moscow.

Moscow was a much more open and free spirited city than Leningrad at that

time. Leningrad was a provincial city. The city authorities went out of their way trying to prove their loyalty to the regime, so the ideological pressure was much harder in Leningrad. Moscow was a center, a Metropolis. All the international festivals and exhibitions took place in Moscow. All the prominent artists, musicians, and singers lived in Moscow. I was always attracted to people who had talent, who were extraordinary at something, be it singing, or poetry. I always had a lot of friends among artists, the best of them. I always believed Russian art to be the best.

I was curious about the West, but it was the people surrounding me, my friends, that I really admired. I felt they should be known in the West, I felt the West should know what was happening in Russia. I did everything I could to change this situation – I was introducing my friends - painters, poets and writers to plenty of people from abroad, so that they had an idea of what an incredibly high and sophisticated level Russian artists had. Actually, my life was pretty good at that time, I did not suffer any particular persecutions, I could support myself financially.

If I had been allowed to freely travel abroad – I don't think I would have stayed in the West. The thing is, we didn't have much of a choice. I remember one of my friends met a French woman, a very nice woman, he liked her a lot. He wanted to go to France to meet her parents, but he was denied a temporary visa. The Soviet authorities told him: "No, you can't go to meet her parents, but if you want to move there for good – we won't object." He was given 24 hours to decide, he said to me he did not need 24 hours, he decided everything in 15 minutes. He left Russia.

I felt that if I were allowed to go abroad, I would not have to emigrate. I just wanted to see the world. I tried to apply for a tourist visa a couple of times, but I was denied a visa even to a country like Romania. This was the main reason why I decided to emigrate. Through one of my friends I managed to receive an invitation from Israel. I applied for an emigrant visa and I was given a permission to leave the country very quickly. That was how I left Russia, I was leaving without looking back and without having any clear idea of where I was going to. I found myself in Israel. But I did not feel right there. I never really thought of myself as a Jew, I still don't. From Israel I moved to America, to New York where I've lived lived for twenty years.

I did not experience any cultural shock in America. New York felt like 'my' city, from the beginning. So much of world's wealth, material and cultural wealth is concentrated here. On the other hand you are completely on your own. You can do whatever you want, nobody will stop you. Nobody will help you, either. In New York you have to fight for survival every day. You begin your day early in the morning, you struggle through the day till late at night. Every little thing takes a struggle – be it driving: you are driving amidst the endless stream of cars rushing somewhere. You struggle to meet the people you want to meet, to do things you need to do, you fight to make money to live, to buy food. I remember in Russia they used to call New York "The jungle of stone." It's true in a way.

I found myself in a strange country, without money, without my own home, without any clear prospects for the future. Of course, I felt anxious. True, I knew English, but so what? Everybody in New York could speak English, some better, some

worse. Besides, I did not have papers, I didn't have the right to work. I had a tourist visa from Israel. I met a friend of mine, an American, whom I knew from Israel. He was my best friend in Israel. There I showed him a book I wrote in English, he was very impressed. But when he found out I had come to New York just like that, without making any arrangements, he strongly disapproved. He was a very wealthy man, head of a big real estate company in New York, he owned 20 residential buildings in Manhattan. I asked him if he could give me a job. The only job he could offer me was a doorman's job in one of his buildings. I took this job. I told him, "There are no dirty jobs." You finish your working day. You wash yourself. And you are clean again. There are dirty souls that can never be cleaned out, but there are no dirty jobs. So, for a couple of months I worked as a doorman. I knew it was a temporary thing. I knew something would happen, sooner or later. A couple of months later I met a man called Nakhamkin. He was starting an art gallery. He needed someone to help him, he had no idea what kind of person this someone should be. I was 'tailor-made' for him: I knew English, and he did not. He couldn't write a letter on his own. But he knew a lot about business and about trade. He dealt in works by contemporary Russian artists. It was the first gallery to present Russian painting to the world. But working with live artists is not easy, each one of them has a temperament, each one has an ego, you find yourself amidst this constant fight of egos. Besides, at certain moment, the interest in Russian art in the Western market began to drop. The times changed, the market was saturated. There are only a few collectors involved in collecting Russian art.

So, after a while the Russian art market has collapsed, only a few artists who had already made names and established reputations for themselves remained in demand. But a big group of artists whose work Nakhamkin was presenting fell into oblivion. I left the gallery, realizing it was time for a change. That was when the Russian Samovar came to life. From the beginning it was very popular among Russian community. A lot of my friends knew about the place and supported me from the first day. It wasn't my idea to start a restaurant. My family and I lived right across from the gallery on 81st and Madison, people were always coming in, hanging out in our apartment.

We had to cook meals every day, every day there was a lot of drinking and eating, and talking. Which was hard on my wife, every day coming home from work she had to receive guests. Finally, she told me in a fit of an anger: "I wonder if your friends would visit you that often if it was a restaurant, not your apartment". Well, it happened that my friends still do, they come as often as they did, now to my restaurant. It has turned to be a cozy place. What makes my restaurant so different from other Russian restaurants in New York is that it is a warm place, a soulful place, and people appreciate that. They feel easy here... as if they fit. Americans come here, too, but mainly it's a Russian place. We don't care much about the commercial side of the enterprise. It's good enough if we are able to pay the rent, salaries to the employees. We don't make that much profit.

Back in Russia I never envisioned myself being an owner of a restaurant, but now that I have become one, I see a certain logic to it. I always liked people, I always appreciated hospitality, I enjoyed revelry. So, I guess there is a certain destiny to what

has happened to me...

13 Gennady K., his forties, a poet

owner of Anyway cafe in the East Village. publisher of a newspaper

What I like about America the most is that it has everything. Including problems. All kinds of problems. And Americans are the first to admit it. And that what makes them a strong nation. I believe there are strong nations as well as strong people. Strong people are not afraid to talk about their problems, they try to overcome them. Weak people – they act out the old joke of Brezhnev times: when the train is stranded on the track and the train operator says: “Let’s make an u-u-u-u sound and pretend we are moving”.

Why did I leave Russia? I think it was foolishness – but now I am happy I was so foolish. By 1985 my life in Russia was going pretty smoothly. I lived in Moscow, I had a two bedroom apartment and I was writing short stories. By 1987, I was making money by reading my stories publicly. I was paid pretty well for doing it, actually. I was reading together with my friends, who were poets and writers. Our audiences ranged from 100 to 800 people.

Why did I emigrate then? First, I did not like my surroundings. I did not like the rudeness that was particularly characteristic of Moscow and other big cities. I did not like the way people smelled on the streets. It was not their fault, of course. They could not always get soap; the hot water was often turned off, particularly in the summer time. People could not always take a shower or do their laundry. Men wore the same shirts, the same underwear for days. So people smelled bad. I hated that. Then there was the food shortage. But I had some connections. I lived near the supermarket, and I knew a person who worked there, so I was getting groceries delivered right to my table. The person I knew, actually, was an intellectual, working in the supermarket as a freight worker. He’d often come to my readings. So the problem of the food shortage was solved for me once and forever. What caused me to leave Russia, eventually, were problems of an internal nature.

In 1987 I finished a new collection of short stories, and suddenly I realized that I was writing the same thing, over and over again. I was a member of the Poets’ Club. My friends were poets and writers who are now recognized as modern classics of Soviet literature, people like Lev Rubenstein, or Dmitry Prigov. It occurred to me that the poems by Prigov, for instance, hadn’t changed since I had first heard them ten years earlier. He had to play a role he had taken upon himself. Once becoming a conceptualist, he could not stop being one, the same way a poet of, let’s say, the country style, could only be a poet of that style. And I should say, the country-poets were much more authentic at that time – maybe because they didn’t have to capture the attention of foreign journalists to publish their poems in the West.

So, even though my work was in favor at the moment, and I could continue to do the same old thing – and even get paid for what I did – despite all that, I felt, creatively, that I had hit a dead end. For years and years we had been writing for our own sake, without any hope of being published, and then suddenly we started getting something. It finally paid off. Right at the moment when it began to pay off, I left. My friends could not comprehend why. Before I left, I was invited to join the Union of

Writers, for instance. I, among forty young writers, was offered membership. I was so disgusted by it. I realized that if I didn't leave then, I'd have to play the Union's rules for the rest of my life. It's like a kindergarten, where you can switch from one group to another, but still you have a supervisor above you. Then you switch from a kindergarten to a school, but no matter what grade you are in, you remain a boy. You'll always be referred to as a "young writer". It's a clan system... And I did not want to be part of it. I did not want to fight with anybody, or explain anything to anybody. I simply detested those writers from the establishment, sanctioned by the state.

Another thing that caused me to leave was the understanding that nothing would ever change in this country, no matter who had the power. It became apparent to me in 1985, when Gorbachev announced that Russia would soon become a leader in the world car-making industry – with cars as poorly made as Zaporozhets or Moschwichs. It was still the same old bullshit: slogan equals action. The word 'said' reads like 'did'. That's the way things were always done in Russia, and that's the way they are still being done.

When I left Russia in 1989, I thought I'd build my life anew. But for about four years I wasn't able to write anything. Well, my first week after arriving in New York I began doing some journalistic work. I was working at the Svoboda radio station, broadcasting to the Former Soviet Union. ⁴ I prepared programs on cultural topics. I also published some articles in the Russian Daily newspaper. But I could not write a single poem or story or play for four years.

Then I wrote my first short story. In Russian. Once I began writing again, I discovered that the direction of my writing had changed. I think I became less dependent on society. On Soviet society, at least. The nightmarish world we all endured in Russia had touched our souls, distorted our vision. We had to deal with problems that were not universal human problems, but the problems forced upon us by the Soviet society. It's like when you live in a communal flat – you have to deal with things you would not even know about if you lived alone. Russia was like a communal apartment.

In America, I don't have to deal with politics if I don't want to. I was never interested in politics in Russia, either, but all conversations were about politics. There was no way one could get away from it. I tried. For sixteen years I worked as a night security guard, working one day and having three days off. I was happy. I did not have to deal with society.

When I left Russia, I could hardly have imagined what America was like. I had some American friends in Moscow, mostly journalists and diplomats. They told me about New York. Still, it was hard to imagine that New York was a real place. It seemed like Mars to me. Cities like New York or Paris were not real cities to me. They came from the books I used to read, and they seemed to only exist in those books. When I arrived in New York, I found myself on the corner of 5th Avenue and 28th street. My first impression was that people were glued to the sidewalk, they all were looking down. I could not see their faces clearly... That was not how I imagined glamorous Fifth

⁴Svoboda means "Liberty." The Soviet government made it illegal to listen to Svoboda, asserting that it was a CIA front.

Avenue at all. So, my understanding of America was shaken right from the start. It took me many years to understand... and I'm not sure I understand it yet.

That's what keeps me here. If I had a full understanding of this country, I would probably leave. But America keeps surprising me. There no such thing as province here. Take Seattle, for instance, a small city in Washington state, on the fringes of the country. But some of the best of the American fashion is created there. This small town dictates grunge fashion patterns to the entire country. In Russia it is impossible to imagine that a town like Tver would suddenly lead the fashion or music industry.

Also, I never knew I would become a publisher of a newspaper. But that's what I do now, and I enjoy it, although publishing is a never-ending struggle, with no money in it. There are about 25 to 30 Russian language newspapers in New York now. They all repeat one another, more or less. What I wanted from the beginning was to form a group of authors, interesting authors who would write for my newspaper. In a way, it's like creating a community of Russian writers in New York. A community of like-minded people. I think I accomplished this goal. In Moscow we gathered at one table at one time. Here, my allies are spread out in space: some live in Boston, some in Los Angeles. My newspaper unites them...

My second business is a cafe. I did not open this place in order to just do business, I did not want to become a trivial restaurant owner. But my cafe has become a center of Russian life in New York. We hold poetry readings, discussions, parties. A lot of different people come here. I see all types here. And I am interested in people. This is already beyond a circle of friends, it's a whole Russian-American movement that's being formed. That's what I'm after...

What I like about America the most is that it has everything. Including problems. All kinds of problems. And Americans are the first to admit it. And that what makes them a strong nation. I believe there are strong nations as well as strong people. Strong people are not afraid to talk about their problems. They try to overcome them. Weak people pretend everything is all right. They act out the old joke of Brezhnev times: when the train is stranded on the track and the train operator says: "Let's make an u-u-u-u sound and pretend we are moving". But America is strong, and there are plenty of problems here. Sometimes, Americans, not unlike the rest of humanity, tend to push certain issues too hard, taking them to the point of absurdity. Take all these issues of political correctness: it is politically correct to say "an African American". But if you call a black person any other name – you can offend him. Why? I don't understand that. Only idiots want to be called a certain way. You have to play by the rules here. And there are too many rules – that I don't like. Any really good solution to a problem can be spoiled, become absurd, the same way as a fiction story can be overdone and wrecked, or it can be done beautifully.

I miss Russia, or rather, I miss my youth there. When I say "Russia" I don't mean the bricks of the Red square. In fact it's the last thing I want to remember. All those parades, pioneer saluting... although as a child I used to like that. Kids like military games... But I don't miss that. I miss being young, miss gatherings with friends, our New Year's eves. It has to do with people who stayed in Russia. But I left and I'm

dead for that life now, dead for our past. My memory is alive. There are things that I'm probably the only person to remember now.

If I had stayed in Russia, I would probably have become involved in some kind of business: I am an active person, by nature. I would have organized something, built a business... maybe got a bullet in the head. I would fight the government bureaucracy, banks, the stupid taxation laws. I would have taken care of many things, like getting 'a roof', protecting my business from the racket... In other words, I would have had to deal with all kinds of problems and spend my life on solving them. I didn't want that.

That's why I have never regretted not staying in Russia. My friend in Moscow is an owner of a bank now. He deals in the oil business and he's a millionaire. When he visits me in New York, he always brags what a wonderful time he's having in Moscow. When I ask: "What exactly do you do?" He says, "Well, first of all – I can buy any woman I like, I can go to any restaurant..." I ask, "But how do you spend your day?" He says he's working 13 hours a day. He plays some tennis in the morning, then goes to work and sits there till the late evening, and this is seven days a week. So, he can buy a woman but he wouldn't even have time to spend with her. He wouldn't even have time to go to a concert. Is that a good life?

Leaving one country and moving to another doesn't solve anything. It changes the outward circumstances: people smile at you on the streets and they don't smell anymore. But that doesn't make your life more fun. I have learned more about people, while being here. I think I was too eager to trust people before... In Russia, we did not have to deal with many things I'm dealing with now: for instance, we did not lend money to each other because nobody had any money. We used to sit in kitchens and talk about literature. When you talk to someone about literature, it doesn't tell you much about who this person is, what he is capable of. Immigration puts everything in place, because here everybody has to deal with problems, and some people tend to solve their problems at the expense of others. I had to learn a hunter's instinct here. I had to learn to be careful with people, to be alert...

I lost my best friend here. He died of cancer, three years ago. He died in my hands. His wife and I cared for him in his last months, literally carried him to the bathroom and back. The year he died was the hardest year in my life. After he died, I stopped living the Russians ways. It was the moment when I realized that I had grown up, that I was an adult. Somebody said once that a boy becomes a man on the day his father dies. Maybe it's not exactly true, but some death should probably occur to shake you up. It tells you a certain phase in your life is over. When my friend died, the period of carelessness in my life came to an end. When he died, I realized I was alone in the world, and I was now my own family. My soul became stone-hard after that – but maybe that's the way it should be.

Infantilism is so characteristic of Soviet people because we never felt responsible for anything. We did not have to care about anything. We had to vote for one person out of one, buy the only brand of vodka that was available in the stores, share the same sausage and discuss the same article in the newspaper. We were juveniles. Russia still remains juvenile. That's why it throws itself from one extreme to another. It's scary

what's happening in Russia. Shukshin, a Russian writer, said once, "We never knew what it's like to live well. Why should we start now?" I wanted to know... That's why I left Russia.

SCIENTIFIC ELITE

14 Boris and Tatyana Girshovich, astronavigators

They are physicists who have followed their granddaughter to America. While in Russia, Boris helped design intercontinental ballistic missiles in the late 50s and moon landers in the 70s. Astropulsion, anti-semitism, and economics make a bitter-sweet mix.

Boris: Our story doesn't fall within the common category of immigrants' stories. We came here merely for personal reasons, not for political or economic ones. Although we never bore tender feelings for the Soviet Regime, this fact doesn't make us political refugees. Our reason to come here was not particularly cheery. We had two daughters once. One of them, the elder one, died in 1992, in Russia. She was 34 years old. When that happened, our second daughter, was already living in Chicago. She had always wanted to move to America and she did. She came to the United States with a work visa. Through her sister and her sister's husband at the time, she learned about some American business in Riga, Latvia, that was hiring young Russian people to work in American summer camps for kids from poor families.

Getting that job was extremely competitive. She had to travel to Riga for an interview. She passed it mainly for two reasons. First, as a kid, she had studied at a special English language oriented school, so her English was quite good. Second, she held a certificate of Masters of Sports in gymnastics. She got the job. She worked essentially for free. She earned only about \$300 for the entire season.

But she received room and board. She returned to us that year. But the next year, the director of the camp invited her to return. She took her husband and her two kids. Her husband started out as a kitchen aid in the camp, but as he was a highly qualified computer programs, he soon wrote a couple of recordkeeping programs for the camp. The camp director introduced him to a friend. Shortly after, he was hired by the Central Computer Department of MacDonald's, in Chicago. Soon, he and our daughter applied for refugee status and it was granted to them. That was the summer of 1991. Exactly at the same time my wife and I stood in the line of people defending the "White House" in Moscow against tanks, protecting democracy during the infamous events of August 1991.⁵

Anyway, when our eldest daughter died, she left three children: the boy and the girl from her first marriage, and a daughter from her second marriage – our youngest granddaughter. The two eldest, the boy and the girl, were taken by their father. And they still live with him and his family. The youngest one remained with us. Her father

⁵During four of five days in late August 1991, Gorbachev was arrested in Crimea, in his summer residence. The communists attempted to take power in Moscow: tanks were standing in front of the house of Soviets (which is called the "white house") ready to attack. People from all over Moscow gathered near the building to defend it with their bodies. Yeltsin was there. of course, giving inspiring speeches. People stood like this all night, but nothing happened in the end, because the tanks never attacked. Gorbachev was released and came back to Moscow. Still, it was a beginning of his fall and the rise of Yeltsin.

had not expressed any interest in her future. We both are quite old people. We were afraid we could't raise our granddaughter on our own.

She was one and a half year old when she came to live with us, she was emotionally scarred, as one can expect in a situation like that. She stayed with us for three years. And all that time we continued working. Tatyana Alexandrovna was working in a Moscow Aviation Institute. My wife has a Post Doctoral degree in Physics, she's an author of a couple of books, many dozens of articles. Her field is the Dynamics of Gases.

We decided to bring our granddaughter here, to hand her over to our youngest daughter, under her care. She wanted to adopt her niece. So, we got permission from her father and we finished all the paper work on adoption that had to be done in Russia. Then, we had to deliver the girl here, along with all the papers, and to hand her to our daughter in Chicago. That was not easy to do.

Tatiana: We knew, in fact, from the start, we would never leave Asya – our granddaughter – once she was here. We knew we wouldn't go back to Russia. She meant too much to us, we couldn't leave her behind. So, basically, we pretended that we were going to America for a short visit.

Boris: We then went to Pittsburgh, to visit my old friends who lived there. I have a couple of friends from my school years living in the US: one is in Pittsburgh, one in Dallas, and one in Boston. We went to a very special high school in Leningrad as kids. One of the most prominent schools in the city at the time. After I graduated from high school, I went to study at the Polytechnic University in Leningrad, Department of Physics and Mechanics, one of the most difficult to get into.

Tatiana: That's where we have met. (pause) His life in Russia was quite rich with experiences, not always pleasant ones. When graduating from a High School in 1949, he came to the graduation ceremony expecting to get a Gold medal, and he didn't get it. They said the reason was that in his final paper he didn't juxtapose enough Pushkin's poetry to Nekrasov's poetry. So, he got a B for the paper.

Boris: And with B for a final paper one couldn't hope to get any medal, even though the rest of my grades were As. Then, I had to go through entrance exams to the Polytechnic. There were nine of them. I got As in all of them. After that, the Chair of the Admissions Committee invited me for a chat. I had the same last name then, which didn't leave any doubts regarding my national identity. In 1949 Jews were still accepted in the Department, although already in limited numbers. Later, the doors of the Department would shut completely to people of my kind. Already then, I was the only Jewish person in my group.

Tatiana: And the year before that, there were plenty. So, that was the very beginning of it.

Boris: So, the Chair of the Admissions Committee who was also the Director of the office that dealt with student profiles tried to convince me for about an hour not to go to Department of Physics and Mechanics. "It's a lot of pressure" he told me. "A lot of hard work – you'll be failed after the first semester if your grades are not good enough, and then what? You will be kicked out of school. Why don't you go to

the Department of Electrical Mechanics instead. It's a great Department... Some great people are teaching there – really lovely people.” But I kept repeating stubbornly: “No, I want to study here...” We kept talking like this for an hour. Finally he turned crimson red and said: “All right, but you'll regret this later.” (laughs)

Tatiana: He didn't get a single B in all his years at school – only As.

Boris: Again, for some reason, they didn't give me a Stalin Scholarship.

Tatiana: I remember I kept asking him why he wasn't getting the Stalin Scholarship. I was so naive, I had no idea there was any anti-Semitism, whatsoever. It never even crossed my mind. We studied in parallel groups at the department. I studied with Prof. Laschansky.

Boris: I studied with Lurie, studying among other things the theories of resiliency and elasticity. When I graduated from the department, the Chair of the Commission assigning jobs to students invited me for a talk. He told me: there are two job possibilities for you: the first one is Workshop Foreman at the Watch factory... (smiles) but in Leningrad. So, I get a chance to stay in Leningrad. The other one: is in Lavochkin's firm in the suburbs of Moscow, but no housing guaranteed.

Well, Lavochkin was famous for designing fighter planes during the Second World War. After the war he did many things. Since 1965, his firm remained the leader in the aviation industry in the Soviet Union. It was that firm that developed the first automated space stations, such as 'Luna', 'Mars', 'Venus'. Anyway, I didn't go to work at a watch factory, of course. I went to Lavochkin. (pause) I couldn't understand at the time why I was offered such a dream-job. Later I understood.

The reason was quite simple: Semyen Alexeevich Lavochkin was Jewish. He was a Jew from Smolensk. And because of the closeness of his firm to the top circles, he – the last and only in the country – was allowed to hire Jews. He had a mandate, from Beria⁶ personally that had allowed him to take in all the Jews kicked out of all other places: from the Central Institute of Aviation, Korolev's laboratory in Lipki, etc.. He gave jobs to all these people, and his Department of Control System became the strongest in the country, as did his Department of Aerodynamics, etc. Therefore, the kind of work his lab did was ten, fifteen years ahead of its time. He died in 1960.

In 1959, we in his lab conducted the successful testing of a rocket that flew a distance of 8000 kilometers. It was the first in the world to have a system of astro-navigational correction in its trajectory. It could hit the area of the target with an error not exceeding 1 km. We continued to test the rocket in 1960, but soon the project was closed down, partly because of Lavichkin's death and partly because of the changes in the Government. Khrushchev came to power, and other Engineer-Designer-in-Chiefs happened to have a 'long hand' in the new Government. Personal connections decided everything. (pause)

But what an amazing rocket that was! All of the Soviet PVO (Air Defense Forces) failed to detect the rocket in its flight from Vladimirovka, near Stalingrad, all the way to Kamchatka, across the entire country. None of the planes existing in the

⁶Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria was head of the secret police and national security under Stalin from 1938 until Stalin's death

world at the time would have been capable of destroying it. The rocket was shot from a railroad platform. It was huge, about 100 tons in weight. It resembled the later-designed U.S. Space Shuttle in its design: two accelerators, the shape of a plane: a rocket with wings. Marshall Zhukov, when coming to inspect the rocket on the plant, would ask a single question: “You think, it would make it to America?” (laughs). “It would, Uriy Kostantinovich” we’d reply, and he’d leave satisfied.

Anyway, I came to the firm right after graduation and I remained there until my departure from Russia. After Lavochkin died, the firm switched from aviation to work for Cosmos (the Space Program). The reason was obvious: Korolev, who started most of the Cosmos programs, couldn’t cope with all of them in the end. Other firms were called to help him. Some of Korolev’s jobs were passed on to us. Korolev, for instance, couldn’t provide the soft landing of a station on the Moon’s surface. He made thirteen shots, none of them resulted in successful landings. But, a year after the project was passed to us, we made it work.

I’ve always enjoyed my work. I never felt it was particularly appreciated by my country. The Soviet regime collapsed in the end because the system failed to recognize the disparity among people. Gifted people, people capable of doing something, weren’t getting for their work what they deserved. Still, I was in a privileged position. As my friend and colleague has put it once when I ran into him on a bus, in 1993 — things were already falling apart in the industry and in the country — “All our lives we were paid big salaries for doing what we liked. Now it’s payback time.” That was true. We did the work we enjoyed doing, but was it ever appreciated? No.

We delivered the first soil from the Moon, it was in September of 1970. We designed a spacecraft that took a sample of soil from the Moon and landed back on Earth. The whole thing was done on the first try. After that, we attempted to patent this particular way of delivering soil from the Moon. There were eleven people involved in the project, mentioned as authors. I was one of them. It took many years for the papers to get through. Babakin (the Director of the firm after Lavochkin) was already dead. Then the whole thing got stuck, because the management that came after Babakin were not among the list of authors. They didn’t take part in the project, so we didn’t put them in. Anyway, finally the invention was registered and we were paid for it. Each of us received one month’s salary as a bonus. Here we are talking about the first spacecraft to bring soil from the moon.

I knew I would never be able to get official permission to leave Russia — because of the kind of work I was involved in all my life. They simply would not have let me go. When I applied for a visitor’s visa to come to America, I was denied it. My wife got her visa in a month. I could not get it. Then I wrote a letter of resignation from my job. We had to solve the situation with our granddaughter, one way or another. I said: “I’ll wait as many years as needed till my knowledge of my country’s military secrets would be reduced... to a harmless level. Then I’ll leave.” Of course, in some instances, even a period of 15 years proved not to be enough for that: it all depends on the people who decide which extent of knowing is considered harmless. Anyway, then my boss told me: “If you don’t quit, if you stay on your job — we’ll put your name on the list of employees

considered for business trips abroad. This way you'll get your foreign passport. And then, whenever you need to go, we'll give it to you."

So, I agreed They put my name on the list. I was sent to the International Cosmos Exhibition in Thailand where our firm presented a couple of exhibits. I stayed there for a month, working as a guide. The following year I came to America for a visit. And the year after that for another visit. The third time we all came and stayed here. I never officially quit my job. I kept extending my stay, even after living here for a year. They expected me to come back. Then my wife had to undergo surgery and one thing led to another. It couldn't drag it out forever. Finally, I called my boss. He is a good friend of mine, and recently became an Engineer Designer-in-Chief of our enterprise. I told him: "I'm not coming back. I'm sorry things turned out this way. But there's nothing I can do. It's just the way it is." He replied: "That is life. I understand".

Here, we applied for green cards, as part of the program for outstanding scientists. We got them. At the application time, we were supposed to present only a proof of a job offer. Later, when receiving the green cards, we had to present evidence of employment, which we didn't have. Luckily, a friend helped us to find jobs as translators at TTI (Technical Translators International). It's a translating agency contracted by NASA, translating, among others, all the documentation on the Shuttle-MIR program. I've been working there for almost a year, as a staff editor. My wife serves there as a contractor.

We knew English in Russia. For the most part, it was passive knowledge. We were able to translate some scientific documentation and articles. We used to make extra money in Russia this way. Our conversational English was always bad, and it remains quite bad. But the fact that we know the subject, and know it, unlike many other translators, from the inside, helps a lot in our present job. I don't do too much translating myself. I mainly work as an editor. Sometimes, I see the mistakes in documentation I have to revise – and not translator's mistakes, but flaws in the design... engineering mistakes. At first, when discovering them, I would report them to my bosses. Later I realized that I'm not supposed to do that. My job is simply to verify the translation, no more than that. A few of my friends tried to help me find a job in my field. I sent my resumes to a couple of places. There was no reaction. Well, I did have an interview at NASA once – for an engineering position – and I was promised a second interview. I could see the person interviewing me was very interested in getting me in, but nothing happened. I believe I know the reasons. First, it's my age. Then my bad English. The third reason is I'm overqualified. That's a big obstacle. I can't hope to get the position at the same level I had in Russia. All these positions are taken. And people who occupy them would only view me as a competitor. Maybe, I made a mistake by writing the truth in my resume. I should've just written 'an engineer'.

The irony is, that I'm translating the documentation read in Russia by people whom I know very well, people I've been working with for many years. I try to keep a philosophical approach to it all. I realize I probably won't have a chance to work in my profession anymore. I'm glad I've found at least some job here, a steady job. One has to be realistic. My biggest hope is to achieve a certain stability, not to be afraid of

tomorrow. And, also, to be able to travel including back to Russia.

If not for our grand-daughter, I wouldn't have left Russia. I could've worked for another ten years, maybe. (pause) But after that – we'd be left with nothing. Surviving on a pension was impossible. We didn't save anything. All the money we were earning was hardly enough to sustain the average level of living: to pay for the apartment, to keep the car, to buy groceries. We couldn't save any money. Here, our situation is quite similar. We are not refugees, so we are not entitled to any support from the Government, like welfare. We can only count on ourselves. If we manage to save some money to support us when we can't work anymore – I'd consider us lucky.

Tatiana: I have no hope to find a job in my profession here. Age is a big obstacle...

Boris: Of course, if I were offered a professional job here, I would take it without hesitation. Particularly, because most of the upcoming projects in space are joint Russian/American ventures. In 1970, our company designed the Lunohod (Moonwalker) operated from Earth. It landed on the Moon in November 1970. The American Mars-walker, which is on Mars now, is basically a copy of that Moonwalker we made. The basic technological ideas are the same. Of course, all our drafts and schemes were published in books.

The situation in Russian science and industry now is very tragic, not only because the funding has been and continues being reduced, that's happening all over the world. The entire field of space studies is too closely related to the defense industry, in fact it grew out of it. One can't ignore that. But what makes it particularly tragic in Russia is that loss of the best minds, the drain of young specialists from science into commerce, or emigration. One generation is already lost, and if the next one is lost, too, there would be nothing but a barren place left. The chain would be broken.

Of course, this growing cooperation between Russians and Americans might give it a chance to survive. (pause) We've always been competing with America. Actually, there were quite a few funny episodes that I recall. Like, our first attempt to land the Moon-walker coincided with the arrival on the Moon of the Apollo 11. These two events had literally coincided in time. Unfortunately, our Moon-walker crashed during the landing due to some flaws in the program.

At that very moment when it crashed – Armstrong was already walking on the surface of the Moon. And the seismograph he installed registered our fall. (laughs). So, the Americans were the first to know about it – what an embarrassment! Here is another funny episode: when our Luna -9 made the first full panorama of the Moon, the picture was transmitted to Earth through an open channel. So, anybody could receive it. The first to receive it happened to be Lowell, the British Astronomer. He received the panorama, and he published it two days earlier than it was published in Moscow Pravda. That happened because the transmission took place on Friday, and on the weekend our entire Politburo was resting. There was nobody to sign the letter allowing publication of the materials.

When perestroika came, I couldn't help feeling a little suspicious. It was hard to believe that we had a General Secretary capable of walking and talking on his own. He

was not a half-corpse and he was giving speeches without prompting, without constantly looking in a paper in front of him. I think Gorbachev's role is strongly underestimated now... If not for him, everything could have turned differently.

It's amazing, how – once it became apparent that Communist party wouldn't last much longer – signs appeared on the doors of all the managing committees: such and such Shareholders' Company. In one day – the entire enterprise turned into the property of those party bosses, those dullheads. They grabbed all the money.

By 1995, a complete loss of lawfulness, of any kind. People who had money could do whatever they want. There was nothing and nobody to stop them. One night, it was winter, and we were driving home after picking up our granddaughter at the day care. It was already dark, and snow was piled up on the road. There was only one narrow lane available. So, I was pulling out of the day care's – driving along that narrow lane, it was maybe 100 meters long and I drove through more than half of it. Suddenly I saw another car entering the lane and driving towards me. I gave a signal, meaning: let me get out first, then you can drive in. But the car kept moving. I stopped my car – he did the same. I was waiting for him to back up and let me go first. He did not. Then I opened the door of my car, slightly, not leaving the car. The door of the other car opened, too, and a huge fellow – 2 meters in size, with his head shaved – came out. He walked right to me and shouted: "Pull back." I tried to explain: "Can't you see: I made it almost to the end... Let me get out, and it's all yours." "If you don't pull back – I'll throw a grenade" he said, very calmly. Well, I pulled back...I had a child in my car. And I believed – he would've thrown his grenade... without any hesitation he would.

Sometimes, violence didn't seem to have any reason behind it. In the building where we lived, somebody blew off all the windows in a hallway. The janitors put cardboard in the holes. About a week later, they blew up all the card board. Then the janitors covered the holes with lumber. In a week, lumber was gone, too. After that – the windows stayed wide open, free for the wind to blow...

Translating for NASA, I have a chance to watch their system at work and compare it to ours. Some things are very strange to me. People at different steps of the process perform certain functions, but often have no idea of the process as a whole. The first time I saw a mistake in the original documentation, I called a publisher at NASA. The publisher had no idea what I was talking about. He called a specialist at NASA, who had no clue either. Only after four telephone calls – to Washington, then to Canada – were we able to find a person who confirmed that there was a mistake and that it should be corrected. That means that documentation passes through several official channels, where people who deal with it have no understanding of it whatsoever. That can lead to a disaster. In Russia, we have a different approach. One person was responsible for the project, from the very beginning to the very end. He developed it, he performed all the calculations, issued all the documentation, tested the project, and followed its life – making all the necessary adjustments and corrections along the way. He did it on his own or with the help of his staff, but whenever something went wrong – it's the author who was called and asked what to do. Here, everything is done according

to instructions. Maybe, that's why the instructions on how to assemble a book shelf are written in such a way that even a complete idiot would do it. But there are some situations that require decisions to be made in a matter of seconds. How they deal with situations like that is a mystery to me. Here, a person who presses the buttons on the operating console and controls the flight of a space ship is not the one who designed that ship. He doesn't know all the intricacies of the design, he simply has read the instructions. To me, that's complete nonsense. Well, here it's a rule.

15 Konstantin Likharev, physicist

He has been teaching at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in Long Island since 1990. Before that, he taught at Moscow University's Physics Department for many years. He loved to compete with American physicists, showing off what underpaid scientists could do. He moved to America because that was the only chance for him to continue his work and to save his laboratory. He remains intoxicated with his work.

I lived in Moscow and worked all of my adult life at Moscow University, in the Department of Physics. My final two years there I served as a Director of the Laboratory of cryo-electronics (low temperature electronics). For a period of time we did very interesting work, but then, finally in June 1990 when the Soviet Union became bankrupt and lost all its hard currency funds, we were told quite clearly the laboratory wouldn't be financed anymore.

It was a high profile laboratory. In 1988, I once presented findings at the Politburo of the Central Committee of KPSS and even shook hands with Gorbachev. Anyway, the whole thing burst like a soap bubble. By June 1990 we literally had no work left to do. So, I went to America to see if some of our research could be moved here. I had quite a tour. I visited 26 places in two and half months, universities and different companies. I was looking for a job not only for myself, but for the core of our research group, which made it much more difficult. Employers in America have a personal approach to hiring, meaning they like to interview people, look them in the eyes, et cetera. I was trying to sell people whom nobody could see, and whom nobody knew in person, though they were known by their work. Anyway, finally I was able to form what they call here a package: three people were hired by the Department of Physics at Stony Brook, and three others by a small firm called Hypress, not far from Stony Brook. We had a cooperative agreement, meaning basically that our groups would work together.

After that I went back to Moscow, packed my staff and moved. Now, we have a big team of Russians here, what my secretary calls a pipeline. There are two full professors here: Dima Averin and me.

There are also quite a few Russian PostDocs, some research scientists, and so on. And there are students. Some people are studying here; some come from Moscow on a regular basis to do some work here, then they go back.

The research that I do lies somewhere in the intersection of solid state physics and electronics. Basically, we create devices based on new principles of physics. We often say proudly that there are two major trends in our work: one is that we create the most rapid electronic devices in the world; and the other one is that we create the smallest, the most compact electronic devices in the world. Both of these trends, which we had proposed some time ago, are becoming more and more popular in America now.

For many Russians scientists, coming to America wasn't easy. I was in better position than the rest because I had had the experience of living abroad. Back in the eighties, despite the fact that I wasn't a party member, some good people – at first Kxokhlov, a rector of Moscow University, and then Velikhov, a Vice President of the

Academy of Science – gave me two big breaks. Without asking the permission of the Central Party Committee, they pushed me out of the country into America, where I spent a couple of months each time. It was almost a miracle at that time: to be able to visit America twice and not be accompanied by any KGB officers. Anyway, I had this experience and I knew what life here was like.

People should stay in their country, where they have cultural roots and share a cultural background. All these little things that you absorb from childhood. There is nothing good about living in a country that is not yours. America is a good country, but it's not mine. What really helps, is that I'm not really living here, I'm working here. I joke sometimes, that I simply moved from room E11901A to room B135.

I didn't know Russia that well, either. I was working too hard. In some ways, I know America better. Here I can travel, at least. In Russia it was impossible: all these problems with hotel reservations. The cities I knew in Russia were Leningrad, Kharkov and Kiev, that's all. I was in Novosibirsk once, but I never reached the Baikal lake. And here I travel often, at least once in two weeks I take a little vacation around the United States. So, formally speaking, I know America better than I knew Russia. But it's only formally speaking. Because there's also the culture – the layers of it that you begin to absorb from the time you're two weeks old. I can't say I know American culture. And considering the amount of time I spend at work, I feel pretty hopeless about ever knowing it.

I miss Russia. I often see it in my dreams. I see a ski track I used to take, near Moscow. I often follow it in my dream, at night. I can count every little hillock on that route. Well, those are just little, insignificant things. The biggest tragedy is what happened to people. I can speak mostly for scientists, I know them better.

People were told in a loud and compelling voice: “You guys, just learn and everything is going to be fine. We need you. Our science and industry can't survive without you.” And then, it happened that nobody needed them. Big science was just a toy in the hands of military industrial complex, and when that began to fall apart – nobody else needed big science. The country's industry wasn't developed enough. Even America doesn't need it that much anymore. Here science was also a toy in the hands of military industrial complex, and now when it shrunk, science has suffered. The situation here, particularly in physics, particularly in fundamental research, is terrible. There are not many jobs.

So, even in America, science is in desperate situation. In Russia, it's much more so. Scientists are unemployed. There is no work for them at all. Some were more lucky, because they knew other languages, or they had some connections. They managed to leave. Young people, like my son, changed their occupation and went into business. Some did it gladly. They're young, and limber; they actually enjoy the change. But people older than 35, they're stuck. And it's not only a question of money. People feel useless. You can't keep telling a person for thirty years that he's needed, and then suddenly, tell him he's useless. There are so many suicides in Moscow now.

Some well known scientists have committed suicide. In Russia today they're like fish out of water; their lives have lost purpose. Because for people like me, work is

almost everything. I've recently counted – I'm working 76 hours a week now. You can do such a thing only if you believe somebody needs you. And if you're told one day that nobody needs you, it's a tragedy.

I heard of somebody in Russia who went on a hunger strike recently, because salaries weren't paid to people. I think it was the Director of the Physics and Earth Institute in Moscow. Everybody laughed, because nobody cares. Who needs these physics and earth experts nowadays?

So, what I'm trying to say is that it's a two-sided process. On one side, it's a positive and inevitable process of balancing. Because the truth of the matter is Russia can't have more scientists than America has, because Russia's national wealth wouldn't allow it to. On the other hand, it's causing millions, literally, millions of personal tragedies.

Only a small percentage of Russian scientists left the country. One of the reasons is that there were only a few scientific fields operating on a level of world class. Those fields are: some Mathematics, most of Physics and some selective areas of Engineering, like Aviation engineering, for instance. But even in the most developed fields, like Physics, the percentage of actual emigrants is very small. But the thing is, even those who remain in the country, become emigrants, because they leave science.

They can't survive on their salaries. The average salary in a Governmental Institution is about 48 dollars a month. Even if he keeps his job, he has to think constantly of how to find other sources of income, and his work loses efficiency. Science requires concentration. You can't afford to think of other matters. So, basically it doesn't matter if the person goes to "outer" or "inner" emigration – in any case he leaves science. And if I try to count the percentage of scientists who have left science, well, I can say almost all of them did. Nobody is paid enough to be able to work, almost nobody.

I know some really good scientific teams that were erased from the face of the earth. As for my laboratory, I remember not long before I left I had counted the number of Ph.D.s in my laboratory. It was 26. Only four of them are still in Moscow.

Science is a funny thing. If you work only a little today, tomorrow you won't remember what you did. I think if a physicist works less than a 40 hour week, he's wasting his time. Then, after a certain point, the increase in the outcome goes up abruptly. You can invest only 2% more effort, but make twice as big an impact. It's an engaging, intoxicating process – and a little nightmarish. You can keep going on for a long time, and then, suddenly, stop and be unable to go on any longer. One can easily go crazy. Some people do, actually, go into mental institutions. In Moscow, right across the street from the Moscow University, Physics Department, there was the Soloviev Mental Hospital. And sure enough, about one third of the faculty spent their vacation in this lovely place. You can joke about it, but it's serious.

Here, I can stay focused on my work. I don't have to stand in line to buy potatoes, or anything else, like in Russia. But, again, there is such a thing as a cultural space. You may not notice its presence, but you always feel its absence, and you suffer from it. In Russia there was a theory that if at least once a week you didn't take a walk,

and look at objects that are not rectangular, like trees, or leaves, or birds, eventually you would go crazy. I don't know if it's true, but it doesn't contradict my observations. The thing is, nobody ever tells one anything about the importance of other things beyond work, like one's cultural surroundings.

Things like a chat with a friend, things that you often think of as a waste of time. But when you lose them, you feel bad. That's why clusters of Russians are forming now in America. Just as in Russia before perestroika, there were clusters of Jewish people. The reason for such clusters was obvious. People were protecting themselves against anti-Semitism. If somebody happened to make a nest in some place, he immediately started bringing his own people into the nest, protecting the nest from intruders.

Here, it's different. Nobody attacks you. There's no anti-Russian or anti-Soviet mood. It's just easier for people to be with their own kind. Like our Russian pipeline here – the reason why it was created and why it keeps working is, probably, people's unconscious desire to recreate the Russian cultural atmosphere where they can breathe. In Russia we didn't need a Russian community. You could go anywhere, to a bar, to a liquor store, and talk to ordinary people. Here we don't have the opportunity to communicate with common people. We're locked within our circle.

I could go to a bar here, too. But I won't understand a word around me. My English is quite good, but there are cultural references I can't understand. One has to start from kindergarten in this country to understand those references.

Stony Brook is a good place to work. People are friendly, and there're no intrigues. They're strong professionally. You have to work hard if you don't want to fall behind. I like it. In Moscow I was spoiled a little bit. I was considered a star, a quasi-star, maybe. Here I have to keep running with my tongue sticking out, just not to be left behind. Because the average level here is much higher than in Russia.

Another thing I like about American science is the financing. In Russia all the money came from the top, from the Government and it was distributed by the presidium of the Academy of Science, which directed it to research institutes. Then the director of each institute would distribute the money to departments and laboratories. The entire system was based on the false premise, that if the Director of some Institute was a Nobel laureate, it automatically made him capable of controlling and managing the work of four thousand people. Landau, one of the greatest Russian scientists, used to say that a person can't have more than three people under his supervision. And this was taken as a rule in his institute.

Unfortunately, not in all the others. Everything but science determined where money would go, factors like: who's whose friend, and who's better liked by the boss, and so on. So, now, when I look at what's happening in Russian science, along with a feeling of great sadness, I feel a certain satisfaction. The Academy of Science is in a very poor state right now, and the members of the Academy feel miserable. They simply don't have money, so they wander along the corridors, complaining to each other. Nobody is kissing their feet anymore, and that gives me satisfaction. Here the system is different – it's a system of grants. Of course, it's not an ideal system. There're a lot of stupidity and envy involved. But at least you can compete for your money. That's why, here

you won't find such obscure, dark, outdated science like what we had in Russia. Such practices have no chance for survival here.

Some people complain that the system of grants allows all kinds of speculations, that people who more often and loudly repeat the words "new" and "newest" and "advanced" get the better chance. That's true, in a way. There's no ideal system. But at least, people have to stay up-to-date. In every department twenty percent of people aren't able to get any grants anymore. They're usually given more of a teaching load. In order to teach undergraduates, one doesn't have to be up-to-date in science. They're teaching what was happening in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The other nice thing is that you compete for grants in Washington. So if you are on bad terms with colleagues in your own department, if you had a quarrel with somebody, it won't affect the decision. And it's easy to stay on good terms with your colleagues, because you don't compete with them. In Russia everybody was fighting for funds. Every Director had his favorites and black sheep among the Laboratory Chiefs. This constant squabble was making life miserable. Here it doesn't exist. And that's nice.

My future largely depends on the situation in Russia. If I decide to go back now there would be nothing for me to do there. Russia will need my work in another fifty years, maybe. It makes me feel sad, but not guilty. Of course, I wish it didn't happen this way. I wish Russia was a strong country with advanced science and industry. I wish I could work there, beating Americans with our results. That would be wonderful.

I remember such moments, in Russia, going to a conference and making a report that would cause the Americans to turn green with envy, then white with shock. I'd prefer it that way. I'd prefer to live in my own country.

My son is in Moscow now. He went into business. It's difficult, of course, but things are happening. New companies rise and go bust. People are trying to form new industries. It's a struggle. And it's life. My daughter is here and she's married to an American. She's spent a significant part of her life here, I don't think she would ever go back.

The thing is, I'm too old to change my occupation, to go into an entirely different field. If I were younger, I would probably do that, without any reservations. I believe Russia is a country of immense opportunity right now. If one wants to believe in Russia's great future then one realizes that the foundation for this future is being laid now. Later these years will be remembered as legendary. People will write memoirs about these times, as they write about the times of J.P. Morgan, or Vanderbilt here. Those were fantastic times: violent, crude, greedy, but... big times.

I went back to Russia in 1993. It was great. For the first time I saw the expression of freedom on people's faces. Before they had an expression of misery, like they were beaten up or walked over. The expression of people who can't control their lives. And now it was an expression of independent, sovereign people, busy people. They may not smile much – smiling is a rare thing in Russia – but they're doing something important, they're building their lives. I liked that a lot. And that was 1993, still a very difficult year for Russia. I remember, I stopped to buy a book for my grandson.

I paid the money, I picked up the book, and suddenly something I had heard caught my attention, something very unusual. I tried to figure out what it was, and suddenly realized it was “Thank you.” The sales woman had said, “Thank you”. For the first time in my fifty years in Russia I heard a sale person say “thank you” without any nervous strain in her voice. It was fantastic.

BUSINESS

16 Tatiana Alexa, 30 years old, former doctor turned business-woman

In Russia she graduated from the best medical school in the country. She switched to business in search of income. It often proved risky. Maybe it was her common sense that helped her to survive in the situations that proved to be fatal to many strong and overconfident men. She came to New York to try something new. She now runs an internet business.

In Russia my life was rolling down a smooth, pretty much predictable path. At least in the beginning.

I grew up in a big, loving family I had a very happy childhood. I graduated from high school with a gold medal. I was accepted to the best medical institute in Moscow. It was one of the best medical schools in the country, the hardest to get into. Things became interesting for me after my graduation, after I finished my six years at College and received the long anticipated medical degree. It was 1989.

The situation in the country had changed, and suddenly, it turned out, neither me nor my professional education was in demand. 1989 was the last year when the State was allocating all the College graduates around the country, assigning them to specific job places. Now everybody has to find a job for himself.

But I was among the last ones whose “fate” was determined by a State Allocation Commission. I didn’t come from a medical family, so I didn’t have any strong connections in my field. The best I could hope for was a position of a regular staff therapist in one of the many district clinics in Moscow. That was not what I wanted to do. I was a very ambitious student. In fact, in my last year at School, I got involved in scientific research work, assisting one of my professors. The project was very interesting, and very promising. If successfully completed, it could have had a shot for a Nobel Prize. It dealt with what’s known in medicine as “lung shock”, a condition caused by a stress situation, like trauma or intoxication, that results in a swelling of a lung and often causes death.

The approach to the problem was not standard, our research lab was predominantly composed of young people like myself. It all seemed very exciting. Unfortunately, I could not persuade the Allocation Commission at my School to assign me to the laboratory. But I found a way around their decision, to work closely with the lab without being assigned to it officially. The fact that I could get away with it – with doing something I, myself, wanted, not what the State ordered me to do, was a sign of changing times. Before, something like that was simply inconceivable.

But those were the last years of Soviet Regime, its twilight. Although most of the procedures remained, there was no content left. They had turned into pure formalities. The system was dead.

My graduation coincided with the beginning of a severe inflation in the country. In the six months after I began to work as doctor in a hospital (at the same time

continuing my research work), I found that my salary was not enough to buy food. It didn't happen in one day, of course. In the first month or two, my salary, 110 rubles, seemed like pretty good money. After a year, it was nothing. Those years after college turned out to be the most financially difficult years of my life. I had a family by that time, my husband was a doctor, too, we both were employed, but we could hardly survive on our salaries, especially after our child was born.

When my parents came to visit us, I often had nothing to put on the table but tea and jam. It was making me feel very uncomfortable. I was raised in a hospitable, generous home, and that was what I wanted my home to be. The fact that I couldn't do it, that I had nothing to offer my guests, was torture for my self-esteem, that was the second reason why I decided to leave medicine. The first one was that our laboratory was closed down, due to lack of financing despite the fact that the subject of our research was so important. On top of that, my work as a doctor brought me a lot of disappointment. I often had to cure my patients with the power of words rather than with medications, as the latter were simply absent. I am not talking about the deficiency in some complicated medical or surgical equipment, but a minimal therapist's kit, first aid medications, including pain relievers. I had to write prescriptions based on what the hospital or a pharmacy had on stock, not what my patients needed.

All the big changes in the country coincided with my entering adult life. Before that I was simply a student, a mother's girl, I spent ten years in school, than six years in college. I followed a route known in advance. My life was completely predictable, I knew exactly what would happen to me tomorrow. And then, suddenly it all stopped.

I was out of school and nobody was giving me any deadlines or schedules. I was completely on my own. I had to make my own decisions. I was a doctor. I had patients I was responsible for. And the fact that I couldn't help them the way I wanted, the way I was supposed to, hit me very hard. And, still, even though I didn't have the right means in my disposal, I had to account for their health and well being as if I did. Recently, I spent a couple of days in an American hospital. The difference was shocking. Here, the examination of a patient involves a series of tests, and depending on the results of the previous test the following test is determined. Only after all tests are complete, and results are received, can a doctor come up with a final diagnosis. In Russia, the equipment was so poor that most of the time doctors had to diagnose their patients not after, but prior, or even instead of testing. In fact, the talent of a doctor was measured by his ability to diagnose with a minimum of testing, merely by touch. Another reason for that was to reduce the length of patient's stay in the hospital. Hospitals were overcrowded, patients often were put in corridors and hallways.

The first medical cooperatives started to form around that time, the first private medical enterprises. I got a taste of it. The summer of 1989 I went to Samarkand with one of such first cooperatives. From Samarkand we were sent to a small village right on the border between Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. We spent three days there. Our entrepreneur decided to make money by bringing young doctors from Moscow to this remote place, equipped, as the advertisement said, "with the most modern, most advanced, most up-to-date medical equipment." Except, we didn't have this modern,

up-to-date equipment. All we brought with us was an ultra sound device for examining hearts, the most useless in this environment, where the main health issue was trivial stomach pain, a liver disorder caused by greasy, fatty food. We took this thing because it was the only portable equipment we could find.

The villagers called us “Moscow doctors with a TV.” The whole purpose was to show off, to make an impression on villagers by examining their stomachs not with our bare fingers but with some metallic thing instead. So we were examining peoples’ stomachs with this heart diagnostic device, seeing one thing on screen and telling an entirely different thing to a patient. We were telling them what we knew was the problem. In the end, the treatment we prescribed was the right one. But the whole thing reminded me of a cheap show. You had to perform certain manipulations in order to win the patient’s trust. If you didn’t lie to him, he would not believe you. Anyway, that was my first and last experience with medical cooperatives. The good thing about it was that I went to a restaurant, for the first time in my life, after I came back to Moscow. We all went to a restaurant called Prague, and spent almost all the money we made.

I had to take a break from medicine when my child was born in 1991. It gave me time to think. I realized I don’t have much of a chance to do what I wanted to if I stuck with medicine. My husband worked as a surgeon. For a while, we had to live on his salary and my maternity leave compensation. We couldn’t afford buying new clothes for our daughter, she was dressed in used clothes. Everything she had on her or around, her stroller, her diapers even, came from my girlfriends who had had their children earlier. A few times I received a humanitarian aid packages. There was some dry milk in each package, disposable diapers: Pampers. I stretched that one pack of Pampers for quite a long time, I used them on holidays, or for doctor visits.

A couple of my friends, doctors who were left without jobs after our laboratory was closed, went into business. They started their own business that had no relation to medicine. They invited me to work for them. My child was 7 months old. I went to work as a secretary in their office. In my first week there, I had to clean the entire office – they had just moved to a new apartment. There was no office space open for rent in Moscow at that time, so apartments were used as offices. For a week I cleaned the apartment. It was the first step in my business career. But the new commercial enterprises were developing so rapidly at that time; the changes in business law were so quick to come that it was a time of great opportunity for anyone who could think unconventionally. In less than six months I made my way from a secretary of the firm to one of the partners.

Our business operations varied from residential construction in Moscow to all kinds of financial operations. We created a financial group that served as a liaison between banks and new commercial structures, seeking out both financing and investments for our clients. We weren’t exactly intermediaries, as we were financially responsible to the banks and companies we worked with. Our financial activities allowed us to grow very quickly. By the time I left the company, in 1995, we had about 10 firms under our umbrella, including one construction company, one airline, a freight transportation company, a small trade company involved in retail sales, and a number of other smaller

companies. We didn't own all these companies, we were shareholders, holding from 10% to 30% of the shares.

I was responsible for coordinating the financing of these companies, all funds went through my hands. I made decisions on investing, reinvesting, distributing the profits, tax allocations. All that had to be done while respecting the inflation in the country and changes in the currency rates. I learned quickly, but the laws changed very quickly too. I had to keep up. I took a course at the Financial Academy. It didn't teach me anything new, it simply gave a theoretical basis to what I learned from experience.

The main thing was to know the rules of the game. The first rule was: people. Business is made by and between people, it's about relationships, about knowing how to communicate with people. Here, in America, the general rule is sales, it's about the ability to sell yourself, your product, the firm that stands behind you. In Russian business at that time, it was about knowing how to make contacts quickly, literally in a moment. You had to evaluate the situation quickly, deciding how useful you could be to the other person, how useful he could be to you. And it was about knowing whom to trust. It was impossible to check anybody's credit history. Nobody had any credit history. The oldest businesses were hardly one year old. There was no way to know for sure who you were dealing with, who is telling you the truth and who isn't. It was all about your intuition, your ability to read people's minds, your ability to take risks – but only justified risks. Of course, I had to trust the people I worked with. Without trust I could not have done anything, everything was scary: it's like you know you could be deceived, robbed, killed, your child could be kidnapped. Anything could happen. The entire business was based on intuition and luck.

Another important rule I learned very fast, was not to make enemies. Never take any disagreements to the point of confrontation. Because there is no way you can protect yourself, there is no way to be safe in the country where there is no law to protect you. Anything can happen. The only way I could protect myself was not to get into hazardous situations if possible, but, if I did, if I got stuck, the only way was to go for a settlement. Always.

It was scary, of course. I had a small child. I didn't keep bodyguards in the beginning.

Business was like a game to me, a game in which I could win or lose. Losing money didn't bother me much. In the worst case, I would end up where I had started. The money was coming easily and going easily. It was the game that mattered to me, money was merely a measure of success in this game. Money meant I was good in what I was doing, it was like a prize for a good work.

Before, while doing the medical research work, I was shooting for a Nobel prize. Now it was money. The fun was in building the house, not making money. Of course, I knew the house could fall apart any minute, because it was made of playing cards. (pause) Money changed my life style significantly. I could afford to keep a personal car with a driver (chauffeur) six days a week. I could afford to buy myself an apartment of the size I wanted, and in the part of Moscow I liked. I could afford to travel. Every three, four months I would leave the country and go for a trip, I went all around Europe

in those years. In the meantime, most of my friends stayed on the same level, making barely enough money to survive.

Members of my own family were left without jobs including my parents, my cousins, my uncle, and my sister. I had a big family and we were always very close. I felt I was responsible for them. Anyway, I did something quite silly from a business point of view. I gave jobs to all the members of my family that needed jobs. Later, I found myself to be a hostage of this situation. Working with people close to you makes it hard to ask the same from them as from regular employees. Besides, every mistake they make hits you harder than any mistake of an employee. It's terrible to feel that you've been set up by your close ones. I had a couple of situations when my relatives would give out information they shouldn't have given out, thus putting me in a very difficult situation. The issue of confidentiality was a big issue in business at that time. Things like who you are, and what you own, who are your allies, whom you trust and whom you don't trust, it was important to keep all this confidential, not to give any clues to the wrong people. It was a matter of security.

The third, very important rule I discovered for myself was not to go to the wrong places. I could always sense those dangerous, forbidden areas, like some voice was telling me: "You can go here, it's all right, but not there, never go there, under any circumstances don't go there." And I never did.

Being a businesswoman in Russia was not easy. My enemies would gossip that I achieved success because I slept with right people. I never slept with anybody, and I never had any such intention. I didn't think I was less smart than the men I met in business, I believed I was smarter than many of them. My abilities, my skills were my only privilege, and I didn't want to have any other. I had a partner, he and I, we owned the company together, each had 50% of shares. We had to make all the decisions together. We had a veto rule, which meant any decision can be made only if we both agreed on it. If at least one of us was against the decision. Well, the other one had to persuade the partner. Because he was a man, the gossip was that we were lovers. We weren't. We were very close, we were like soul mates, spending a lot of time together, nobody was as close to me at that time as he was, and I trusted him completely. The situation we were involved in was full of danger. It brought us close to each other. On the other hand, there were some issues that I, as a woman, could resolve more successfully. When we needed to get a quick and positive decision from someone, being a woman helped. There weren't that many women in business, besides I was a young woman of 25. One time, I managed to obtain a loan for us for one million dollars credit and at a very reasonable interest rate, too. My partner had tried, but couldn't. All the credits in Russia were given with no pledge, or collateral securing the loan, it was merely a matter of trust, of your ability to make arrangements with people. I managed not only to secure that loan agreement, but to receive the money from the bank, all in less than a week. The bank was on the verge of bankruptcy, nevertheless they stopped all other payments till we received credit in full. That was a million dollar victory, but there were smaller ones every day. That was the nice side of being a woman in Russian business.

The dark side had to do with security, again. When bandits come to your office, and you try to talk to them and you think, maybe, you could reason with them, if they had more than one neuron in their brain, but they don't. You can't have a rational conversation if there is no mind to appeal to. And once they see a woman – that's it, to them you've already lost. They look right through you. You are given no chance. You can be insulted and humiliated. It all happened to me. Fortunately, I had my partner to handle these situations. But of course, as the result, his share in all that dirt was much higher than mine. If I managed to preserve my integrity, the reason is that he took the greater part of dirt onto himself.

One way to avoid contact with bandits was not to enter competitors' territory. That was another unwritten rule I formulated for myself. The best thing was to start something new, something nobody was doing before you. This way you could get all the advantages of being a pioneer, plus the advantage that you don't stand in anybody's way. You don't have competitors, and if there are no competitors, there is no conflict of interests. You are on your own territory. And there were plenty of opportunities to be the first in many areas, to start a new thing. Everything was new in Russia. Like, the financial schemes we were developing, those were the "know-how" schemes. Nobody was doing this but us.

Doing business affected my marriage. Things weren't going well with my husband. I guess this situation has been described hundred of times before. When you spend 12 hours at work, mostly giving orders to other people, it is hard to stop giving orders when you get home. My husband continued working as a doctor, he stayed in what had become my past. The gap between us was growing. I had a lot of people under my supervision, I had to make decisions at work, and very important ones. It was not how many flowers should we plant in the back yard, but decisions that had weight, in terms of the amount of money that was at stake, and in terms of the risk, too. These were dangerous games I played. I could not be frank about it with my husband. I could not discuss these things at home, because if I did, he would not have let me go back to work next day. Besides, he was not able to help me in any way, so, there was no point in sharing my fears or doubts with him. It would have just made his life more complicated, that's all. As a result, I felt I could not be myself at home, with him. I had to play some role, I could not allow myself to relax even for a minute, because if I did – I would burst out crying, I would've said something or complained and what would be the point of that? So, this does not make the family stronger. It creates tension. Tension accumulates.

Besides, knowing that you are the one who supports the family, that everything in the household was bought on your salary that you support not only your immediate family, but a lot of relatives, too. You are turned into a family patriarch, a provider, and this adds to your years. Immediately, it makes you feel so old. And the responsibility is so heavy, too. When I finally left the company, all of my relatives lost their positions along with me. And they felt it was my fault. It's strange, when you do some good to people, they don't praise you for that. They take it for granted. But if something is taken away from them, you are the one to blame.

Anyway, those were hard times. Before I left the country, I left my husband. I bought myself an apartment, I fixed it. I lived there for only a month. My business activity was coming to an end. I felt I had hit a dead end. I knew everything about my business. It did not interest or excite me anymore. I knew everything about the people I dealt with. I felt like an old woman, who had experienced everything, who knew everything about life, who would not be surprised or moved by anything anymore. I felt enormously tired and empty.

By that time, we had opened a branch of the firm in New York. I had sent my sister to manage the branch, to serve as a company representative. Soon we started the Internet Service Providing business. I entered the business as a partner while still being in Moscow, and then it suddenly occurred to me that I could resolve my situation in Moscow easily and gracefully by sending myself on a long term business trip. And so I did. In August 1995 I went to New York for three months. Then I came back to Moscow, stayed there for two months and left again. This time I decided to take my daughter with me. It was not easy, the American Consulate would not give her a visa. I had to come back again, finally I got lucky. My daughter is with me now. I did not make any final decision to move at that time, and I still haven't made such a decision. I keep the apartment in Moscow. But my business trip turned out to be much longer than I planned it to be.

Once I decided to stay here for a longer period of time, I encountered certain problems. I came here with no knowledge of the language. I knew German but what use was that to me here? I did not have any business connections in this country. So what that I opened a branch, if I did not know anybody and nobody knew me? And the rules of the game were different here. My Russian experience was of no use, either. Here, to do business, one had to have a credit history, good references, a guaranty from the bank, etc., everything that did not matter in Russia. The thing that helped me so often in Russia – my personal charm – here, it did not work: I had no language to make it work. And I did not want to do business with Russians, the kind of business they did was too petty. It would mean I'd have to come a few steps down from the level of business I did in Moscow. So, it was pretty hard. But the most important thing for me is and always was to set a certain goal for myself and then work on achieving this goal. Even if the goal is wrong, you get a thrill along the way, you find meaning in the process of achieving, whether you achieve it or not. In Moscow, I managed to achieve success. It cost some moral losses, but I proved I was capable of something. I made it there. Now I wanted to try and prove myself here, in a situation of real capitalism, real business. The question for me was: can I make it here? I began proving to myself and others that I can. I have not reached the happy ending, not yet. I am still in a process.

I like the security of doing business in America. I mean, it's physically secure, safe. But the competition is so high, it keeps you in suspense. Here it's not your personal security, your life, which is under constant threat, but your business. There are too many competitors. I know if I fall, I'll be immediately smashed, walked upon. And it's not a very pleasant feeling. In Russia the struggle was physical, here it's economic. It's hard to be new, too. You've got less of a chance in this country being new in the game, with

no family standing behind you, with no connections, traditions, roots. I don't like the bureaucracy here – too many papers and numbers. All this prevents me from believing I live in a free society. I don't like feeling like a second rate person, and an immigrant is a second rate person here.

Immigrants are not loved. I don't consider myself an immigrant, and I never call myself one. But if I were one I'd hate it, because I can see how people's eyes change once they learn I am from Russia, once they suspect that I am not a guest – because it's okay to be a guest – but, god forbid, an immigrant. Then they'd never forgive me things like bad English. I feel it constantly, whether talking to my prospective business partners on the phone, or shopping, or simply catching the eye of a doorman in a building. I feel it particularly strongly in my business relations. I am in alien territory. But the stronger that feeling, the stronger is the temptation to make it mine. I have decided that if I can make it here, I can make it anywhere. What drives me first is ambition. And second, ambition.

But no matter whether I succeed or fail in achieving my goal, I think I would like to change my occupation, eventually, and do something not at all related to business, or money. Maybe, to do movies or go into the publishing businesses. Whatever I do, I don't want the money to be the only measure of my success.

17 Ella Kozhevnikova, doctor, then waitress, restaurateur

In Moscow, she started as a doctor, then turned to waitressing in order to make more money. She came to New York a couple of years ago with her husband and their son. She co-owns a small caf on Mac Dougal street in Soho.

Question: Authors and background of Twelve Chairs story

In Russia I studied at the Moscwo Medical School, as did my sister. It was my father's influence. He was an engineer specializing in computer science, he worked in Zelenograd, a Moscow suburb. It was built as a city of the future, it had about thirty big plants and research institutes. Most of the them worked for the Space programs, developing advanced technologies.

My sister Tatiana and I were born in Zelenograd and lived there most of our lives. When I was about 8 years old, my father became interested in medical engineering. He soon began to work in this field professionally, he created a laboratory for developing new medical equipment. His laboratory designed a new hearing device for the deaf based on bone conductivity, a tiny device which could be implanted in nasal bones. It also created a defibrillator for the heart and a device to measure the eye's blood pressure. His love for medicine determined my sister's and my decision to become doctors. We both graduated from the best Medical School in Moscow. My sister worked as a doctor only for one year, then got involved in business. She never returned to her profession again. I worked in a medical polyclinic in Zelenograd for three years. I was the first one in our big family to contemplate emigration.

I don't know why exactly. But I sensed that something was wrong in the country right after I graduated from Medical school. I could sense the danger in the air. Around that time my mother found an article about some firm in Latvia dealing with professional emigration to South Africa. It was 1990. It was still impossible to emigrate from Russia, at least for people like me and my family. We were not Jewish and we did not have any relatives abroad. Suddenly there was this firm which seemed to be able to help us to emigrate to the South Africa. We contacted them.

I was so passionate about this new idea that I infected my sister's husband with it. We went to Latvia together to apply for visas. My husband did not really want to leave Russia at that time, but he did not object much to my decision. He did not believe it would work out anyway. So, we went to Latvia and we filled out the applications and we were to expect visas to South Africa in about three months. But it was 1991. In August, Gorbachev was overthrown. Soon, the firm in Latvia ceased existing. They explained it by the fact that South Africa did not want to continue any business with Russia, too frightened by the unstable political situation in our country.

By that time we had already paid money for the applications, and of course this money was never reimbursed. Anyway, that was our first attempt to emigrate. I say 'our', although in fact it was me who really wanted to leave. Now when I try to analyze why did I want it – I can hardly formulate the reasons. Neither I or my family had never experienced any persecution, because of nationality or anything else. I remember having a wonderful childhood, I always had a lot of friends, we were part of a privileged circle, we received a good education. But even before the August events I began to feel very

uncomfortable in my country. I was always very much afraid of any kind of physical violence, and even though in 1990 it was not happening yet, I could feel it approaching. It was the fear that I felt, even though I could not explain the reasons for this fear. It was an irrational feeling.

So, my first attempt to emigrate from Russia failed. I was working as a doctor by that time. My husband was, too. He graduated the year before me and was hired by the Research Institute for Artificial Organ Transplants in Moscow. He worked there as a cardiologist, a very prestigious job. He worked there until 1993 in the Division of Heart Rhythm Disorders.

They often tested new equipment, or new methods, directly on patients. So, some patients would come for surgery, walking in on their feet, and then would be carried away from the operation room with their feet forward, dead. Of course there is always a certain percent of risk in heart surgery ... but still some things were not ethically clean. And then there was another issue – bribing. The Director of Cardio center was known to be taking money from patients. All the regular staff doctors were getting a standard 140 rubles salary, regardless of how many hours they spent in the hospital, how many night shifts they had. Most of them were young doctors, right out of medical school. Anyway, all these things eventually led my husband to leave the clinic. After that he went to work as a doctor in the Emergency Ambulance. It was like becoming a dishwasher after being a chef in a fancy restaurant.

I was still working in the polyclinic in Zelenograd. I took the job in the first place because it came with an apartment. I was the first one among my many friends to receive my own two room apartment, at 24 years old. The clinic administration hoped to attract college graduates this way: working as a doctor in a public polyclinic was not considered a prestigious job. But I did not care much about prestige after having to share the apartment as a family with my parents for four years. My husband, our son, and I lived in one room 9 square meters square. I took the offer without even thinking.

When I came to work in the clinic, I hoped they would put me with some experienced doctor, so that I could watch what he did and learn this way. In fact, I had to start entirely on my own. Luckily, I had a nurse working with me, who showed me how to fill out prescriptions and such things, I did not know I was supposed to prescribe only those medications that were available in drug stores, I had no idea what was available. I took a course in theoretical pharmacology at school, but theory had nothing to do with the actual situation in pharmacies. I remember that after my first day at work I came home crying. I was convinced I'd never be able to become a real doctor. But after a couple of months I felt pretty comfortable in my position.

Life was not easy for me at that time. I remember having only one pair of high heel sandals for the summer and one pair of boots, also high heels, for the winter. I could not afford to buy a second pair of shoes. So, I had to walk miles and miles in dirt, snow, and to the top floors of the twenty story high buildings in newly developed housing complexes, while doing my house calls. Occasionally, the building would have a freight elevator, but with no light. It was very scary to take those elevators.

When I started working, my boss warned me: “When you do a house call –

don't ring the apartment doorbell right away. Wait and listen to the sounds coming from the apartment, to make sure everything is fine..." It was 1990, there were some incidents. Once, a young doctor was locked in the apartment, kept there and threatened... the man wanted her to give him a document proving he was ill, to be excused from work.

I had an incident once, too. I was barely able to escape. You see, anything can happen when you are alone in the apartment with a man who is older and stronger than you are. You never knew why a person would call for a doctor.

Besides this, treating patients became a problem, too: there were no medications. We could prescribe only the drugs available in the pharmacies... But nothing was available anymore. Despite Once I diagnosed a heart attack when the patient was complaining of a sore throat. I questioned him very carefully and discovered he had a reaction to physical pressure, I sent him for a cardiogram right away – he was diagnosed with an infarction. The years in the clinic were a really good school of life for me. It made a real doctor out of me.

My salary was 160 rubles a month. I received no overtime pay, no holiday pay, even though sometimes I had to work on the weekends doing emergency visits, etc. It all was covered by the salary. I worked like this for three years. And then, one accidental meeting changed my life. My husband's brother's wife worked as a waitress in a restaurant. I met her accidentally at my husband's birthday party... I had never seen her before that, just knew that she existed. Anyway, she mentioned at the party that she was taking a new job in a Chinese restaurant in Moscow. She simply mentioned that, without giving it too much attention. By that time, I felt sick and tired of my life, of not having any money. The last straw was that I had to borrow the money for that party, too, to celebrate my husband's thirtieth birthday. I could not allow myself not to celebrate it.

Anyway, a few days after the party, I remember myself thinking: I should call Sveta and ask if they needed another waitress in this restaurant, and if she could possibly recommend me. And the same day I was thinking that – quite miraculously – she called me herself and asked if I would want to come with her. The guy who gave her a recommendation said she could bring another girl with her.

The restaurant was located in midtown. It was called Panda. It was the first private restaurant in Moscow. In 1993 nobody had heard of a thing like that. So, Sveta gave me instructions in the car: I was to say that I was an experienced waitress, that we had worked together in the Red Dragoon, a big Chinese restaurant in Moscow, for three years. Of course, I did not have the slightest experience waitressing. Moreover, I had been in a restaurant myself only once or twice in my entire life. And, I had no idea what Chinese food looked like. Anyway, we arrived at the restaurant.

There was a long line near the entrance of girls applying for waitressing positions. But we did not have to wait in line, we had a letter with us, we were expected. Somebody had made a call to the Manager. We were let in right away, without questions. This somebody, as I found out later, was a big political figure in Moscow. He knew Sveta from the Red Dragoon. When she decided to leave that restaurant, he said he'd help her to find another job. And he did.

Panda was to become a very fancy restaurant, one of the most expensive in Moscow, a hard currency restaurant. At that time, I had hardly ever seen a dollar bill. The first time I did was when I went to Latvia to fill out the application for a visa. The fee for one application was \$35 dollars – which equaled 700 rubles, six months' salary.

Anyway, we were hired in a moment, nobody even asked whether we could speak English. As a hard currency restaurant, and a very expensive one, it was meant mainly for foreigners. The cheapest appetizer there cost \$19.95 dollars. Chinese restaurants in Russia are the most expensive. The owners of Panda were quite interesting, too. One of them was a Chinese, and all the chefs were brought from China, they worked on contract. Some of the hostesses were Chinese, too. Another owner was Russian who had lived for twenty years in America, and the third owner was Russian from Russia. So, the restaurant had three owners, plus, of course, it had to have supporters among the top officials, powerful people, without whose approval it could not have been opened.

One of these top officials was an Assistant on Economic Issues to Hasbulatov who was still at power at the time. This person – his name was Misha – had given recommendations to both of us. I don't think we'd have been hired without his recommendation – so fierce was the competition. So, we began to work there. Both of us were made managers from the start, each of us had five other girls under our supervision. That was a big disappointment for me, because I was hoping we'd work together, so I could learn things from her. I did not know a thing about waitressing, I did not know the names of the Chinese dishes in the menu. Besides, all the menus were written in English, I could not understand a word. I was scared.

I decided not to quit my doctor's job right away, but to take a leave and give my new job a try. I got a release from work - supposedly because of my son's illness. I did not tell my parents anything about my new job. The only person who knew was my husband. I told him I wanted to give it a try.

My first day at work I was asked to help with the cleaning. They were behind the schedule and needed help to be opened in time. I was put to clean the toilets, and I remember myself cleaning and crying: "Is this going to be my life now?"

But when the day of the opening came, I was suddenly bursting with energy. I was doing such a good job, that they asked me to serve in a private room, meant for the most important guests. Misha, who was my recommender without ever having met me, happened to be among those guests. Sveta introduced me to him. He told me I was working better even than Sveta did. At the end of the day he asked Sveta and me to come for a drink with him. I thought, as he was our benefactor, we couldn't refuse. I had never been in a situation like this before, so I had no idea how to behave. I looked at Sveta and I said: "Yes, why not? Let's go some place for a drink." He said we'd go to a casino. I've never been in a casino before, did not know they existed in Moscow. The restaurant had not closed yet. Misha asked the manager to let us go early that day. The manager did not object. Misha's word was taken for an order. Even though he did not have a share in business, it was upon his will and permission that the entire business existed. He could do whatever he wanted. So, he went to the manager and said: "I am taking these girls with me." Nobody said anything. We went out with him. I remember

I was wearing a fur coat and sandals: I did not have time to change my footwear.

We got into his Mercedes – the first time I had seen a Mercedes in my life – and took off. He was driving... We were sitting in the back seat, chatting with him, we were in a good mood. I did not know Moscow too well, but Sveta did, and suddenly she said: “I think we are going the wrong way.” He replied: “I changed my mind, we are not going to a casino, we are going to my dacha.” Before we had a chance to realize what was happening, the car was driving along a highway on a great speed. We stopped chatting, sat there quietly: we were taken to the wrong place... He brought us to his dacha, a big house in suburbs of Moscow. He wanted to make a dinner for us. I went on explaining: we were not what he thought, what he took us for. I made a great effort to make it clear to him, I said I was a doctor... I felt – even though he knew Sveta before me, he had taken an even bigger fancy to me. So, I’ll be the one to pay the most. I told him everything: I confessed I did not have experience waitressing, I confessed I was a doctor, I said: “My family is waiting for me.”

In response to all my confessions he simply said: “I can tell you are a smart girl. Go, take a shower and come to bed. He said it to both of us. First he put champagne on the table, took out white fish, other delicacies from inside the refrigerator, served the table.”

Then he went to his bedroom, and said: “Come and join me.” I don’t know what he was going to do with two of us. Anyway, at this point I had nothing else to do but to go for an open conflict, I said: “No. We won’t. It’s all a mistake.” - I said.

He replied: “Why did you sit in my car?”

I said: “We thought we were going to a casino...”. I could not play games anymore. I think he was never refused by anyone before. I knew how much power he had, I was scared... but there was no way I could do what he wanted, it was... impossible. Finally, he left us alone and retreated to his bedroom. We could not sleep, we did not even undress, we just sat in that room all night. We could not leave the house on our own – it was surrounded by snow, we were hundreds of kilometers away from Moscow, we did not even know exactly where we were, and I was wearing summer sandals. Where would we walk? In the morning, he woke up, went jogging. He did not talk to us, did not say a word. Like we weren’t even there. Then we heard him making a phone call. He came into the room and said a single phrase: “Somebody will come to pick you up”.

I said to Sveta: “We should leave here immediately. He probably called his boys, they’ll come and slaughter us.” We put our coats on, he saw it.

I said: “Sorry, and thank you, but we better go now.” I kept repeating: “Sorry, sorry...” I did not want him to get mad again.

He said: “Why don’t you want to wait?” I said: “We are late for work...” We were supposed to be in the restaurant by eleven that morning. He thought for a while then he said “OK, I’ll take you to the patrol post.” He did not insist that we wait for the car which, according to his words, was coming for us, I don’t know why he did not insist, he simply said: “I’ll take you out of here...” So, he took us through the patrol post, and he dropped us off there, and from there we walked – a few kilometers in the snow, in summer sandals – to the train station. When we finally arrived at the restaurant, at

2PM that day, nobody asked us anything. They saw us leave with him, so there were no questions.

Thanks to this incident we kept a privileged position in a restaurant from then on. nobody dared to touch us, or fire us... We were 'His' girls. He, on the other hand, did not say anything to anybody. He showed up in a restaurant a couple of times after that, and every time I saw him I shook. I was afraid of revenge... I talked to my sister, Tanya, the same day we escaped from his dacha. She was already doing business, she knew some influential people – not as influential as he was – but still. I was hoping they'd help us if anything happened. So, the same day, I called her, and she arrived at the restaurant with her friend and business partner. I told them the entire story. Tanya's friend gave me his cellular phone number and told me to call him if the guy showed up at the restaurant. He said: "You can't joke with these people. It's amazing that he let you go just like that. You simply don't realize what a serious situation you got yourself into. Never go outside the restaurant alone. People have simply disappeared."

Panda was a very expensive, trendy restaurant. It was quite common for the girls - waitresses to receive offers from customers. Waitresses were all young, all were wearing a uniform: short, red dresses in a Chinese style.

Nobody stayed for a long time. There were too many conflicts... a lot of stealing, the system of control over employees was still not developed, later the management installed video cameras. But at first... everybody was stealing. Then there was fight around tips. Tips were supposed to be split between all the staff: waitresses and bartenders and kitchen workers. So, waitresses often tried to hide tips. Or, when some customers paid their bill by check – the check often would not reach the register, disappearing somewhere along the way. Some people were caught. Some caught others. Some girls went out with the wrong guy, or refused to go out... All this could become a reason for being fired. In the eight months I worked in the restaurant, the staff changed maybe three times. Everybody were fired, everybody but us. Nobody dared to touch us, including the owner, who was a big girl lover. He had never made any passes on me or Sveta. We were considered to be Misha's girls. Even after Hasbulatov went down and Misha stopped coming to the restaurant, still nobody touched us. We were untouchable. Besides, Sveta and I stuck together. It saved us from many undesirable situations. We rented an apartment in Moscow and shared it. We had to work for two days in a row with a two days break. The restaurant closed at twelve – too late to take a train back to Zelenograd – so we rented the apartment in Moscow. We stayed in this apartment for two days. And the other two days, we spent in Zelenograd, with our families. My husband did not like this situation too much.

Now he's saying it was the reason why we eventually left Moscow. He did not want me to work as a waitress, he believed medicine to be my profession and he wanted me to hold on to it. It's interesting that even my parents – who, when they first heard of waitressing job, were very much against it, eventually accepted it. Our financial situation was so bad. Working as a doctor, I was making six thousand rubles a month by the time I left.

In the restaurant, just the salary, right from the start, was 25 thousand rubles.

But the salary was nothing compared to the tips I was making, and all the tips were paid in dollars. I was making 40-50 dollars a day in tips. It was an incredible amount of money for me at that time. I remember when after a couple of weeks in a restaurant I decided to finally officially quit my job in the clinic, and I came to the clinic to do so... I remember what glances my colleagues gave me when I said: "I don't need to wait for my pay check." They looked at me like I was crazy. Of course, waitressing was a hard job. I had to walk and stand – 12 hours on my feet, I could not sit down for a minute, there was not a single chair for waitresses to sit on. Now, when I own a restaurant, and I see my waitress has no customers, I say to her: "Go, sit, relax, read a book..." My manager back then, if she saw me standing idle even for a second, shouted: "Don't you have anything to do? Go, wash the wall." And I'd go wash the wall. It was hard... People in the restaurant were constantly humiliated. I did not tell anybody I was working as a waitress, except for my sister, my husband, and my parents, nobody else in the world knew... including my closest friends. I told my friends and colleagues from the clinic I had found job in a medical firm in Moscow.

I simply could not tell the truth. I could not admit to anyone that I, a former gold medal student, a graduate of the most prestigious medical school in Moscow – ended up working as a waitress in a restaurant.

By that time my husband began to think seriously about emigrating. He found an ad in one of the newspapers advertising a firm – this time in Moscow – that was helping people to emigrate to Canada. The firm promised Canadian visas for eligible persons who fit certain requirements regarding age, family status, and profession. The entire procedure, in case of success was going cost us 15,000 dollars. Somewhere in June-July we went there for an interview, and my husband suspected the entire affair to be a fraud. We shared our suspicions with my sister, Tanya.

She advised us to wait. We did not make the next payment, so stopped the process. But because Tanya knew our intentions, a new opportunity soon came up. Her company was opening a branch in America. She suggested to the board of directors to send my husband as their representative. We were invited to for an interview, we passed it and my husband was given position as the Director of a newly opened branch in America. It was supposed to handle the export of medical equipment, an area my husband did in fact knew quite well. In November 1993 we arrived in America.

We had no intention of moving to America for good. Nobody in my family had ever been to America. To me New York seemed like a very dark, dangerous place, which spread crime all around the world.

My husband knew some English, I did not know the language at all. In my first year in America – I don't think I had any clear idea of what America was like. My husband was working, he was getting a salary. He had to create the whole new business from a scratch. It was a hard work, but at least he did not have to look for a job. He had a steady salary. Instructions came from Moscow, but a lot of things he had to decide on his own. Our roles have changed: he was active now, he was the one who was working and bringing money into the family, I stayed home with the child. I was happy about this role change.

He became good at what he did very soon, he handled all the business negotiations and correspondence, all this without any previous experience of a kind. I guess one can learn to do anything under pressure... Our biggest problem was our son. He was seven years old and he felt terribly unhappy in America. When we were leaving Russia, I remember everybody telling us: "You might have some problems there, but not your child. Children of his age adjust very fast...." But the opposite thing happened. He kept crying every day, remembering Moscow, he'd say 'Good night' to 10 people before going to sleep: "Good night to grandma Marina, and grandma Valya, and grandpa Stasik, etc..

Three months after we arrived to New York, I started looking for a job. I opened the Russian language newspapers, the job listings section. I did not ask anybody anything, although we had some neighbors who could give me advice. I was too embarrassed to ask, I'd rather do it on my own. And I didn't want them to ask me about my husband's job, we were warned not to talk too much about it. All the commercial issues in Russian business were supposed to remain confidential. He did well, soon after we arrived he bought a used car, he was driving it. We had enough money. But I felt bored: I didn't go out much, I did not talk to anyone – I didn't really feel I was in America. So, I began looking for a job. I could look for a job that allowed me to speak Russian.

I found a couple of ads in the paper. And I called the first number, it was a cosmetics firm. They were looking for women. The ad said knowledge of English was not necessary. I felt scared while calling this number. What helped me was that the answering machine message was in Russian. I left my message, saying I'm such and such, I'm calling regarding the ad, and this is my number. That was all I was capable of saying. In two hours a woman called me back and I was invited for an interview. That was how I came to work for the Mary Kay firm. It was an American marketing firm selling cosmetics. By the time I started working there Russians made up the majority of the sales people, and the customers.

The way the business worked was you had to buy some product for 50% of its price and then sell it for full price. In addition to that you could create your own team, recruiting new sales people like yourself, getting a percent of what they sell: it was a typical pyramid system, though the company denied that. Anyway, I signed on to this business, I had no idea of how hard it was. Before getting any income, one had first to invest some money buying product, I did not realize that selling the product for full price was almost impossible.

They were telling a lot of lies, these people. But it just happened that I had some luck from the start. Somehow I managed to sell the right amount of product and sign the right number of people. Suddenly at the end of the first month I was promoted and granted a car. It was not my own car, it was lent to me, but still it was a big deal for me. I stayed in the firm for a while. I don't regret it now, because if not for Mary Kay – I would not have my restaurant now.

I left Mary Kay. It happened that I met a woman, Nellie, through one of my coworkers at Mary Kay. She had lived in New York for four years, and before that in

Israel, for 17 years. She comes from Siberia. I went to visit her at her house one day, we had dinner. She mentioned she wanted to open a restaurant. It was her life dream.

Even back in Moscow I had been thinking of opening a small cafe taking Sveta as my partner. But in Moscow it was incredibly difficult and dangerous, because of the racketeering and everything else. But here, it got to me. I was thinking about it all night, I told my husband: “You know I met this woman. What if I suggest we open the restaurant together?” I was completely intoxicated with this crazy idea.

Nellie wanted to open a restaurant in Manhattan, in Soho. She loved Soho. She took me there one day, showed me the area, she made a whole tour for me, she showed me: that’s where Barbara Streisand made her first appearance, that’s where O’Henry wrote his Last Leaf, this is the narrowest building in the world... She was in love with Manhattan, even though she lived in Brooklyn. And for me it was the first time I actually saw Manhattan, the first time I walked its streets. Nellie showed me the place she picked for her restaurant. The space was for sale. We wrote down the Real Estate phone number. The next day we went there, but we did not have any success. We could not explain anything: I did not speak English, Nellie’s English was not that good. We came there – two women, dressed not very presentably: I was still wearing the old overcoat I brought from Russia. We did not make a good impression. Then I asked my husband to come with us. He had experience in business negotiations by that time, he had bought some proper business suits, he knew how to handle talking. We went together, and this time they took us more seriously. They showed us a couple of places. One was on MacDougal street and we loved it right away.

We encountered a lot of difficulties while opening the business. But we did not get discouraged. We had no doubt, not a single thought that it would not work out, we were convinced it would. Nellie had wanted to have her own restaurant since she was 17, I was thinking about it in the previous three years, since working as a waitress. We made a lot of mistakes Like, we had to buy refrigerators, it was one of our first purchases. Of course, I did not know anything about what of kind of refrigerators we needed, what are the prices, etc. We found a company, which gave us what I thought was a good discount. They sold us the used refrigerators for \$1000 a piece, and the price of a new one is \$3000. I did not know at that time that the company got these refrigerators for free. Restaurants that go out of business give away their equipment, they even pay some people to take the old refrigerators away. So, these people got the refrigerators for free, then they painted them, and sold them, without ever replacing a motor, or other old parts. These refrigerators started breaking in a matter of days. All these problems and obstacles never made us regret that we started the business. And it pays well now.

Lots of people go through our cafe every day, we have good relationships with all of them, with customers, neighbors. We never aimed our cafe for Russian customers, although we have some Russians coming here. They find the place by accident, but we know our Russian customers by names, some of them became our friends. The majority of our customers are Americans. They like the place, the like they name of it: “Twelve Chairs”. They don’t know it was named after the famous Russian novel written in the

1920s. Some people come and begin to count chairs, and then they ask: “Why are there more than twelve chairs?” Then we tell them about the book. We keep the copy of the book in English in the cafe, so that people can read it. In the beginning we did not advertise the fact that we were Russians. We did not know what kind of reaction it would cause. We had no way to know, and nobody to ask: there are no books written on the subject. We did not want customers to stop coming to us, and this could have happened. Everything matters in this business, it matters who you are, what area you are in, what relationship you have with your neighbors. This area is predominantly Italian. We get along well with Italians. Little by little we got rid of our fears, realized the attitude towards Russians was positive.

Finally we revealed that we were Russians. There are a couple of Russians in the neighborhood, they became our regular customers. A lot of Americans who come here tell us about their grandfathers and grandmothers from White Russia, Georgia, Ukraine. Recently there was a small article about us in the New York Times... When it came out – the effect was like an explosion. We tried to advertise before that – it was like throwing your money into garbage. But after this tiny article our telephone rang every minute for about a month: people were calling to find out where we were. And all because of one paragraph in the newspaper. Nellie and I spent more time in the restaurant, together, than at home with our families. Of course, it’s getting easier now, but we are far from being relaxed. We are not at that stage yet: to allow ourselves to relax.

If not for this cafe – I am not sure we’d stay here. I like this business very much, and it’s keeping me here. My husband did not want to stay that much. The business he started eventually went under. When we were opening the restaurant, Nellie’s husband was working. The company my husband worked for did not exist anymore, so we decided to split the money we got for the apartment between two of us. He wanted to open a limousine service. So, half of the money I invested in the restaurant, another half went to buy a limousine. In the first year we did not make any profit in the restaurant, and we did not expect to. Our husbands were making money, enough to support our families.

But a couple of months after we opened the restaurant, Nellie’s husband became ill. He had to undergo surgery and he became handicapped after that. He lost his job. And a month after that my husband had an accident. We were driving in his limousine, when some car crashed into it from behind – the car was driving through the red light. We were not injured, but the limousine was damaged beyond repair.

We were so shocked, we did not come out of the car when the police arrived. We had never been in an accident before, and we did not know the laws. We told the police officer that the other car drove through the red light, but there were Americans in that other car, a few people and the driver. Those people came out of the car and gave their testimony as witnesses, as if they weren’t in the car, they said it was our fault. Their testimony was given more weight as witnesses’ testimony, and ours did not count: the passengers’ testimony doesn’t count. After that we could not find a lawyer to take our case. We lost all our money, and my husband lost his work. So, it happened that Nellie and I lost our family providers, almost simultaneously. She has three children,

and I have one. It was a tragic situation, but we managed, we survived. We spent days and nights in the restaurant. We could not afford to hire anybody, my husband stayed at home with the child. He felt very depressed for a while. Later our friends helped him to find a job. Then I persuaded him to begin to prepare for the medical exam. He's a doctor, after all.

I don't miss Moscow that much, but I miss my friends there. We can still go back. My husband wants us to. It's me who keeps us here. And it's my restaurant that keeps me. I have come to like this city, with all its guts. And I realize: one can't keep moving all the time. Moving is a big deal... it's like a big fire, and you can do it once, but not over and over again. I've overcome so many obstacles. My life here has not been sweet. But I feel good here, better than I felt in Moscow. I breathe more freely.

18 Sergey Tchavretov, a new entrepreneur

He studied physics in college, then went into business, like so many of his friends. He came to America when the business began to expand. His office is in the Empire State Building. Back in Russia, the business supports a security division of 70 people.

I lived in Rostov. My partners and I started our business in 1989. For about four years we worked in Russia, then expanded to other countries. We bought different products, some in Europe, most in the United States. At a certain point, business interests demanded that we have an office here, so we opened the office in New York.

We started out as a cooperative. I was a student at the Rostov University in the department of Physics. A lot of my college mates went into business. They are doing pretty well. Maybe because commerce is close to natural sciences, such as physics or math. Both deal with numbers, with things that can be counted, calculated.

I wanted to make money. I had to earn money to live, and being a scientist in Russia did not allow me to do that. Life was kind to me in Russia. I did not have to work like a slave in a state enterprise, to sit through endless working hours. I went into business right after university. 1989 was a good year to start. People already had had an opportunity to make money, but the dangers had not started. In 1989 the psychological climate was not much different from the pre-perestroika times.

We wrote computer programs and sold them, selling computers, too. Then we started bringing in other products, buying them in Europe. The customs fee was small at that time and we could buy new consumer goods in Europe pretty cheaply, and then sell them at a good profit. At that time imported products were still rare. At first we brought electronics products, later we added furniture, other things. A lot of people were doing similar businesses.

Around that time I met some of my future partners. We decided to merge our businesses. We've been working together ever since, which is a quite a rare situation in Russia. The most common problem in business partnerships is that at a certain point people have to choose between friendship and profit. Most of the time they choose profit. But to me friendship, relationships, and trust have always been most important. And my partners share that attitude.

When private business was first allowed, the general feeling was "You should do it fast, because tomorrow it can get banned again." In fact, even though it was not banned completely, it got much more difficult and intricate. Any businessman will tell you that doing business in 1989 was much easier than in 1996. Take taxes, for instance. In 1989 you had to pay 3% of your income to the state. Now it's 70-80%. When taxes are so high, people just stop paying them. They find a way around the law. Because it's unreasonable. You can't explain to people that if they make 100 rubles, seventy of it should go to the state. Giving away 30% of your income, like here, is hard enough. So, it's just the usual cat and mouse game that our government plays with its people all the time.

Our company has significantly expanded with time. We opened some stores in New York, too. We are selling European furniture here as well as in Russia, though

our main customers are still over there. We rented the office space in the Empire State building to make an impression on our Russian clients. Americans don't care much about the specific building. But every Russian has heard about the Empire State building. It's the first thing they know about New York. So, by putting our office here, we created an image, and image is very important in business. I guess, our American partners are not indifferent to the fact that we have an office in this building, either. It shows we are a respectable firm, with some history. We have a good reputation. Now, a lot of companies here have branches or representatives in Russia, so it is actually possible to check any company's background. Before, it was almost impossible. I guess, the information they were getting on us was favorable. I know some of the business people were making inquiries about our company in Russia, checking our credibility.

What I like about business here is that it is safe. In Russia there are more ways to make money, and they are easier. Profits are higher, but the dangers associated with business are incomparably higher, too. Business is risky in Russia. The mafia is not the biggest risk. Government agencies are. Tax laws change almost every month and taxes go up. That means that even if you paid taxes in full, you may still owe some money to the state. Privatization of government enterprises is another danger. Privatization means that some influential people are involved in the enterprise's activity, people of authority, who want to appropriate it for their own sake. But sometimes there are two groups of influential people claiming the enterprise, so they have a conflict of interest which they try to solve through judicial or violent means. Our company, for instance, keeps a security division of seventy people, 20 of them are armed. We wouldn't be able to work without such a security team. For the four hundred employees that we have, we have to keep seventy guards. But that keeps us out of trouble.

What also helps us to avoid trouble is that we do business honestly. We try to keep our promises. What often causes problems is when people try to cheat us. For instance they take a loan and don't pay it back, or they take a product and don't pay for it. When some people intentionally cheat other people, those who were cheated feel pissed off and try to either retrieve what was taken from them, or to take revenge. What happens is that the party that has been the victim in this situation hires someone to collect a debt from the party that conned them, and this person receives a percentage of the amount he was able to get. You can call it a racket, of course, but in fact it is just a way of achieving justice... a way of doing business.

Because there are no legal structures in the country that can enforce justice, or reimburse the losses. Here there are police, the courts, and lawyers. In Russia, racketeering stands in their place. It is in fact the only functioning structure that can provide a solution. You see, nobody in Russia would take seriously a threat of being taken to the police station, it does not scare anybody, but a threat of losing your health does scare people. Ninety percent of all the war that goes on in the country is about getting even.

We started business in Rostov. Now we have offices in Moscow, in New York, in Italy and in Prague. We also have business partners in many other countries. It happened that I was put in charge of the office in New York. I never intended to leave

Russia, I still consider myself to be on a business trip. I work here, in America, the same way as I could've been working in Moscow. I was picked to do this job, that's all. My wife and children are with me in New York. But my parents and my sister are still in Russia, in our native town. I travel to Russia every three or four months and stay for three weeks each time. So, I am still very much connected to Russia. It's hard for me to say where my real home is. It is here and there. And of course, I belong there much more.

As one of my friends put it, and I find the description true: "America is a labor camp with a refined diet." It is true that living conditions are good here, but people work very hard. Well, maybe, that is what they want. They have different principles and goals in life, but these are not acceptable to us. Take the relationship between children and parents. In most families here, children stop living with their parents after high school, and after college parents stop supporting them, assuming their mission is over. In Russia, parents support their children for a much longer time, they are much closer to each other, stay close through their entire life.

I do business with Americans, but I don't have friends among them. It's easier with Italians. Italians are much closer to us. The way they feel about parents, family, friends is the same as us. For an Italian, friendship is more important than money. You can't say this is true for an American. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule. Italians respect tradition, just as Russians do. In America there is no historical ground for a deep tradition. Except in business. In business Americans have achieved unrivaled heights.

What amazes me in this country is how smoothly the system works, despite the fact that the average American working man is very mediocre. The average office worker, a clerk in a bank can hardly add two numbers together. But it does not at all obstruct the whole system, because it is so well built that it does not matter who is rolling every little wheel of it. It just keeps running. If you compare the qualifications – the professional and intellectual level – of the personnel of any average company here with that in Russia, I think the Russians are superior in many ways, even though their salaries are incomparably lower. But the system in general is much more efficient here than it is in Russia, and the results speak for themselves.

I have met some smart people here, people in charge of businesses for example. I often feel sorry for them, because they have to hire all these mediocre employees, and pay them huge salaries, and still manage to stay in business somehow. This is not a trivial task. The fact that they cope with it successfully deserves respect.

America got lucky not having destructive wars for a long time, as Europe had. As Russia has even now. Rostov, my home town, is only 600 kilometers away from Chechnya, where the war is going on. It's very close... it's like you live in New York, and there is a war in Maine. It's driving distance.

It's not just a war – it's a horrible, bloody war. Much worse than Afghanistan was. Of course, it makes me feel worried. And the notion that any minute it can turn into a civil war is scary.

19 Boris Kardimun, a thoughtful soul

He's 66 years old. He lives in a spacious nicely decorated loft in Soho. A psychological casualty of war, a free spirit, a guru, and an itinerant painter in his Soviet past, he now works as a social worker helping newly arriving Russian immigrants to get settled in America. Of those his age, he says, "They didn't leave Russia in time." He thinks the same about himself.

I was born in Georgia. My parents had moved to Georgia in 1930. Both of my parents come from the Ukraine, my father was born in Odessa, my mother in Vinnitsa. So, although I was born in Georgia, I am by origin a typical Jew of a shtetl [small Jewish town].

My father served in the military as a professional officer. After 25 years of service, he was discharged from the army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. This gave him significant career advantages. He was given a civilian position, as the Deputy Director of BelGlavSnabSbit, an organization with a ridiculous name, but that was nevertheless quite powerful. Basically, his duties were to control the transportation and distribution of White Russian timber, White Russian vodka, White Russian sausages to the other Soviet Republics, and receive, in exchange, coal from Kazakhstan and other raw materials. But that happened much later, after the war.

Going back to the beginning: for a while we lived in Tbilisi (Georgia), and lived peacefully, at least from my point of view. I don't remember much from those years, the horrors of the war erased most of it from my memory. My mother was the youngest of 7 brothers and sisters in a big Jewish family. They kept a tradition of annual gatherings at her parents' house. That was how In June of 1941 all of us, a big family of 36 people, found themselves in Vinnitsa, a small town in the Ukraine. All my relatives took a vacation to spend the summer with my grandparents in their home town. Out of these 36, only my mother and I survived. (My father was serving at the time.) I was the smallest among my cousins so my grandparents insisted we leave the town when the war began. We were surrounded by the enemy. We survived shooting and bombing. Here is one of my memories: my mother and I are hiding in a coal wagon, in a barren plain, somewhere in Don Basin near the Black Sea. We are covered with sweat and coal dust, it's the middle of July. The heat is terrible. In the same wagon with us there is with another mother, and her son of my age and the very same name: Boris. Then the German bombers and fighter planes show up in the sky. People, refugees like us, run out to the open plain, to get away from built structures. But we can't get out of the wagon – the walls are too slippery, soiled with sawdust. We are stuck in the wagon. My mother covers me with her body... The other boy named Boris is right next to me. Something hits him. He dies. I was four at that time.

My memory doesn't keep the sequence of events very well. But pictures I see very clearly. We are running towards some steam boat. I don't know why we are running. I step over a rail track. It's shining in the sun. Then I step on the wooden cross bar of the track. I can see the oil stains on it, gravel around it, and a daisy sticking up. I remember crossing the fragile planked footway leading to the boat. I don't remember what the boat looked like, I didn't see it all. All I saw was the black hole of a hold we

were heading to, and then the sacks with potatoes inside the hold. I climbed up one of the sacks to look out the window, and then the bombing started. The boat next to ours was blown to pieces. I remember human body parts flying through the air, smashing against the window, I remember the blood on the glass, and how I slowly slipped down that sack of potatoes, to the floor. For years and years after that I couldn't hear the sound of an airplane without quivering. It took me fifty years to be able to take it calmly...

In 1944, in Tbilisi, a new bakery shop opened right across the street from our house. There was still a war going on. One could feel its presence in Tbilisi, too, but it was a distant presence. I don't remember a single bombing of the city, a few times the German airplanes would fly over the city, dropping leaflets, not bombs. Still, a pastry was an exclusive luxury even in Tbilisi. For a couple of days, passing the pastry shop, I'd stick my face to the window and gaze at the cakes exhibited there, fighting the temptation. Finally, I gave up: I opened the drawer where my mother kept the money. I took out one bill. I still remember how it looked: it was a 30 rubles bill, a color of red brick, with a portrait of Lenin on it. With this bill I bought five pastries, each one cost six rubles. I brought the pastries home. I might have been in a state of trance, because I don't remember how exactly, but I ate all of them. And I left the waxed paper the pastries were wrapped in, on the window sill. And that was where my mother discovered the paper with some crumbs stuck to it. She examined it. She licked it. Then she asked me: "Where did you get the money?". I pointed at the drawer. She only said one thing: "Well, you could've left one for me at least." She said nothing else, there was not a single reproach.

My father went to fight the Germans and he never came back from the war. Although his non-return doesn't imply here what it usually does. He came back alive from the war but to another woman. And then another one, and then another one, and yet another one. For a while, my mother tried to reunite with him. In one such attempt, she decided to move to Moscow, where my father was at the time. It was 1947. We settled in the apartment on Volkonka street, right across from the Puskin Art Museum. The apartment belonged to my father's aunt. She shared it with us.

The day after we arrived in Moscow, I went in the yard where other children were playing, and the first thing I've heard somebody say was: "Look, a *yidionok* (a little Jew) has come." I wasn't raised in a strict Jewish environment. I didn't even know I was a Jew. I thought I was Georgian. But right at that very moment, I became a Jew. That's how my real education started. In the yard. They played with me, they talked to me, but I was not like them, I was different, I was a *yidionok*. That was 1947. In 1948, Stalin attacked the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Its members were accused of being traitors and were executed. When it started, people around me, including my mother started talking together secretly, whispering in each others ears, I already knew I was an outsider. I belonged to a race of strange people called Jews, people with jarring voices, big noses. Once I asked my mother about that, she evaded the question. And still we were eating matzah for holidays. It's funny how old traditions kept protruding here and there. There was no talking, nobody pronounced the word "Jew" – but there

was matzah on the table.

The trial of the Jewish doctors in 1952 made an anti-Communist out of me. At fifteen I knew that I hated my country and would never want to live there. In 1955 I met people who changed my life. They were dissidents. They were mostly in their early thirties. I was 18. We read and spread around work by unpublished writers, including writers who had emigrated or had died in Stalin's camps. My new friends had access to all this information because they themselves were the sons or nephews or grandsons of the people who suffered repressions.

All these people came from the families of the old Russian intelligentsia. I was their chance to continue the thread. They wanted to teach me what they knew and what they stood for. My mother knew about my friends, she did not know everything. I couldn't tell her everything. She had enough reasons for sleepless nights. I was giving her a lot of trouble, growing up without a father. Even though I loved my mother dearly, she was never an authority figure in my eyes. I remember her always working a lot. She was a pharmacist, and worked at a pharmacy her entire life. She was a hard worker. I remember her always doing something at home. She was always sewing something, or cleaning, or washing. She was restless, tired, and beautiful.

She and my father never got back together. But she never tried to turn me against him. He did it all on his own. I always had a difficult relationship with my father. Even later in life, he wouldn't give his permission for me to leave the country. I was only able to emigrate after he died.

One misty winter day of 1952 I was taking a stroll in my neighborhood, in Kuntsevo, accompanied by three girls. We reached a square near the train station. The girls walked into a pharmacy. I stayed outside, waiting for them, embarrassed to go inside. The word 'pharmacy' was linked in my mind to the word 'condom'. I was fifteen, and everybody around me seemed to talk about condoms. At least, that was true of all the teenagers in Kuntsevo, living in barracks with us. My friends in Moscow used to discuss different matters, but Moscow was far. In Kuntsevo, all conversations circled around burglaries, prisons, and condoms. So, I couldn't even think of walking in there with the three girls. And suddenly I heard somebody screaming behind me "Get the little Yid! Knock him down!".

And before I realized whom the exclamation was referring to, the two men knocked me down on the ground. Both were enormous, robust guys, drunk like fish, but still very strong. They punched me, we fell into the snow, rolling there, they were all over me. It was slippery. Because I was a boy and slim at the time, I managed to crawl from under them, like an eel, and I ran. But I could not escape: a crowd surrounded us, people stood close to each other, like a live wall. There was not a single gap in this wall I could escape through. A few times I tried to cut through the crowd, bouncing against the bodies wrapped in overcoats, trying to push through. They would not let me. Their soft mass was so pliant, and yet so hostile. The two men knocked me down again, this time a third person joined them. I was covered with dirt and mud, half undressed and bleeding, I was exhausted and ready to give up, when suddenly I felt somebody, from behind, pressing my eye with his thumb trying to squeeze it out. The

pain was so strong, it gave me a new doze of energy – I pulled away. This time I plunged between the people’s legs, and I was able to break through, I escaped.

I didn’t know those people in the crowd, they didn’t know me. My only fault was that I was unmistakably a Jewish boy. And that was always my problem, or maybe, my advantage, because it freed me from many problems that some less apparent Jew would have had. Like trying to pass for a Russian, changing my last name, etc. Since my early childhood the opposition between Jew and the others became painfully clear to me. That was the foundation upon which the layer of anti-Sovietism was later added. I never became a Zionist, but I never stopped being a Jew. I was quite stunned to discover, after I came to the United States, that from the point of view of many Jews, I am not a real Jew, because I don’t go to synagogue, and I don’t observe Judaism. In the Soviet Union my background had steadily secured the hatred of many, many others. And I had equally strong feelings for them. I always hated them. I don’t mean to say I hated Russia and Russian people. But the truth is that the Great Nation didn’t favor me much. Although, some occasional representatives of the Great Nation were eager to admit that “there are some good Jews, after all”. (laughs).

My resentment of the realities of Soviet life caused me to like books. I became interested in literature and philosophy, particularly the trends not related to the Marxist doctrine. I became a big authority on the occult, a kind of spiritual guru. But according to Soviet law, I was a mere parasite. Although I graduated from the Teachers’ College in Moscow, I never took the job assigned to me upon graduation. I did not want to serve the regime, I never did. Instead, I took all kinds of odd jobs, worked as a freight worker, a baby-sitter. Fortunately, people in my country never ceased having various needs, and somebody had to fill those needs. For a while I worked as a hypnotist. And in my last couple of years in Russia I even became a rich man.

It happened almost by accident. One of my ‘spiritual’ pupils introduced me to his friend from Odessa, a handsome young man, and a great hustler. We liked each other from the start. He was serving his last year in the army. So, soon after we met, he went back to his base. Meanwhile, I went to the county of Kostroma, to gather mushrooms. Kostroma’s forests were famous for their mushrooms. Suddenly, I received a long distance call from my young friend. Lev was his name. He said: “There is an opportunity to make money, and big money.” “How big?” - I said. “Three thousand (rubles).” That was a lot of money. I didn’t believe him. I said: “I’m busy, I’m gathering mushrooms here. It’s the peak of a mushrooms’ season and I can’t leave now. Call me later”. So, I stayed in Kostroma, kept picking mushrooms and canning them. In two days he called again. The business opportunity he was talking about was decorating the walls of local a Cultural Center, in a small town in Altay. That’s where he served, and where he called from. Painting was among my many occupations. And I had a lot of friends who were painters, too. He said: “Find a friend, and come over here”. Anyway, this time I believed him. I took a friend, we arrived at the place, we did the job. And we made not three, but seven thousand rubles. And that was just the beginning.

Soon the two of us formed a company, a workmen’s association. The idea was simple: there were an enormous number of collective farms. And in those many

collective farms the children grew up, having everything except for one thing. The walls of their schools and kindergartens were painted in a dull gray. We offered the proud parents, the collective farmers, to decorate the walls with scenes from Pushkin's fairy tales. And that was a killer idea, because nobody could object against helping children or illustrating Pushkin. Everybody was happy in the end: the farmers, we, and the artists whom we were giving a chance to make some money.

The only problem was that what we did was illegal. Our little enterprise was not sanctioned by the Government. But there were ways of solving these problems. The procedure was usually as follows: we'd come to some provincial town. Lev, our business director, would make a visit to a Third Secretary of a local Regional Party Committee. A Third Secretary was usually the one handling the ideology issues. The average price of a Third Secretary of Ideology in an average Soviet town was 600 rubles. Lev had a gift for bribing. He could handle any bureaucrat of any rank or stature. In the end, our underground, half illegal gang was given a government assignment to decorate the Medeo skating rink, the largest skating arena in the world. The offer came directly from the Minister of Culture. But by that time (1979) I had already left the country.

My wife was a very clever woman, she was much more adept at being an immigrant than I. By the end of our transit period in Rome, she spoke English fluently, whereas I was just beginning to mumble something. Within forty five days after we arrived in New York, she had already found a job as a computer programmer. Very soon she became successful. I was way behind. At first, I was proud of her success. Then I felt humiliated by it.

In many ways, I kept holding on to the old illusions. I had some friends in New York – American writers, film directors. In Moscow they taken a big interest in me: I was a dissident, an exotic bird. In New York I became a common immigrant. Suddenly there was a huge gap between us. They all lived in Manhattan, in nice apartments. There was no way we could communicate as equals. My wife didn't have such problems: she had her job, she had a family to support. She became the family provider. In Russia it was the other way around: I was the provider. I was the Man, the Master in the house. Russia was in many ways an Asian country.

Here, the Master turned into a zero. She was making rapid progress. I remained where I was. This created certain problems between us. Finally, our family collapsed. Many Soviet families don't survive immigration. And quite often the wives do much better than their husbands. While a Soviet-Russian husband spends his time reflecting on life, a wife keeps working. She has no time to suffer, or contemplate. She has responsibilities. In Russia it was taken for granted that a woman should endlessly stay in lines, cook, clean, take care of her husband and children and yet go to work every day. But here you can't take it for granted. This is the West. The rules are different here. I'm ashamed to say I was a typical Russian macho husband. For a long time I was convinced it was her duty to take care of me and the family, while I sat and contemplated life and death issues. Now I can't believe I was so stupid. And it took me a very long time to realize that, and to admit that despite all my hatred for the Soviet system, I was, in fact, a typical product of it. I was a conformist. Only a tiny part of me had protested,

the rest of me had complied fully.

For a long time I existed in some kind of fog, blinded by my own preconceived ideas of what America was like, not being able to see the reality. I brought too much baggage with me, I mean cultural baggage, which turned out to be a big obstacle in my understanding America. I believed I'd be able to survive and live here the same way I lived in Russia. My logic was: "If I was able to survive in Russia – it'll be twice as easy here." But I kept failing, and I couldn't understand why.

For a while I didn't have to worry about money. I had brought my collection with me – a collection of books and paintings. For a while I was able to survive – even travel all over Europe – by selling the books from this collection. The collection lasted five years.

When I ran out of books to sell, I sank into a deep depression. That was when my family fell apart. I had to start working. My first job was giving consultations on Russian Avant-garde books. Then I gave private tours all over Europe.

Still, there was not a single second in all my years in America that I missed Russia. In 1989 I happened to go back – not to Russia, but to Georgia. I had a special invitation from the Minister of Culture of Georgia. The reason for the visit was the creation of the first Georgian Cultural Center in New York. I was supposed to head the Modern Art Gallery of the Center, and I was flying to Georgia basically to select the paintings for the gallery. It was April of 1989. The beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Government in Georgia. I witnessed the students' demonstrations in Tbilisi, the shooting that followed, I saw the wounded. I was in the crowd myself, with a mini cassette recorder. I was the last foreigner to be evacuated from Tbilisi. I saw the crowd smashing the windows of the shops, destroying cars. Ironically, I was protected from the enraged crowd by a KGB officer, assigned to me for that purpose. I found this fact amusing, as a number of years earlier I was interrogated by KGB officers. Now they were providing my security. In my last night in hotel in Tbilisi, the KGB officer slept on the floor, outside my room. It was indeed an unforgettable visit.

Now, I'm working in an organization called New York Association for New Americans (NYANA). Basically I am providing professional orientation to newly arriving Russian immigrants. Most of them are my age, or close. That means, they've been entirely formed during the years of Soviet Power. They are creations of that system, and all the changes happening in Russia hardly touched them at all. The reason why they emigrated from Russia and came here, is basically because they can't live without Soviet System. And in America they find this Soviet System preserved intact: they're being taken care of, they're put on welfare, they get social security benefits. A lot of these people are engineers, scientists. Some had good positions in Russia. Here they find themselves in a vacuum. They can't find jobs, they can't learn the language. They communicate only with immigrants, like themselves. Their problem is: they did not leave Russia in time.

STAYING HOME

20 Nikolay Stepanov, early forties. A driver across Russia.

He lives in St. Petersburg with his family. His daughter is five. He has worked as a driver all his life, driving cabs, then trucks. He delivers cars from buyers to customers, spending days, sometimes weeks, on the road.

Roots are important. That's why I can't leave this country. My roots are here.

Between 1985 and 1990, when everybody around me was talking about emigration, I began to think about it, too. Maybe my life was easier than other peoples' because there were many things I wasn't aware of. I come from a working class family. We always worked hard, never aiming for much. My life was never particularly exciting or beautiful. Therefore my approach to life was more or less calm. But when people around me began to leave the country, one after another, and after I talked to some people who had been abroad, I began to compare life there with life here. I was still young, healthy, full of energy. Why should I be stuck in my life here when I could be doing the same things yet living much better? I don't mean being a millionaire. I mean just having a decent human life. Having my own apartment, my own car, good clothes - all these things began to matter at that time. People were looking at you, judging the way you dressed, etc. And I often felt that something was wrong with me. I was feeling inferior. That's how it all started. Because, you see, I didn't have a degree, but I was in good health, and I knew I could do my work. I'm a dependable person. I can perform the same job for a long period of time, stay in one place, and do it with quality. But I want to be paid for the job I do. I want to be able to support myself and my family, and to provide my family with a certain quality of life. I don't want to wake up every morning worrying for my daughter, for her future.

But I didn't leave. Why not? I remembered living for six months in Poland once. It was a socialistic country, a Slavic country, and life was pretty much the same there as in Russia. I didn't have problems with the language. And still, I was tortured by nostalgia. Things I didn't pay much attention to before suddenly grew enormously important. I would watch something on TV, would see a familiar place: a corner of the house, a corner of the street in some city or I'd hear Russian speech and that was it, I was ready to cry. And the food was good there, but not the same. It didn't taste right: the salt didn't taste right, the mustard, the butter. Nothing was right. I never felt like I was at home there. Yes, I was working. I knew everybody and everybody knew me. But still, I was a visitor there. I could never accept the fact that Poland was a place where I could live.

I tried to shut this feeling down - by drinking vodka, by reading books - nothing helped. I was never in the right mood. I couldn't stay there. It's so much easier for me here. Everything is familiar.

But at the same time, life is getting strange here, too. Things are changing. For a long time I couldn't comprehend the fact that I didn't have to have an official job, didn't have to be registered at any particular enterprise. All my life I worked as a driver, driving cabs, trucks. I didn't make a fortune, but I always had a stable income.

It was enough to feed me and my family.

Since all these changes took place in Russia, my mentality has changed, of course. The boundaries have been extended. What used to be a problem wasn't a problem anymore. Like all this stuff with official jobs, or hard currency transactions, that used to be illegal, but not anymore. I didn't know if I could adjust to a completely new life. It's all hard for me. I wouldn't want to have my own business. Maybe I'm not smart enough. Or maybe, I don't like risking too much. I prefer to work for somebody. My job now is to deliver cars from suppliers to customers. I drive cars from one place to another, driving anywhere. I make good money.

I'm paid somewhere between \$150 and \$900 for a trip. It takes days sometimes. It can be dangerous, too. The roads are deserted and not safe. I drive alone all night. There are people out there who can shoot you, take your car, tie you up to a tree and strip you. Anything can happen. But at least I know it can happen; I know what to expect. But, it's something that depends on me. I rely entirely on myself. And I like that. I don't like to be dependent on other people, like a partner or a shareholder. In business you have to deal with other people, to depend on them. And on the road, I am on my own, depending only on myself. I try to be careful, to look at the road. I take note of everything, every small detail, such as a car behind me, an accident at a gas station, or people trying to stop the car in the middle of the road. I take all these signs in, and I don't even have to think about them, to analyze them. My body reacts immediately. It happens almost automatically.

Maybe my experience as a cab driver taught me to be attentive, to see many things at once. I know I can find a solution to any situation, not only here, in Russia, but in any country. Without even knowing the language. Maybe it will take a little longer abroad, but I'll work my way out of any situation. Eventually. I'm pretty sure of that.

It's too late for me to emigrate now. I'm forty-two. The only thing is that don't want my daughter to live here. I wish she could grow up some place else, or had a family somewhere else. She's six now. I wish she could have a different life. I'm hoping she will... I don't want her to live here. I'll try to do everything I can to change it. I'm doing something already, by paying for her English classes. I'm trying to give her a good upbringing. We'll see. I'm too old to leave. Too old to adapt to another life. If I were 30 or 35 now, if I didn't have a disabled mother, if my entire life experience were different, I would definitely emigrate, because life is too hard here. Too heavy. You have to make too much effort just to survive. To get good food, to buy a TV, to be able to go to a sea resort for a month. That's all, nothing else. And I'm working so hard for that. I don't have time to see a play, to go to a museum. The last time I was in a museum I was fifteen. I can't even think of doing something like that now. There is no time. And there is no feeling of stability. I feel fear sometimes – not for myself, but for my children and for my parents. If something happens to me, who will support them? I can't rely on the state. I can't rely on any organization, on any charities. I can rely only on myself.

I was asked to transport drugs once. It was going to be a very well paid job,

good money. Of course, there was a reason why they asked me. I knew the roads, I had been crossing borders in and out, I knew how to deal with custom officers. I had a good reputation.

Frankly, I gave this offer some thought, but in the end, I declined. If I'm gone, who will be there to help my family? I've got no relatives, no brothers... But I thought about it. And not because I'm greedy. Because I want my family to live well. That's the only reason. That's what makes you consider such "offers". So you try to figure out: can you cross this line or not?

21 Alexander Obraztsov, late forties, writer, St. Petersburg

He writes plays, short stories, poetry. He waited more than ten years for his first book to be published. He has patience. He believes in spiritual values, some born of totalitarianism.

I have never thought of emigrating, have never considered it seriously. An ideal situation for me would be to buy some hut, well-heated, somewhere in Finland, where I could sometimes escape, hide for a while, catch my breath - and then dive back into the world. Life is difficult here, financially and creatively. Creatively, because it's hard getting work produced or published. Still, you can find your own niche. I'm getting more and more involved in journalism, a new form for me. You have to convince people from the press that they need high quality literary texts. If they believe in you, they publish you. Things happen in theater once in a while, too. So, actually, it's possible for a writer in Russia to make a living in literature; he doesn't have to become a commercant (businessman) or unload cargo at the stations.

You need to hustle and not let people forget about you. You can't make a lot on journalism. Average rates are approximately 25 thousand rubles, about five dollars for one typed page. I can easily write five, six, ten pages. The problem is there is usually a delay in payments; they pay you sometimes a month after the text was published. But that's fine. Then, there are always other opportunities which you sometimes forget about. For instance, you submit something some place at some time and suddenly they call you. Or some of your work is being performed without your even knowing it. Recently I found out that one of my plays was running at Dodin's theater - the play I co-wrote with Ludmila Razumovskaya. You forget those things, because so much is going on.

You kind of leave your mark everywhere, a little something every place, and eventually it pays off. Last year, an amazing thing happened to me: I was granted a stipend for my writing from one of the Moscow Writers' Unions. I even forgot which one. I filled out some applications and I got the stipend. The good thing is that they keep supporting us writers; they throw us a bone from time to time to keep us from dying out. Some old writers receive life term stipends, a million rubles, about 200 dollars a month. That's a lot by our standards. So, I got this stipend, and then I came to the Theater Union here in St. Petersburg, and they told me I was granted a stipend here as well. I was so shocked. In my entire life I have never found money on the street and suddenly I felt like I had, and big money, 500 000 rubles a month. So, in a year I made six to seven million. That's more than a thousand dollars a year, fantastic.

Even in America it would be a big deal to find a thousand dollars. So, all these months I lived under the shock of my sudden luck. Anyway, the point is you can always make some money, but only if you participate in life. Once you fold your little wings - like the fly in the milk jar - you go down to the bottom in an instant. I remember an old woman who worked in the Theater Union for many years. A marvelous person, knowledgeable, understanding: she knew all the playwrights, she knew who was worth what. Then she retired one day and simply died of hunger. People forgot about her. She was starving, fainted on the staircase one day and died. There are many cases like

that.

A friend of mine, also a playwright, a published playwright, works as a janitor. He has four areas he sweeps. He's paid 60,000 for each area. He works like crazy cleaning off all this dirt and snow. And he makes only 200,000 rubles a month. It's very little.

When I meet him he always complains. A lot of people still think complaining is a good thing to do. People feel sorry for you, comfort you. That's the way it used to be. But times have changed. Complaining doesn't work now. People don't feel sorry for you if you complain. They despise you. I guess it's because there are too many reasons to complain now, and too many people who have a right to complain – all these old women begging on the streets, homeless people.

So, when a relatively young and healthy man begins to complain how hard his life is, it doesn't sound too compelling. Before, everybody felt the oppression. Even though you wouldn't see the KGB out on the streets, you could feel their presence. People had a right to complain. Now they don't have such a right. I guess that's the main difference.

I have to create an audience for my work now. I had my first book published right when perestroika came. The book went unnoticed. Nobody at that time cared much about fiction. Even though the book received good reviews. One of the most severe literary critics in St. Petersburg – Toporov is his name – gave it a great review. But it went unnoticed. I have a lot of material, short stories and poetry, accumulated in my desk, none of which is published. I suspect it's because I'm a free person, too free for this country. When a person here shows no signs of slavery, it irritates people. He becomes a stranger, an alien to everybody.

I'm trying to create a community of writers. I have completely stopped any communication with fat literary magazines. I think they brought the most harm to our culture than anything else. They and the State Theaters, the last bulwarks of bolshevism. I quit the Union of Writers and later they gave me a stipend (laughs).

If theater is the last, but still living bastion of fundamental bolshevism, the Union of Writers is a refuge for the ailing and insane old men. When you come to the writers' meeting and see all these bald, lame, crooked, hunchbacked people, it looks like a freak show. And they still think of themselves as pillars of Russian culture, though nobody in the new generation knows their names. They're outdated. They have broken up into five small Unions and fight among themselves for the old Writers Union' building that burned down a long time ago. It's a metaphor for their existence: fighting for the building that has burned down. You can still see its frame, whatever is left of this building, standing across the street from the Big House (the former KGB headquarters).

The other thing I can say about my present literary work – my productivity now directly depends on the market, depends on the possibility of publishing or producing my work. In other words, I can't write stories knowing they won't find a reader or plays that no audience will see. For instance, I know I can easily publish short stories in the newspapers, so I write short stories. I can't find a theater to produce my full-length plays, so I write small plays with small casts, or stage adaptations of novels, like Gogol's novels. It wasn't like this before.

Before perestroika I used to write without having any hope of being published. It never prevented me from writing. I used to think that one writes because it comes directly from his heart. Now writing is becoming more functional. Maybe it's the age. I have achieved a certain stage in my life where I can write as easily as I breathe. I'm not tortured with questions like how to begin the story or how to end it. I can start with anything, with a simple sigh, and then keep going.

I notice the same happening with other writers. So, it's not just me. I probably take it easier than others though. Maybe, it's because I've survived a terminal illness. It's like coming back from dead. I'm living a new life. One of my friends, Sasha Popov, hanged himself. He couldn't take it. He died merrily, died like a hero, I think. He called me a few hours before. He sounded very excited and happy. Partly, it was madness, of course. He told me, laughing, that soon a carnival would come, people would come out into the streets, our children, something like that. He knew he was going to hang himself in an hour or so. It was different from any description of suicide I've ever read.

Sasha's case is still a mystery for me. Before he did it, he sorted all his writing and put everything into folders with a great precision: he was a very accurate person. He made a shelf of such dimensions to match exactly the size of the folders and to accommodate them all. He had counted everything with such a precision, including the fact that after his death he'd become famous. That was his only mistake, a terrible miscalculation. I think he was imagining himself after death, kind of like a spirit flying above us all watching his own fame, laughing at his enemies. He was a strong person. He always thought of himself as a fighter, but when the time had come for a real fight, he just couldn't do it. Because, I think, now is the time for real struggle. Struggle in its pure form. What we had before was a dirty struggle, a criminal struggle with no rules. I mean a struggle with ideology, with communists. Now it's a struggle with oblivion, a force of forgetting. It keeps crashing on you, like a gigantic wave.

One of the things that changed with Perestroika was our approach to the West. We were finally allowed to travel, to see the world. And we realized we were romanticizing the West in many ways. We used to think: "There is the 'West' that knows and understands everything, it will help us, make its fair judgment, put things in order..." It was a "Europe will help us" kind of approach. In fact, we've already found out that Europe doesn't care about us at all. All they care about is to prevent us from being a danger to them. It became clear that neither Europe nor America need any spiritual values. They think they have enough – more than enough – of spiritual values of their own. But they're mistaken.

Because a real spiritual value is rare. The fact is, the only thing we've always had in abundance, the only thing we were capable of producing, was high quality spiritual values. And suddenly, nobody needs them. Nobody needs them because they're not wrapped properly. By wrapping or packaging, I mean form. Russia was always famous for producing spiritual values and not for wrapping them. At the end of the 19th century Russia suddenly learned how to wrap, and the world realized that Russia, can, in fact, produce. When Dostoevsky gave his insights the form of an urban criminal romance, it suddenly made those insights universal and accessible. That is what I mean by proper

packaging.

It's true for industry, too. In Russia we have good butter, good meat, good milk. Good quality fabric, stockings... Nobody buys these products, just because of the wrapping. People prefer things from the West.

Russia has had a unique experience: for the first time in history, God allowed an entire large nation to go out on a limb. Common sense says that a nation under such circumstances should simply obliterate itself: people would have to devour each other – and, in fact, that is what was happening here in the twenties and thirties. But, somehow they didn't eat each other up completely, but, in the end, managed to create a reality of their own, an odd reality, where, nevertheless, one can live. In fact, the reason why the West doesn't want to take our “wrapping” now, doesn't want to recognize our art, literature, music, is that they don't want to admit that something worthy, something good can be grown in a totalitarian society. They can't believe that values created by artists inside a totalitarian society can be of any value to them. They think they know all about totalitarian regimes, assuming people are all the same. But there are niches and caverns dug out by people inside totalitarianism which ought to be explored. Knowing them can be crucial for the survival of a mankind.

22 Alexander Sinitsin, 29 years old, Russian businessman

He came from a poor family, his mother was only a doctor. As a boy, he walked around with holes in his boots. From then, he dreamt of moving to America. He never did. He became an “exploiter” instead. But not a big enough exploiter, he found out later. His dream is to recreate the salons of St. Petersburg in the 19th century.

I was raised in a very poor family. So very early in my life I began to think that I should either emigrate or try to achieve some success in my country. As I was finishing my military service, Perestroika began. It seemed the time had come when one was able to do anything he wanted to make money. I had a friend who lived in the same building as I did. Sergey was his name. He had something like a club in his apartment. A lot of young people, people my age, would go there. They all had different interests, different occupations. A lot of these people were involved in some kind of business. At that time, 1988, business was still illegal but a lot of people made good money selling (“speculating on”) vodka. Later, they invested money in production industries, such as manufacturing footwear, and so on. I was amazed that young people like myself could make such good money. My eyes opened: I realized there were ways of making money I hadn’t been aware of before.

I got involved in a garment sales business. At the time, Sergey and his friends were selling jersey fabric from Finland, selling it illegally and making big money on bulk sales. But when I tried to sell it, nobody would buy it from me. So I decided that rather than selling the fabric itself, I’d make something out of this fabric like women’s clothes. I had a friend who was a professional tailor, and so we started a business together. I invested money, did marketing and directed the whole thing. That was my first business deal. Later I became involved in other garment sales, working with other companies. I was buying and selling clothing, and I was making sales trips to other cities. Then I came across a company that was producing chandeliers. It was like finding a gold mine. The chandeliers were selling really well and I was making good money. It was a constant and steady income.

My passion, though, has always been to collect and restor antiques. I grew up in this city (St. Petersburg). I have always adored and worshipped it. My dream as a child was to live in this city during its golden age, the 19th century. It was a time of superb culture, with literary and artistic salons. I always wanted to recreate that environment.

For a while, I pursued one idea: to create a salon in St. Petersburg, where all kinds of creative people could gather and talk. I wanted to buy an apartment and furnish it in the 19th century style, to create beautiful interiors that would inspire people, console them, encourage peaceful, intelligent conversation. I even began collecting business cards from artistic people I met during my trips on planes and in trains. I purchased the furniture for the salon. But then, I wasn’t able to find an apartment I could afford.

I visited Washington, because I had been told that Washington was similar to St. Petersburg, and I did find some similarities, actually. All these squares, gardens with sculptures and busts of famous poets and philosophers: Goethe, Dante. But the people are different there. I saw people selling drugs in those squares and I saw those

wild advertisements. In Washington, I couldn't find a place for myself to be alone for a while, to concentrate on my thoughts. One needs some tranquillity to feel creative.

The classical America that appeals to me cannot be found on the streets today. With my interest in antiques, I should have gone to the elite circles. Only the American upper class can afford to buy antiques. Only they can enjoy it, like they enjoy the taste of a good wine.

Russia is different. We all came out of the same cocoon, so to speak. There is no class dividing line, no snobbery, no feeling of inequality. Consider one fact: the new Russian millionaires now buy and restore enormous apartments that can occupy an entire floor in a building. Next to them live the poorest people, often still in communal apartments. In any other country it would be impossible for a millionaire and a poor person to live in the same building, to run into each other constantly.

In 1991, the insane years began. The liberalization of prices allowed people to make fantastic profits due to the discrepancies between salaries, the cost of products and what they could charge for those products. Everybody was making great profits, including myself. People were making good money, mostly in secret. Nobody publicized their profits, nobody knew exactly how much the other person was earning. One could live on \$5 dollars a month. Utilities, rent – all these cost nothing. So, people who were making \$500 a month could have a luxurious life. They were spending money, making trips abroad, buying cars and apartments.

Nobody wanted to invest money in any kind of production, partly because people were afraid that things would reverse and the communists would come back. I myself believed that until the last elections in 1996.

1993, when I came to the United States, was the peak in my career. I had a couple of people working for me. I was an "exploiter". I had been thinking about America since I was a child walking around with holes in my boots. I grew up in a poor family, my mother was a doctor but she didn't make much. America seemed like a different galaxy to me, I had a very romantic image of it. During my whole life I carried this goal: when I turn twenty five, I will go to America and begin my life anew there. In 1993, when I turned 25, I told myself: "Time to go".

It was easy to get a visa, and I had an invitation from people I hardly knew. From my first moment in America I felt intimidated by its size, by its complexity, by its diversity. There were too many different people, different faiths, different faces and colors. The only thing that united everybody was the green dollar, and the star-striped flag swaying above them. I felt very confused from the first moment. I wasn't even able to use a pay phone in the airport, to call my friend, the only person I knew in New York. I didn't know how to dial the number, how to start and how to end the call. Luckily for me, there were Russian emigrants with me on the plane, going back to New York. I asked them for help. So they dialed the number for me, and I reached my friend. If I hadn't reached him, I would have been lost. From my first step, I realized it was a difficult country.

I took a cab. It was an old Cadillac with a door that wouldn't lock, so the driver used a piece of rope to keep it closed. When we were driving from the airport,

I was surprised to see the amount of trash on the road. Once again it reminded me of Russia. Later I saw a teenager at the bus terminal in New York. He was absolutely stoned, singing something and dancing, waving his hands, almost hitting an old fat guy standing next to him.

Many young Russians I met in America had problems assimilating. Of course, one has to make it a lifetime task. I had to choose: to stay in America or to go back to Russia. On the other hand, I liked a lot of things about America. I liked the feeling of political stability one has there. In Russia at that time it seemed an explosion was inevitable. People expected a new revolution. In America, nobody wanted any revolutions. They solved their problems once – during the Civil War – and forever. Now they were living their lives.

But I didn't stay in America. What prevented me from staying was, first, my ambition. I had been making good money in Russia, and I couldn't hope for anything as good in America. Also, suddenly, in America, I realized what it means to work really hard, not the way I did in Russia. In Russia I had time to go to museums, to travel, to have my hobbies. I could wake up any time in the morning and go to sleep any time at night. I could control my working day and plan it the way I wanted. Maybe, if I had put a long term stake in the United States, I would have succeeded. But it would have taken a lot of energy. Competition is so high there. There are so many talented, educated, healthy young people in that country, and each one of them wants to be first. In a way, I felt I was too weak for that country.

A lot of Russians I met in the United States were nice people, but lacked a quality which I consider to be very important: honesty. They thought they could push their way into American life and succeed by being aggressive and dishonest. They were taking pride in fooling "trustful Americans," taking advantage of them. A lot of people in Russia feel this way. There are a lot of jokes that make fun of Europeans and Americans: like, look what fools they are: they have these self-service stores, and our people shoplift. But I don't think it shows how silly Europeans are; it shows how inferior we are. That's why they live well in Europe – because they don't steal and they don't break things. And our so-called slyness has brought us nothing but chaos, a mess.

When I came back from my trip to America, it was one of the happiest moments in my life. I wanted to kneel and kiss the ground. It felt like I was away for at least a year, though it was only one month. Even though there was a terrible mess in the airport, and the cab to the city cost a fortune, I was happy all the same. I was home where I had friends, connections, money, and where everything was familiar. I picked a new business route for myself along the Black Sea. I wasn't making big money, but it was like being on vacation. I would bring goods and then stay for a couple of days. I rented a room in a house just fifty feet away from the sea. I could spend all day on the beach. I could eat fruits, meat, and drink good wine. It was like being in heaven. And that was my job. Often, lying in the sun, I recalled my friends in America. They eat junk food just to save some money; they live on illusions. I was living in the present. I was living a real life. And I felt here, in Russia, that I was worth something. I was above average. I don't have these feelings anymore.

Things began to change after I came back. People were allowed to legalize their income. So suddenly, for the first time, I saw people who were rich, truly rich. I saw people who were buying very expensive cars and new apartments. I couldn't have dreamt of such a life even in my best years. The funny thing was, after the question of income stopped being a secret, I suddenly realized that the business I was doing was, actually, a small business.

I should have operated on a much bigger scale. That was my first disappointment. And then, it was getting clear to me that the time of easy profits was coming to an end. That time when the legends were born about Russia – like, in Russia, if you put a stick in the ground, it will soon be covered with money. That time was over. Making money was getting more and more difficult. In a way, we had approached the way of doing business that exists in the West. One needs to be really good at what's one is doing. The person needs to know the market, and he needs to work really hard to get good results. Thank God, I have experience and good connections to help me keep my head above water. But I can't say I'm happy with my profits. It's hardly enough. More and more I think that maybe we didn't take the right course after all, that maybe this course leads to a dead end. No country in the world lives merely by parasitic means, the way Russia does now. Here, in Russia, we seem to have lost shame, conscience and any sense of true creativity. After privatization many people received enterprises, entire industries in their hands literally for free, as a gift from the state. Most of it was sold, and all the funds went down the drain. They were spent, wasted, just so that a few people could get big, quick profits. Nothing was used for modernization, for making our industry able to compete on the world market. So we spent all the funds and what's next?

It's too hard for a person to survive here. A lot of people can't. A lot of people used to rely on the state, professional people. They didn't want to change their occupation, to go into business. They believed the state would always need engineers, scientists, workers to work in its plants and factories producing all kinds of products. Nobody needs their plants anymore. Entire cities that were built around those plants – like CAMAS, a famous automobile plant – are useless. Nobody needs those people. They don't have a chance. There is a new official term in use now, a “depressed city”. There are “depressed areas” and “depressed cities” in the country. When I plan my marketing trip, I look carefully where to go. I won't go to just any city. There are big cities with huge populations, but without a single penny in circulation.

I miss the nobility in people's behavior, in people's relationships. We lack it in our present life. I have nothing against the new Russians. The more rich people we have in the country the better. I believe culture is closely connected to wealth. Like it or not, a rich person simply has to be educated, has to cultivate culture. It's not as funny as it may sound. If you're rich, you have to deal with serious, decent people – like European businessmen. You have to win their trust. Culture and business go hand in hand.

I don't like doing business. I'm not doing it because I like it. It's how I make my living. It gives me a possibility to have the life I want to have, and to collect things

that I like: antiques and works of art. I had a crazy idea once: I thought of offering my services as a consultant to rich people, my friends who had money, advising them on what to buy. You can buy some incredible things here for a very little money, two to four times below their real price. But nobody seems to need it. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the Soviet regime was encouraging education, the education they gave us was often formal, not deep. People can't understand things with their hearts any more, be it a book, or a film, or a sculpture. An ancient statue is just a piece of marble for them. They don't feel its warmth. I feel the warmth of old things.

OTHER COUNTRIES

23 Eteri Stokua, 35 years old, painter

She lives on Bleecker St in New York. Her studio is the living room of her first floor apartment. She comes from Georgia in the southern Soviet Union. She grew up in a big family. Years ago, she fell in love and married an American. They split up. She moved to New York to make it on her own as an artist. It seemed easy and she felt spoiled. At first.

My life was pretty good back in Georgia. My family lived in Tbilisi. I finished the Academy of Arts as a painter. I was supported by my parents, so I didn't have to worry about money or an apartment as did most young people in Georgia. But in 1988 I met and married an American linguist. We came back to Chicago together. We lived in Chicago for a couple of months, and then my husband was invited to work in Japan at the University of Tokyo. After living in Japan a while, I returned alone to the United States in 1989, and I traveled, living in different places. You see, if I hadn't happen to marry my husband, I would never have left Georgia, because I didn't have any reason to emigrate. My family wasn't Jewish, so we wouldn't be able to leave as Jewish emigrants. And I wasn't politically oriented. Life was pretty exciting in Georgia at that time. Perestroika had just started. I remember demonstrations in Tbilisi. People were trying to change things and that was exciting.

I was 23 years old when I left Tbilisi. I happened to meet this very wonderful person. So, I never had to look for papers or for a place to stay. We lived at his father's place in Chicago. He had a good salary so we were basically living like normal young people trying to start their life.

We loved each other. It was not a marriage for [immigration] papers, or anything like that. It was my first big love, and an ideal one: everything was the way it should be. But then he was invited to work in Japan and I followed him and stayed there for a few months. But then I couldn't stay there any longer: the culture was too different. I wasn't able to learn Japanese. I had to stay in the apartment most of the time and paint. I felt very isolated. It was difficult to be in the culture, where I could speak no language, where I had no friends save my husband's colleagues – who weren't big entertainers, anyway. It was great to be with him – it was the first time we happened to be together, just the two of us, in a different country. It brought us even closer to each other. But then I had to go back to Chicago to meet my father and my brother who were coming to visit me. I thought I would stay for a few months. But I stayed longer. My husband and I had fewer chances to see each other.

Then my show happened in Chicago. And it was very successful, we had great reviews in the Chicago newspapers. The entire show sold for up to hundred and fifty three thousand dollars. And then I got a teaching job at Santa Barbara college. So, things were looking very good for me. And I became very spoiled. I didn't worry at all about how to support myself since it was happening so easily. I mean, not easily, I was working a lot, but I had such a great response to my work. So, I moved to New York.

I lived on this money for three years. But now the money is gone. You see,

I don't create much work. I make three, four works a year. And that create certain problems – that's what my manager keeps telling me, and other people say the same: that the paintings are expensive, because of the amount of time they consume. I have to make out somehow. I have to pay for the studio space, for the materials. I have to be able to do what's supposed to be non-commercial art. My paintings are not considered to be easily sold, easily dealt, and I don't make enough paintings. But all I do is paint. This is my day-to-day life.

Sometimes I manage to put money together by selling one painting, and I can live on this money for a while. I don't really care about the money when I have it. But at times, I don't have enough money to buy food or to pay for my apartment. Life is expensive in New York on the fringes of Soho.

After my first show, I expected to make so much money, I thought I'd be able to raise the prices on my paintings higher and higher. I thought I'd be able to hire people to do some work for me. But now it looks impossible. The paintings are not selling well in New York. Now I'm talking to my Chicago gallery about doing a show there.

When I came to America, I didn't have expectations. I was observing life and learning, moment by moment. One thing I resented from the beginning though was the work ethic, the approach to work.

People try to push it so hard here. Living becomes so much about working. This work ethic made into American myth that was put in front of me, constantly discussed in newspapers and magazines. From the beginning I felt it was fake. I don't think working deserves that many sacrifices: time, friendships, eventually everything, just to get your own car and your own house.

I look at my friends who came here and had to take any old job. They came from very good families. In Georgia, they always had had something to eat, nice apartments. I know, they felt very disappointed, because they thought life here would be easier than their life in Georgia, but it wasn't. I saw people going out of their minds, trying desperately to balance their psyche and pay their bills at the same time.

But they don't want to go back, because they still have hope – this dream of America as a wonderful place to be. Besides, they grew accustomed to the internationalism, the universalism of life in New York, where you can get to see everything, and so much is going on. It's hard to leave this place. Once you get involved in this culture. Any other place would feel like going back to the middle ages. But this feeling of being in the center of events is fake, too. Because, you may end up sitting in your room, not seeing anything of what's happening around, just sitting in your room and working. But still, you have this illusion that you're getting something, some information you would be missing in any other place. So, if it's important for you to know what's happening in the world, you wouldn't want to leave New York for any other place. But, again, it involves such sacrifices to live here, such constant work, that an individual who does this, trying to achieve this American dream, he eventually becomes a slave.

There are some people who have much better skills at making money. They would do anything for money, compromising friendships, compromising everything, not

caring about anybody. Their culture, their families taught them how to bargain. For Georgians, such a way of life is disgusting. Because in Georgia we were taught to spend money, not to save it, not to bargain for things. Bargaining was considered low. So now, when I'm trying to bargain, I end up doing it to the advantage of the person who bargains with me, because I give up. I'd rather not bargain at all. But, in America you have to be a sales person. Everything is for sale. And I'm just an artist. I don't have any business skills or knowledge of marketing. I don't want to do any of this stuff. But maybe I have to change myself if I want to stay here. Maybe I should start thinking of marketing myself. Or maybe I should leave.

But my life is here. In the time I've lived here, I have met a lot of different people. I have had friendships, relationships with all kinds of people, people of different races, different social and economic backgrounds. Like me, people who came to New York were often foreigners in their own culture, too. You end up in a place where everybody is like that.

I was always included and loved back in Georgia. But I was never a regular Georgian woman. Maybe, because I was painting from early childhood and that spoiled me in a way. I was much freer in the way I talked, behaved than most other women. I found a lot of values in Georgia old fashioned. Georgia was a small country where people lived mostly to enjoy life, not to work hard. Work was a small part of life: you had to do it, but you didn't have to overwork yourself. You could meet a lot of people there who didn't make much money, but they read a lot. You could spend your life just thinking, or talking. Here, it doesn't matter if you're a big lawyer or something, you work your ass off. I don't think it's always necessary. People should have time for home, and friends. I think there is a big deficit of human values here.

Language changes your personality. When I speak English, people feel that I'm exotic. My accent and the timbre of my voice are so characteristically Georgian, this deep, low, voice.

My behavior is more emotional than is the custom here. For a Georgian person this is nothing; it's just the way we express ourselves. But here, it brings me unnecessary attention and a lot of compliments. Like when you really are up to business matters and you speak with a man who gets attracted to you because you speak in this peculiar way and because you're from the country that he can't even find on the map.

Or welcoming guests, for instance. When I have a guest I take it as my responsibility to entertain him. That was always a big part of Georgian culture, Georgian mentality. Georgian life was much about how to make a good welcome for a guest. This hospitality of mine makes some people feel special. People who understand that enjoy it, and they eventually become good friends. But with some people you have to be defensive. You can get people's attention very quickly but this quick attention can be a wrong kind of attention.

When I think of the future, there are a couple of things I want to have in the future: I want to have health insurance, that's for sure. And I want to have a place of my own. I don't want to be without a child when I'm an old woman. That's what I want. It may not happen. Being an artist – it's hard to predict anything.

24 Irene V., Romanian

a court interpreter, lives in Los Angeles

Two Russians killed other Russians. The police found them because there was a car parked in front of the house and the engine was running. So, the police knocked on the door, and out comes a man full of blood – who opens the door. He was cutting out pieces out of the man who had been killed inside. He was cutting out the bullets – so they wouldn't be identified, cutting out the tips of the fingers, so that the police wouldn't be able to take fingerprints, etc. So, they went to jail, these people. For a while, I lost track of the case. And then, at some point, I was called to interpret when the sentencing was given for one of them. The man was in his mid thirties. He had done his two years of punishment, and he was going to be deported to Russia. The judge, after reading the sentence, asks him: "Well, do you accept your sentence.". And the man says: "Yes, I accept my sentence. But something was promised to me, and it has to be delivered first." "And what is it?" – asks the judge. "I was promised that I'd get to see Disneyland before being deported to Russia."

My family and I left Romania in 1977, after waiting eight years for permission to leave. I was forty nine at the time... They didn't want to let us go. My husband held some important positions in Romania in the past. He used to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Diplomatic Corps. My husband had been in London from 1951 to 1957, with the Romanian Embassy. From 1957 to 1960 he worked in New York at the United Nations. In 1960, in the context of purges of Jewish people who had important positions in the Government – my husband was Jewish – he was recalled to Romania. For a while I had to live (in New York) alone with two small children. Then we went back to Romania. We tried to find some work, because my husband had been thrown out of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I started working for an economic newspaper [AS A JOURNALIST], and worked there until 1976. In 1969 we applied to emigrate to Israel. [THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT] didn't let us go, we were denied visas a number of times. Finally, after appealing to numerous international organizations, Jewish organizations in the United States, we were allowed to leave. It was 1977. Suddenly we were told we we had to leave Romania in three weeks time.

We had lived abroad before, so we had some idea of what the West was like. But the experience of an immigrant coming to look for work is very different from the experience of a diplomat working in the West. We came to America. We knew a lot of things about the country, but we had no professions. My eldest son Victor was already in the United States, studying the University of Southern California (USC), in Los Angeles. I just couldn't stand the idea of living in a different country from him.

I never felt strongly Jewish. Me and my husband, we both were raised in very assimilated Jewish families. We didn't receive any religious education. Our Jewish identification came only from the fact that other people considered us Jewish. If somebody asked me: "Why do you think of yourself as Jewish?", I'd say – because my life was greatly marked by the fact that I am Jewish. My whole history would be different if not for this fact. I was born in 1928, and in 1940 I left Romania and went to Russia with my

mother and my grandmother, because Germans were invading Romania, and my parents decided to take me to Russia, so that to save me from Germans. So, I was in evacuation from 11 to 17 years old, and that greatly marked my life. Then I came back to Romania. Then, when my husband was thrown out of the diplomatic corps because he was Jewish – my life turned around once again. So, my Jewish origins did leave an imprint on my entire life. Now, living in Los Angeles, I can say, I feel very lonely not having a strong Jewish identification. Because I think it's important to have either Jewish, or some, at least, identity when coming to America. I find that in America people are much less assimilated than they were in Romania, or Russia. People here live in ethnic areas, and not having any national, ethnic, religious identity, makes you quite lonely...

[I COULDN'T HELP READING THE ABOVE AND FOUND IT FASCINATING. THE ODYSSEY TO THE US INTERESTS ME, THE RED TAPE AND SO ON.]

I found a job as a secretary in the Jewish organization. I've found it in my first month in America. My husband couldn't find any job for about a year. He didn't have any experience. Nobody was interested in his diplomatic experience here. Finally, he took a bookkeeping class, and he got a job as a bookkeeper. I remember, when looking for work, I'd go to a placement office, and the only thing they'd ask: can I type, and can I type with ten fingers? Because that's how they type in America; every high school student here can do that. But I could not, so they couldn't find any job for me...

I find emigration to be a very dramatic experience. No matter how strong your desire is to get out of your country, adjusting to a new country is extremely difficult. The most difficult thing is the loss of identity. Suddenly you don't know who you are anymore. You're not working in the same job you used to, and people around don't know you... you feel you've suddenly turned into a different person. You have lost your social status, and with it you have lost yourself. For me, the first three years in America were the hardest.

Now, I believe, I have regained my identity. It started to happen when I found a job similar to what I did back in Romania: interpreting. Once I started working at this job, I began to feel it was me again.

There was a lot of excitement in starting out in America, too. Mostly it was the excitement of learning new things. When I was working at the University of Southern California – I worked there for eight years – I had the right to take any class without paying tuition. So, I got a Master of Science Degree in Education. In fact, I wanted to go on and get a Ph.D., but then I realized it was too late for me to start something entirely new in my life, so I gave it up. But learning about America, being in the University environment – although I didn't happen to use what I learned – was enormously useful for me, and very exciting. Later on, when I started to work as an interpreter for courts, I saw American life at its saddest. I also work for the State Department sometimes, as an interpreter, and I have to travel all around the country. And seeing all these things that are new to me makes me feel much younger than I would have felt if I had stayed in Romania.

I think what helps you to survive and succeed as an immigrant is an ability to learn, the desire to succeed and optimism. It's much harder for pessimists to survive

here.

I missed Romania, but for a long time I was afraid to go back there. I was afraid that if I'd go there, I'd feel so relaxed and everything would be so easy – the language, the geography, the streets, that I knew so well in the past, even the air would be so much easier to breathe there – that I wouldn't have enough strength to come back to the United States. Last year, in September, my husband and I went to Romania for the first time after all these years. It was as I expected. It was like coming home and everything was so easy, and comfortable, and small... After we got back to LA, my husband felt depressed for some time. He didn't want to admit it was because of our trip home, but I could see... I think he realized that we can never really feel at home here.

I work as a freelance translator, mostly for the courts in Los Angeles. I am called when they have cases with Russians or Romanians. I interpret for the criminal cases, and I see all kinds of things. Most of the cases have to do with traffic matters, or petty theft, or drunk driving – particularly characteristic for Russians. The other category of crimes is insurance fraud. I have interpreted for a few cases of staged accidents. In one case, a criminal Russian organization was renting a little apartment in Los Angeles for Russian tourists who would come to LA and stay here for a couple of months. They'd buy a car and get insurance, and then they get into a staged accident with this car, collect the money and leave.

There was one episode that had to do with the Russian Mafia. Two Russian men killed other Russians. The police found them because they had left a car parked in front of the house with the engine running. So, the police knocked on the door, and out comes a man covered with blood. He had been cutting pieces out of the man who had been killed inside. He was cutting out the bullets so they wouldn't be identified, cutting out the tips of the fingers, so that the police wouldn't be able to take fingerprints, etc. They went to jail, these people. For a while, I lost track of the case. And then, at some point, I was called to interpret when one of them was to be sentenced. The man was in his mid- thirties. He had done his two years of punishment, and he was going to be deported to Russia. The judge, after reading the sentence, asked him: "Well, do you accept your sentence?" And the man said, "Yes, I accept my sentence. But something was promised to me, and it has to be delivered first." "What is it?" asked the judge. "I was promised that I'd get to see Disneyland before being deported to Russia." The judge laughed. I think the man was deported anyway, without going to Disneyland.

I remember another case, that was not at all a major criminal case, but it had some human interest. A woman was caught stealing a blouse from a store. She was a middle-aged Russian woman. After the trial she told me, "You know what happened, Irochka (diminutive for Irene – T.N.)? It was my birthday, and I'm here all alone. No relatives, no friends. So I thought I'd get a present for myself. I went to the store and picked this blouse." She didn't tell this story on the trial, just to me, afterwards.

Another case: an old man in his eighties had some parking tickets. He asked the judge to forgive him the fine, because he was so old and lived on Social Security, and so on and so forth. I think the judge reduced the fine, or forgave him completely,

I don't remember. But after the trial, when I walked out with this man, he suddenly told me: "You know, I forget to say something very important to the judge." "What is it?" I asked. And he said: "I forget to mention that I took the Reichstag!" [the German government building in Berlin] Well, I was very impressed, and I went back to the courtroom. The judge was already busy with another case, so I approached the bailiff and I said: "You know, that man needs to tell something important to the judge." The bailiff asked: "What is it?" "He took the Reichstag.", I said. "What did he take?" he replied. "Oh, it doesn't matter." He thought they guy had stolen something. (laughs)

There were other cases when Russian or Romanian women would leave their husbands and children – sometimes, small children – and go to another richer man. Often a husband, not being able to accept that, would begin to stalk the wife, trying to make her come back, or threatening to kill her. There are some really tragic cases. Like this one: a middle-aged Romanian man comes to America. He has a wife, also middle-aged, who doesn't look like much. Suddenly, he gets the idea that his wife is prostituting herself – it's a delusion, the guy just lost his mind. But he's convinced that his wife has become a prostitute, that she goes out with other men. One night, he takes a knife and slashes her throat.

In another case, similar to that, a middle-aged Romanian man with a middle-aged wife suddenly gets the idea that his wife is posing for Playboy Magazine. The man works as a long distance truck driver. During his trips, when making stops with other drivers, he feels that every time he walks into the room, others stop speaking, look at him, and laugh. He believes the reason they laugh is that they've seen a porno movie with his wife in it. One day he comes home, starts an argument with his wife and kills her. He shoots his wife, and he also shoots her teenage daughter. He gets life in prison... Cases like that are mostly characteristic for Romanian immigrants. A lot of them come from small towns or villages. They come to America, to a highly developed technically civilization, and it's a big stress for them. Of course, some people have a certain disposition to go crazy, but still, it's the immigrant's experience that triggers it.

And I remember another little story, from my own experience. When I was working at the University of Southern California, at some point, there was supposed to be a meeting held at the Hillel House, a conference on the subject: "Russian refuseniks" (people who had been refused emigrants' visas) I offered to the Hillel's director, a woman, a rabbi, to talk about my own experience of emigration. And she replied: "Oh, no. Nobody's interested in that... This is all just politics." After that I never tried to tell my story again...until now.

25 Alexander and Masha Feoktistov, Latvian doctors

Russians from Latvia. They were part of the elite. But they knew they were outsiders, viewed almost as colonists. Here they are a different kind of outsider and they have no status. They feel more dignified.

We came to America almost by accident. We lived in Latvia, and life there had its peculiarities. When Glasnost came, everybody else but Latvians became unwelcome in the republic, Russians, Jews, Poles. I wasn't even sure which group I belonged to: my father was Russian, my mother had a Ukrainian father and Jewish mother. Anyway, suddenly, all the Russian doctors were required to pass some special exams, three exams, including Latvian language and Latvian history. Latvian doctors didn't have to do that, they had only one professional proficiency exam. Then we found out that we were about to lose our apartment in Riga. My wife had come to Latvia in 1978, she had moved there from Moldavia.

But this was 1990. One day my friend called me during my shift in the hospital. He was close to the Government circles, the kind of person who knows not only the latest news, but also the events that are about to happen. So he told me, "You'll lose your apartment."

"Why?"

"Privatization is coming," he said, "Those who haven't lived in Latvia 16 years prior to the date of privatization won't have a right to become proprietors."

I had already known we would never get citizens' rights in Latvia, now, in addition to that, I realized we'd be left without a place to live, too. So, that day I came home, and I said to my wife, "Let's go to America." And, to my big surprise, she said immediately, "OK, let's go."

You see, I didn't expect her to agree that easily, I was prepared to having an argument, I thought I'd have to persuade her, but she simply said: "Let's go."

The first thing I did was to call my friends in New York. We knew a couple of people who had immigrated earlier. One of them said: "Yes, come over, don't even hesitate. You'll find a job, you'll get a green card, no problem." Another friend was more cautious, less optimistic.

He said: "Well, if you think that's what you should do, come. We'll figure something out." So we sold the apartment, and with the money we made, we paid for the American visa, for myself, and a plane ticket. The thing was, we couldn't go together. We were a family with no children, there was no way Americans would give us a visa. Our intentions would too obvious. So, I applied for a visa just for myself. I received it in the American Embassy in Moscow. And I left less than a month after I had had that conversation with my wife.

I had eight hundred dollars in my pocket, and a small suitcase in my hands. Or, maybe, it was four hundred dollars and two suitcases. They were so small, these suitcases, filled with things we wanted to carry from an old one into a new one. There weren't that many of them. We sold or gave away almost everything.

So, I came to my friend in New York, the one who was so optimistic. He put me up for one day. Then he said: "You'll stay with an old woman, my relative. You

can share the apartment with her.” The old woman lived on social security. She didn’t mind having somebody living with her and paying her some cash for the room. I paid \$200 per month for a room, it wasn’t even private. I started working for cash. The idea was: I’d come, get by somehow, find a job, prepare for my medical exam, and wait for my wife. Masha was still in Latvia, without an apartment and without money. She was selling whatever was left of our belongings in order to survive. In two months she applied for a visa. By that time Latvia got separated from Moscow, she didn’t have to go to Moscow to get her visa, she could do it in Helsinki.

The computer in the American Embassy in Helsinki didn’t find my name. That’s why she got her visa. She arrived on March 13th, 1991. We began to live in the same room I lived before, two of us now. The old lady we shared the apartment with was a real bitch. One of those people had who had everything in Russia, she was a Chief Accountant at the Kirov Ballet Theatre.

And here she was receiving social security. She wasn’t happy at all. I told her once, after listening to her complaints: “But, no matter what, you wouldn’t want to go back to Russia, do you? Life is hard there, people buy food on coupons.” And she replied: “What are you talking about? I was the one who distributed those coupons.”

We had to decide what to do next. Our friends advised us to go to a Jewish Immigrants Organization. The organization was helping Jewish refugees in the US. Both of us were born of Jewish mothers

Masha: In Russia we were often harassed for being Jews. So, we thought finally we’d come to our own people, and they’d help us. We hadn’t applied for refugee status yet. We came to the Hebrew Immigrants Association for advice. I still remember that young woman, a social worker saying: “You’re not Jews.” I was shocked. All my life I was scorned for being a Jew, finally I was here, in America and what did I hear? “You’re not Jewish enough.”

Alex: We decided not to apply for political asylum, the way most of the Soviet Jews did. I had never fought against the communist regime, I didn’t want to lie about it.

True, I had never respected Soviet system, but it’s also true that I had a pretty good life, good position in it. The real problems we had encountered in Latvia, the ones eventually caused us to leave, were Latvian nationalism. Nobody wanted to hear about this. America supported the emancipation of Baltic Republics, it was an unconditionally good thing. There could not be any refugees of Latvian nationalism. I know some Russians who have been deported from America and sent back to Latvia. The reason for deportation being that “Latvia has a Democratic regime.”

So, I decided to apply for a working visa. I am a doctor. From 1986 to 1989 I was the Head of the Central Laboratory on Immunology in Latvia. We were doing research on AIDS. It was one of the first laboratories of its kind in Russia. The reason it came into existence was that one of the top communist party bosses in Latvia returned from his trip to Tanzania with AIDS (laughs). Anyway, when I decided to look for a job here, I went to a library and compiled a list of the laboratories in the United States that were doing research on AIDS. I sent my resumes to all of them, over a hundred resumes,

in total. Then I started waiting. Finally, I got my first real job – in Harlem, in the Ambulance for the under-served population, they took me as the Medical Assistant. I was taken on a trial basis, for one month. I worked four hours a day, a trip to Harlem and back was taking another four hours. But after I worked there three weeks, my boss called me to her office and said: “Sorry, you’re not the right person for us.” I asked why. She said: “You’re lucky you weren’t sued for what you did.”

“What for?”

“For abuse.”

I was so naive, I asked: “What do you mean by ‘abuse’?” She explained. I was giving a shot to a little boy once, a really nice kid, so I joked with him a little, and after I finished I slapped his bottom slightly, the way we used to do it in Russia as a way of saying “Bye.” His father saw the whole thing and I was accused of sexual abuse. They said good-bye to me.

A couple of weeks after I lost that job, I was invited to the Research Laboratory at the New York University for an interview. After the interview, they told me: “We’ll call you up.” Two weeks later I called them myself. They said: “We are still interviewing people. We’ll call you in two weeks.”

Two weeks later I called them again and asked: “Can you give me an answer?”

They said: “No, not yet. We’ll call you back in two weeks.” On July 12th, I remember that day very well, my visa was expiring that day, I called them again. We had just moved to a new apartment, the telephone wasn’t hooked in yet, so I went outside to make a call from a pay phone.

I said: “This is my last call. I need to know right now. Are you taking me or not?”

And they said: “Yes. We are taking you.” I began working there. At the same time, Masha, my wife, worked as a home attendant, took care of an elderly women. Our life finally began to take some shape. Then, most unexpectedly, a true miracle happened. Masha got pregnant. In Russia we were told it could never happen. She underwent surgery, a serious treatment. The doctors told her: “Forget about having children Don’t even think of it. It can never happen.”

We had a son. Of course it was hard in the beginning. I’d spend all day in the laboratory, she’d stay at home with the baby. For about a year we had to live on one salary. I was making \$27 thousand a year. It’s not that much, particularly in New York. We had to borrow money every month. Our friends kept a hundred dollar bill always ready for us. The first day of each month we would take it, on the fifteenth of each month we would pay it back, and then – take it again. So, one day I came to my boss and said: “Mark, I know you need a lab assistant. I suggest you take my wife.”

“Let her come for an interview.”

She was hired. She’s a dentist. But I thought, it was harder to fix people’s teeth than to do some paper work. It wasn’t easy, of course. She felt hysterical the first couple of months, because she couldn’t make a mistake, she couldn’t afford to make a mistake. I explained and showed her everything. And she had to take care of the child, too, waking up in the middle of night to calm him down. She was exhausted. I

couldn't help her too much. I was preparing for my exams. I got a promotion, too: I was taken as a Research Assistant. After my son was born, the same year, they gave me the position of The Associate Research Scientist. My schedule was like this: I leave home at 5 AM every morning, to be able to study in the lab before everybody showed up. Every evening after work I was spending hours in the library. The year went by. I passed my exam and with a very good score. I got a residency at Roosevelt hospital. We now live in hospital housing.

When we came to America, the first months here – we were in a state of shock. And thanks God we were, because we didn't understand what we had done. We had burned all our bridges. We left behind everything we had: positions, apartments, and cars. We came to America, with the clothes we had on us. And we had to live, somehow. So, we couldn't afford to have problems, like emotional linguistic, or cultural problems. We pushed forward, without looking back or around. We had one goal: to survive.

We lived on \$400 a month, paying \$200 rent, so only \$200 remained. That was the money we lived on for the whole month. I had to walk to my job and back, because I couldn't afford buying a token. All night long I was carrying the paralyzed man around on my shoulders, and in the morning I walked back home, completely exhausted.

Masha: In Latvia, we were respected and wealthy members of the society, we were doctors. You know, many immigrant Russians keep talking about their past, remembering what big bosses they were. Somehow most of these people were big bosses in the past. It's really quite funny. But, unlike these people, I felt more proud and more satisfied sweeping the floors and cleaning toilets here than being a dentist back in the Soviet Union. Sweeping floors was something I did for myself, for the first time in my life. In the Soviet Union we were used to having somebody always standing above us, telling us what to do. We were raised and we lived our lives in humiliation. Our life mattered only as long as it was useful for the society. None of us mattered as individuals, we were part of a whole, of a big entity. But here, suddenly, my long dormant sense of human dignity was awakened. This released human dignity expressed itself even in cleaning toilets. Anyway, even though we don't know this country too well, we only know New York. But we love this country and are grateful to it what it has given to us, and it has given us a lot.

Alex: I lived in Latvia most of my life, thirty-two years. Despite the fact that lots of Russians lived there, Latvia was not Russia, and Russian culture there was not the same as it was in Moscow, or any city in Russia. Even the Russian language I spoke was not exactly the same Russian language people were speaking in Moscow. It had the quality of learned language. So, being Russian in Latvia meant being an outsider. And that was how I felt, and that feeling had increased with time, reaching the level of absolute despair in the end. So, I learned how to be an outsider even before I came to America. But here, this feeling was never that desperate and hopeless as it was in Latvia. Here I felt, once you have a goal, and you're working hard to achieve it, you'll get there. If not exactly there, then some other place. It's another thing I have learned here: to be flexible. You can always try something else, change you plan a little bit, adjust it.

Masha: In the Soviet Union, you didn't have much of a choice. Your life was determined from the beginning, the path was laid out in front of you, once and forever. All you had to do was to follow it. No variations allowed. Our lives didn't belong to us. Here we have a choice. And one of the most important things we've learned here was how to live in the present. To live not for the sake of the future, wonderful and beautiful future which is to come, but to live life day after day. And to enjoy what we have today. And we have a lot, actually: we have a healthy child, we have an apartment with a view on the Hudson river, and we enjoy the view very much.

Alex: I feel easier here, in a moral sense. I feel I can do what I want, and nobody would tell me: "This is not a right thing to do." The way it was in the Soviet Union. Where everybody spoke to you on behalf of the society, telling you what you are, what you should be, telling what is right or wrong. Nobody judges you here, nobody forces their opinion on you. Nobody puts limits on what you do. You, yourself, can put the limits, define your own boundaries or you can accept the boundaries given by the society, but only because you like them, not because they were forced upon you. I am not talking about limits given by Law. I'm talking about personal freedom.

Masha: We feel particularly proud of what we've done, because we've done it with our own hands. Nobody helped us. And we don't have a lucky star. I mean, some people can get away with certain things, but we can't. We never got anything for free, we never got anything in an easy way. We've earned everything we have. And this what makes us proud. We were completely on our own and we did it.

Alex: Coming here was like coming to a new planet. We expected everything to be different around us. We didn't look for any likeness between the new and the old worlds.

My boss was a very wealthy man, owned his own company, lived in a two story apartment on the Upper West Side. He was an established scientist, too – more than two hundred works published. But, talking to him, you would never even guess that. He was the nicest person. His parents were immigrants.

I remember, once, at the party, we talked and he asked me: "What do you think of me?"

And I said: "I think of you as my son."

"What do you mean?"

I said: "Well, I'm the first generation of immigrants. You are the second one. You are my son."

Listening to his stories about his parents, how they first came to America, how they lived in poverty, I couldn't get rid of a weird feeling that time had gone backwards. It felt like we were his parents. Because their experience was so close to ours. He told me about his father, who was a doctor, who came to America, and found his first job as a scientist, It was like he was telling me a story about myself. He was twice as old as me, my boss, but at such moments he did feel like my son. Probably, that's how my son will talk about me, thirty years from now.

Masha: Life here has made me tougher, but also more open, more open to everything new. And if somebody asked me what is the most important thing newly

arriving immigrants should bring with them to this country, I'd say, they should bring more soap. And wash their eyes and ears as often as they can, so that they can see and listen. That's the first priority.

GOD AND ATHEISM

26 Father Michael, Russian Orthodox priest, New York

He talks in an engaging, soft-spoken manner. He has been a priest for twenty years. Half-Russian, half Jewish, raised as an atheist and educated as a historian, he turned to religion (Russian Orthodoxy) in his adult years while still in the Soviet Union. A participant in the religious dissident movement, he left Russia in 1972. He serves the Russian parish on East 71st Street in New York City. Even now, religious thought remains a dissident act.

I left Russia in 1972, among the first emigrant dissidents. 1971 was a crisis year in the dissident movement. A few of its activists were arrested and they began to give information to the KGB.

I left the country a few months before a fellow dissident pronounced my name during interrogation. Had I not left I'd have been arrested. The general situation in Russia was not very favorable to me. I had wanted to become a priest, but I could not hope to be accepted to the orthodox seminary in Russia for two reasons. First, I had gone to university, and second because I had taken part in the dissident movement.

I turned to religion in my adult years. Although I was baptized as a child, my upbringing was utterly atheistic, like everyone living in Russia. Also, I am half Russian and half Jewish: my mother is Russian, my father is Jewish. But I was always searching for God – first on my own, then later I met Father Alexander Men, a prominent figure in the Russian church, a priest and a philosopher. He had an extremely magnetic personality. He played an important part in my conversion. For many years before I left the country, I worked closely with him publishing underground (samizdat books – an activity that was considered illegal and punished severely. We published Men's own manuscripts among others, as well as works by Solzhenytsyn, and works by Russian philosophers and theologians from the beginning of the century. All these authors are published openly in Russia today, but back then it was a dangerous venture. I had to choose between arrest and emigration.

My religious faith always put me in the position of an outsider, a minority in the Soviet Union. At university, I had to conceal my faith, particularly, because I had my degree as a Historian – a profession directly linked to ideology. On the other hand, the movement towards or, rather, back to religious tradition was already starting among the intelligentsia. It came to complete fruition after Perestroika, picked up by the authorities as a convenient substitute for the departing communist ideology. But what's happening with orthodox religion in Russia now can hardly be called a renaissance. It rather reminds me of the dark ages. But in my years, this starting orthodox movement had a sense of enlightenment and discovery. I was always interested in Christianity. After I joined the orthodox church, I studied other Christian confessions as well: Catholicism, Protestantism. I had ample curiosity about all religious traditions and my interest was greatly stimulated by a general atmosphere of spiritual search in the intellectual circles I belonged to. People were searching for and finding new religions and new beliefs. The walls between religions seemed very thin, in fact, almost nonexistent. Later, people

were divided by religious faith and by ideological trends. So much so that members of different groups stopped talking to each other. But in my time, we all shared a great interest in one another.

So when I chose to emigrate, I had no idea of where I was going. It was like a trip to the moon for me. In the early seventies we had no information about the West, or very little, often not quite accurate. I left Russia with an Israeli visa. I went first to Vienna, and from there I went to France. I had connections among some of the Russian emigrant publishing houses abroad. There were only a few of them left in the West by that time: the generation of Russian emigrants writing in Russian was dying out. The first generation of people who had emigrated after the revolution was already gone. The people I was dealing with were the second and the third generations. They didn't have any serious contact with Russia. My idea was to connect these Russian language publications abroad with a new political and intellectual movement forming in the Soviet Union. I served as a liaison between the two. I stayed in France for a year. I came to feel quite lonely there. The life of the orthodox church in France was not exactly exciting. So, I moved to America.

Leaving Russia was very difficult. I can describe that experience as 'interior death'. It was hard leaving my friends. A lot of them eventually moved to the West. But at that time, it seemed I was leaving them forever. I had no idea we were at the very beginning of a vast emigration process that can only be compared in its magnitude to the emigration of intellectuals from Germany in 1930's. Of course, there were other waves of mass emigration in history, but only two countries in the world – Russia and Germany – allowed themselves to throw 'over board' intellectuals in such great numbers. Emigration may be hardest for an intellectual, because he lives off his mind and his language. I mean language in the broadest sense of the word, language as culture. It is the air the intellectual breathes. Without it he melts down like a snow-girl in a fairy tale. And that has become a catastrophe for an entire social stratum, a tragedy for many people in Russian emigration. Only a few of them managed to stay true to their profession, and even fewer to continue growing in it. I am a priest, so it's a different story. I can't say I keep functioning here intellectually, even though I have received my Ph.D. and write articles in English. Still, it's not a full, intensive intellectual existence. I can't compare it to the intensity of my intellectual life back in Russia, or to that of my friends who stayed there. I envy them in a way. Although the situation in the orthodox church in Russia is quite conservative now.

The church is not free; it's rather narrow-minded. Not that many theological debates are going inside it. But outside of it, in the adjacent areas of philosophy, psychology, one can see some really exciting developments. So, if I had stayed in Russia, and survived the most difficult years, survived prison, and the psychiatric wards (a lot of my friends and allies in the dissident movement did not survive) I could have been now a distinctive part of this new intellectual force in Russia.

Russia is connected strongly to European culture with which it has a constant dialogue. The Russian tradition of religious and theological thought is rooted in orthodox tradition as well as in poetry and history. America perceived its goal from

the beginning as a departure from European culture. It has its own system of values, points of departure. Although science and philosophy do exist here as well, they are professional fields of study rather than issues of culture.

In Russia, philosophy was never an academic field of study. Philosophy embraced everything. It was a general contemplation of issues of life and spirit. It has an element of dilettantism of course, and as such it has its bad and good sides. America doesn't accept dilettantism, refuses to see any value in it.

Also, America is a Protestant country. Protestant religious thought is centered around the Bible: its content and its interpretation. It's not that much interested in religious traditions, in the church as a tradition, in the orthodox church and its connection to Byzantium. Such traditions are so important for Russian religious thought.

So, a lot of what constitutes the Russian mentality remains unrequited here. It's one of these things that doesn't translate from language to language. The same holds for the experiences of recent Soviet immigrants, whose experience cannot be understood adequately, not only by Americans, but even by other Russians who had not lived in the Soviet Union. That explains why there is such a wall between Russian immigrants of different generations. Even though we came from the same country, we belong to different worlds.

When I came to New York, I was put in a cheap immigrants' hotel on 29th street and Park Avenue. I was astonished by the number of cockroaches I discovered there. I described them in one of my letters to friends in Moscow. I was writing regularly and my letters became quite popular, read widely not only by friends but by many people preparing to or simply contemplating emigration. Later, I was told that 'my information about cockroaches in New York had put the issue of emigration in a whole new perspective.' Well, even if this information had some impact on people, that impact didn't last for long. A new rising wave of emigration from Russia in the late seventies far outweighed the first one. Even cockroaches in New York didn't stop anyone.

I missed Russia, particularly my friends. But with time, a new circle formed around me. Some of my friends moved to New York, too. So eventually, a small oasis of Russian life was created in New York. In a way, this New York Russian circle is more authentic than what you can find in Russia today. Here it was preserved intact. Russia underwent huge transformations. When I first went back to Russia, in August of 1991, my trip coincided with the attempt of the communists to overthrow Gorbachev. I saw tanks on the streets, and couldn't help feeling terrified. I was sweating cold sweat. But the other people on the street, the common Soviet people, didn't show any sign of fright at all. They talked back to soldiers, swore at them, spat at them. The population that I saw on the streets of Moscow in those August days was not the same population I left behind in 1970s. But I had remained the same. I hadn't gone through the same process with all of them. I lived in a free country all this time, of course, taking advantage of its freedom, but certain mechanisms remained inside me – my fears and anxieties – and when I found myself back in Russia, they all came back to me.

I have been an orthodox priest for twenty years now. As a priest, I feel myself part of American life, part of its religious process. I don't feel any kind of inferiority

in this regard at all – the inferiority of an immigrant. In fact, I am grateful for all the opportunities I have received here that I could not have gotten in Russia. Still, I am not sure at what extent an immigrant can be a part of his new country's life, its historical process. I came to America in 1973, and I know that from 1973 to 1997 the country has changed. When Americans say: "The country has changed so much", I agree with them, but I don't know how and in what ways. I would not be able to tell you what precisely has changed in the country in a past ten, twenty years, even though I've been here all that time. And any American would be able to tell you this right away, to name those changes, because they are real for him. He notices every slightest shift in the society.

My case is a special one of course. As a priest of predominantly Russian parish, I exist within the American society, yet outside of it. New York is a special city, too. Nobody is at home here.

I entered the orthodox seminary right after I moved to New York from Paris. It was an American orthodox seminary. There was nothing Russian about it whatsoever. The only student I could speak Russian to was a black man who was interested in languages. His interest in Russian went so far that he eventually got married to a Russian princess of Russian-American heritage, who actually didn't speak a word of Russian. Anyway after I graduated from the seminary, I got this Russian parish on 71 Street and Third Avenue.

Serving in a church takes a lot of time and energy. People come to me with their confessions. They come to me for all kinds of advice. A lot of members of my parish are recent emigrants from Russia. Some of them are converted Jews, some are 'converted' Russians – people who turned to Christianity at a certain moment of their lives. When I came to this parish in late seventies, there were still some Russian immigrants of the first wave left here, or their descendants – I mean Russians who fled the country after the Bolshevik revolution. Kerensky, the first Minister of democratic Russia in 1917, was singing in our church chorus till his death in the late seventies. Balanchine attended our parish, too. Those were the last of the first generation of Russian immigrants in New York. Now they are gone for the most part. The Soviet or post-Soviet immigrants came in their place: they constitute the majority of the members of the parish. Because of this circumstance, even though the purpose of our parish is fundamentally religious, it has to perform certain social functions, too. Like bringing people together. People come here to practice their faith. But the relationships formed between them resemble those in a family. Here people find the warmth that they need so badly.

I view my experience of immigration as positive. It allowed me to start my life all over again. Early Christianity gave great importance to breaking all ties with one's family, environment. It was one of the first principles of Christian asceticism. That's what happens naturally to every immigrant: he leaves familiar ground and steps into an unknown territory. It's a great spiritual challenge. Not everybody can survive it intact. It's particularly hard for a Soviet person – we all were raised to be conformists. But it's easier for a religious person: God is one and only, everywhere, in every language.

I am glad I've become a priest here, and not in Russia. I could not have served my church in Russia with the same commitment and freedom as I do here – just because

the church is not as free there. For instance, last summer, in Russia, Father Kochetkov – a very prominent orthodox priest and a missionary – was dismissed by the Patriarch. He was not allowed to conduct services in his parish, the parish that he himself had created. The reason for such a severe punishment was that he had tried to slightly modernize the service, make it more comprehensible for common people. He would read parts of the New Testament during the service in Russian, rather than ancient Slavic. As my friend in Russia put it years ago: “We have defeated the State, the party, even the KGB. Now only the Church is left.”. And it’s true. The Orthodox Church is now one of the most rigid bureaucratic institutions left in Russia. Its structure hasn’t changed since Stalin’s times. It’s a true relic of the old regime. So, I appreciate being able to serve my church here, in a free country.

STARTING OUT

27 Matvey Kanengiser, hair stylist

He lived in Kiev, Ukraine, until 1991. He comes from a family of factory workers, but he became a model, then hairstylist. The profession made him close to the rich and powerful in Russia and still does here. There are some differences.

I left Russia in 1991. I had lived in Kiev, and I lived well. Plenty of Jewish people were involved in my occupation, so, I never really suffered from anti-semitism. I didn't really look Jewish, so it wasn't a problem. I remember a certain period, in 1989 when rumors were spread about possible pogroms in Kiev. People were finding anti-semitic notes in their mail boxes, etc. Some people really panicked. But the threats never materialized. No pogroms happened. The whole thing just died away. I decided to emigrate because I was looking for excitement.

I began working as stylist in 1985. Before that I worked in a metallurgy plant, where my father sent me after I graduated from high school. My father was a workshop supervisor in this plant. My whole family including my aunt, my sister, and my cousin, worked in this plant. It was a family tradition. I started there as an apprentice, but in a year I was promoted. I was operating a simple machine, cutting sheets of metal in parts. All I had to do was to move the handle up and down, and then again, up and down. The operation didn't require a big deal of sophistication, or even thinking. Then, by a mere accident, I met a girl who was seeking hairstyle models for her husband, who was a stylist. He needed models to present his work at festivals, exhibitions.

So, I modeled for him for a while, and I liked the business. I liked people involved in this business. There were a lot of beautiful people there. I liked that. I thought I'd try it myself. The girl was teaching in a hairdressers' professional school. I took the course there and became a hairdresser. The profession suited me, and I suited it. I like changes, and that is what fashion is about. It never remains in the same place. Some people warned me, "You'll get bored, standing on your feet all day, cutting people's hair." It was never boring to me. It's amazing to watch a person change before your very eyes, once their hair style changes. People's manners change, the way they walk, their facial expression, even their voice. It's like you're creating a whole new personality.

I soon became a very fashionable hairdresser in Kiev. I won a couple of competitions. I was making good money, because people wanted me to do their hair and paid good money for that. The salary in a beauty salon was not great. Most of the money came from tips.

People in customer service – hairdressers, directors of supermarkets, stores, and salespeople – we all were connected to one another, lived by the principle: "What you guard is yours." So, if I did the director of a supermarket's hair, he paid me back in sausages. If I didn't need sausages, I could go to a person who 'guarded' something else, and get something in exchange for sausage. After perestroika, things changed, but not much. You still had to pay people for different services, so that they'd pay you, you still had to serve as a kind of a mediator between people. You still had to bend before the people with power. That made life very humiliating.

When Chernobyl happened, and some Americans, who seemed to worry more about it than many people in Ukraine, invited some children, supposedly victims of Chernobyl from Ukraine, to visit and spend some time in the United States. It was a kind of humanitarian gesture on their part. But the children who ended up going to America, for the most part were sons and daughters of the same directors of supermarkets, hotels, etc. and other powerful people, people with connections. The same old Mafia...

The whole emigration process took me five years. At the end, I couldn't think of anything but getting away from Russia. All the political and social upheavals in the country passed me by. I came to New York, and settled in Brooklyn. The Jewish immigrants' organization, NYANA, supported me for the first couple of months. I was learning the language. I was looking for a job. First, I tried a couple of beauty salons in Brooklyn, where I lived. Some of them were run by Russians.

But I was rejected, they needed somebody who could speak English. I couldn't speak English well enough for them. Ironically, the first employment I found was in a fancy French salon in Manhattan. I passed it once, I liked the way it looked, I decided to go inside and inquire about the job. They took me. The French didn't care much if I could speak English or not. They didn't speak that much English themselves, and they didn't expect it from me. They were French. they believed speaking French was good enough. It was one of the best beauty salons in New York, located on Madison and 74th. For me, it was a great professional school. I worked there for two years, the best time in my life here. I felt great among my French coworkers. Their English was not much better than mine, we often had to communicate with gestures. Our boss was spending half of the time in New York, and half in Paris, where he had a salon as well. I remember him talking to the clients – a lot of them were wealthy old ladies living on the Upper East Side. Often he'd listen to them telling what they want, and then say: "I'm going to cut your hair up to here...". And that was it. If you don't like it, you are free to go. This was for the most part what I was required to be able to say: "I'm going to cut your hair up to here...". I was spending a lot of time at work. I was basically coming home only to sleep. A lot of interesting people used to come to the salon, many celebrities: princes, models, actors. It was fun.

I wasn't making that much money. In a way, I was exploited. Like any other immigrant business, the French business was built on the principle: take more from the customers and pay less to the employees. Most of the employees in the salon were young people brought from France. They didn't speak English well or at all, and while they were learning English, they were paid very little, about 20% of the fee charged from customers. The average price for the haircut in the salon was \$150. Usually, after a year or two, when they'd improve their English, and their skills, and ask for a raise, they'd be told: "OK, this is not working, you can go". And the boss would bring new fresh people on their place. That was how the business worked. There were a couple of experienced stylists in the salon, they had their own clientele, they were paid good money. The rest or us worked our butts off for very little pay. Some got lucky. Like, take Frederic Fekkai. He came from France. He didn't speak any English, either. He didn't know anybody in New York. Then he happened to meet Kelly Klein, she was one of his customers. She

introduced him to Bergdorf Goodman, the store owner, that was where he opened his first salon. That's how things work. In a way, it's the same system as in Russia. Only in Russia you'd shmooze for a slab of meat, or sausage. And here, the stakes are higher.

In the French salon I first learned about style. In Russia there was no real style. Everybody did what everybody else did. There was no real information on fashion, no understanding of 'class'. The most colorful was often considered the most fashionable. Chic was to have a foreign label on your garment. Or take Russian fashion designers, like Zaitsev. He'd designed dresses in the shape of eggs, Faberge eggs. Brought them here. Well, Americans put them in the museum. What else would you do with those eggs. You can't wear them. This is not fashion, it's just a desire to shock. Fashion designers here also try to shock, to impress the public. But what they do makes sense as clothes and also there is a simple idea behind the design. In Russia all the designs are complicated, piled up with decorations. I remember the elaborate hairdos we used to do in Russia – by the time you finished it, the whole thing begins to crumble, losing shape. Here I learned about style, and found my own style, eventually. I read this article recently, an interview with a stylist from Russia. He said he can choose any style he wants. He added he can dictate any style he chooses to the public. Like, he can tell people to wear red today – and they will, and green tomorrow – and they will. That's his idea of fashion. A typical Russian approach: they all want be to be Napoleons there.

When I came to America I wanted to achieve the most in my profession, to get recognition. My profession is a creative one. And you have to be up-to-date with fashion, you have to read the fashion magazines. Competition is very high here, but still it's much easier for me to work here. I can't explain why, but it's true. There's an air of freedom here. I knew nothing about America, about New York, when I came here. At first, I was shocked by many things I saw. Like all that garbage in the streets. I was shocked by the extent of poverty. But now, when I go to Central Park and see all these homeless people, lying there in the sun, looking so carefree. There is an air of freedom to their existence, too.

A certain class of my clients in New York strongly reminds me of my clients back in Kiev: they're Russians from Brighton Beach. They're former managers and directors of supermarkets and clothing stores, here they own restaurants and stores and warehouses. They haven't changed a bit. They still like being supervisors.

I really don't have a circle of friends. New Russians don't interest me, old Russians, the immigrants who have lived here for twenty years or so, are boring. So, my only circle is my girlfriend, really. She's my company. (laughs) After I left my first salon, I worked in a couple of others. Finally I decided to work for myself. It's the best. I don't like having supervisors. I am not a collective kind of person. I was not in Russia, I am not here.

28 Yelena Mandel, 44 years old, a lawyer, lives in New York

Brought up an atheist in Russia, she became interested in Jewish History and Religion. In 1979, she came to America to get a degree in theology, than another in social work. She changed her occupation once again and became a lawyer. She now practices bankruptcy law in a high profile law firm. Atheism to conservatism to secular Americanism.

I left Russia when I was 24. I graduated from a Teachers College in Moscow, Department of English. I lived all my life in Moscow. In 1975 I married my ex-husband. When he proposed, he told me: "You should know that I am not going to live here, I will definitely leave this country some time soon. So, if you are not ready to come with me, you had better say 'no'." I said 'yes'. But we left only in 1979. Between 1975 and 1979 we led the very active life of underground Jewish radicals.

It happened accidentally: we had a friend in Moscow, a linguist who knew many languages and at some moment decided to add Hebrew to his collection. He came to us one day and said: "Would you like to take Hebrew lessons together?" It seemed like an interesting idea, so we started taking Hebrew together, without thinking too much about it. But through those classes, we got involved in Jewish social and political life.

My ex-husband started teaching Hebrew himself. For about four years we hosted a Jewish club in our apartment. Every Friday my husband and I would go to a synagogue, pick up some English speaking Jewish foreigner there who had come just to meet some Russian Jews. We would invite him to our apartment to spend an evening, and a crowd of twenty thirty people would already be there.

People came each Friday without special invitation. We would discuss some Jewish themes with the guest in English. A lot of rabbis visited our house at that period, rabbis from America, England, South America. Our Fridays became more and more popular with time, more and more people would come to the club. Most of these people were planning to leave Russia. In addition to the club, I was giving private English lessons.

I had been doing it for many years. A synagogue sent all the prospective emigrants who wanted to learn English directly to me. My family was never traditional. On the contrary, my parents were extremely assimilated.

My Jewish education at home all came down to one accident. When I was six and went for my first day to kindergarten, my mother told me: "You should keep in mind that you are Jewish, so all the other kids will hate you." That was all the warning I got. And then she added: "And you must hate them, too." She did not explain why or for what reason. She simply sent me to the big world with such a warning. I can't say I always strictly followed this advice. But it made a big impression on me. I always was very well aware of the fact that I am Jewish.

In Russia both my husband and I experienced Anti-Semitism. We weren't accepted to University. I was warned against ever trying to get into University, but I told myself: "I should at least try, I would never forgive myself if I don't." I was eighteen then and silly enough to apply to the Department of History of the Moscow University.

The examination commission was clearly and explicitly trying to knock me down. They had to work hard, because I did know a lot. I was an A student all my life. They asked me question after question, until finally they asked something I had no answer for, then, triumphantly they gave me a B. I was not accepted. Well, this was the kind of thing that happened to all the Jews. And I was prepared for it.

Most of my childhood I spent in physical fights with other kids, mostly boys much larger than myself, who insulted me with pejorative words about Jews. Once I even got a concussion, while fighting a guy in a pioneer camp. This physical trauma along with my not being accepted to the University were maybe the only traumatic situations I had suffered because of Anti-Semitism. Of course it felt bad, not to be accepted. Particularly because among those who were accepted that year to the Department of History was one of the worst students from my class in High School.

But I did not know what Judaism meant till my early twenties, when my husband and I began to learn Hebrew, and then Jewish religion and history. Even though we felt very Jewish, we never thought of emigrating to Israel. Maybe because our motivation for emigration was political rather than ethnic. We had lived long enough in one socialist state. There is no reason to move into another one. So, we did not want to go to Israel, but we did want to come to America and get a real Jewish education. That was the script. And we pretty much followed it. As soon as we got to America, we went to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the major school of the conservative Judaism in the country. We both graduated from this seminary with the degrees of Masters of Jewish Theology. The year I received my Master's degree in Theology was the first year they began to take women to Rabbinical school. I seriously considered going to the rabbinical school, but then I changed my mind. They were very much interested in having my husband there, tried to talk him into becoming a rabbi. We were the first Russians to ever study at the Seminary, there were plenty of Russians after us, but we were the first. And they wanted very much to have a Russian rabbi. They did not consider me seriously for this "part", but my husband was a big attraction for them. They made him meet other rabbis who kept talking of how wonderful the rabbi's life was.

But my husband did not go to the rabbinical school. Neither of us did. They got their first Russian rabbi soon after us...

My husband started his classes at the seminary exactly in our second week in New York. I started the next semester – somebody had to earn the money. I went to work as a secretary in our third week in America.

I could speak English perfectly well, but it was about the only thing I could do. I did not have any marketable skills. My husband had his degree in Engineering, but he hated Engineering with all his heart, and was never going to go back to it.

We were studying in the Seminary, mostly to feed our souls, it was not clear at all what are we going to do next. The idea was to get a systematic Jewish Education, to learn how to be Jews, so to speak. We did not think of making it our profession. Although my husband, while he was a student in the Graduate program, was teaching in different Hebrew Schools throughout New Jersey and New York. He was teaching

American kids Hebrew and Jewish History. How he did it remains a mystery for me. His English was almost non-existent at that time. And I was working as a secretary at a small architectural firm.

I found this job through the New York Times. I studied the job listings thoroughly from my first day in America. I remember going to five interviews a week. The problem was I could not type, could not do anything. The company that had finally hired me was tempted not by my skills, but by the opportunity to pay me a very little salary. They paid me minimum wages, which at that time was about \$ 3.50 an hour. I was working there for six months, then I had to leave and find a part-time job, as I went to study to the Seminary. I found a part-time position as a librarian in a big legal firm on Wall Street. I worked there for almost four years. Meanwhile I finished two Graduate Schools.

After the Seminary, or actually while I still studied there, I realized I needed to acquire some practical profession, too which would allow me to survive. The Seminary held a joint program with the Department of Social Work of the Columbia University. So, I took this program. It seemed like a good idea. As a child I loved to read Freud so I thought I could be a psychotherapist. So, after I got my degree in Theology, I went back to school and got my next Master's degree in Clinical Social Work. After that I did in fact work as a psychotherapist in an organization called the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services. I worked in one of their clinics in Washington Heights. It was not far from where we lived, I could actually walk to work. Only one-third of my patients were Russian immigrants. The other two-thirds were immigrants from the Dominican Republic, orthodox German Jews, professors and students of Columbia University, the Irish from the Inwood area – the diverse population inhabiting the Washington Heights. The case load was quite interesting.

But after four years, I got fed up with my job. I guess I am not a very compassionate person. Listening to peoples' complaints, hearing about others' problems got annoying after a while. My specialty was marriage counseling. The problems most couples have are pretty much the same. At a certain moment I felt "If I hear about this problem one more time, I will beat my head against the wall." Anyway, it became clear I had to change my occupation. I went to law school. I must say, the credit for this ingenious idea – and it was in fact a truly ingenious idea – belonged not to me, but, again, to my ex-husband.

By that time he himself had graduated from Law School and worked as a lawyer. He was convinced I was made to become a lawyer, and he almost forced me into law school. To me it was like a game, a game and a challenge. The idea was to figure out the rules of the game and to play by these rules. It was big fun for me – figuring out the rules. I now work in a fancy Law Firm. Some people would kill for a job like this. It's the best. I fit in into this world quite organically, I feel fluent and free in it. At the same time I can't get rid of the feeling of estrangement, as if I were watching myself from the side. I play the game so well that nobody but me can't tell it's a game. But I know it is, and I like that. I enjoy this feeling of estrangement. It allows me to experience reality on two levels at once.

When we first came to America, we, like most of the Russian immigrants, especially those who came here in seventies, had extremely conservative political views. For a while I used to write on Jewish topics for the New American newspaper. It was a Russian language newspaper, very popular among the Russian community. One of the articles I wrote was about Jews converting to Christianity. I wrote that most of the converted Jews get baptized out of ignorance: they don't know anything about Judaism and don't want to make an effort to learn, preferring the much less demanding and much more laid out path to Christianity.

This article caused a big scandal, half of the Russian immigrant population of New York stopped talking to me after it was published, some of them still shun me. But this is only half of the story. The other half was a person named Moishe Haim Levin, a Jew from Riga, and a Lubavich rabbi, read the article and took a great interest in me. He was organizing some programs for Russian Jews at the time. He called me and offered me a job in his newspaper for Russian Jews that he was about to publish. He invited me over to meet him. I went with my husband. He lived far away in Brooklyn. During the first five minutes we had a very civilized conversation. But then he happened to ask me: "How come you know so much about Judaism?" And I replied: "I am studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary." Well, what happened after that is hard to describe. For the orthodox Jew, a Hasid that he was, a conservative Jew is a biggest evil. He accused us of being worse than other Russian Jews, "who, he said, are simply ignorant, and don't know any better, but you, – he said, – you should know better." Then his wife appeared from somewhere with an infant in her arms, and started cursing us, too. We left...

My first six years in America I was very religious, I observed the Sabbath, kept kosher. Now I eat pork again. After my divorce I held a grudge against God, started eating pork (laughs). My approach to religion is now very American. I participate in many panels and commissions as a representative of Russian Jews. I am becoming a token Russian. In other words my Jewishness is becoming a social responsibility, rather than spiritual one.

I don't agree with many Russian immigrants' complaints that it's impossible to be close friends with Americans. I have some very close American friends, no less close than my Russian friends. My general impression is, and it maybe an unfair judgment on my part, but it seems to me that Americans are, overall, more decent people than Russians. They are more honest in their friendships, a quality that Russians, whom I dearly love, often lack. It's true for both business and personal relationships.

American women, for instance, would never take away your husband. Russians would. Americans would never talk badly about you behind your back. I know this for sure, my American girlfriends would never do that. As for my Russian girlfriends, I don't have the same certainty. I know that if the occasion arises, they would, and with pleasure. On the other hand, I, myself, lack this pureness and idealism so characteristic of Americans. I don't have it all. I am more like the rest of Russians. (laughs)

I am specializing in Bankruptcy Law. The subject is quite dry. But what I like about law, what attracts me the most... is, first, the intellectual thrill. It's like solving

the riddles in math. Law reminds me the most of algebra, which I used to love as a child. I always liked logical paradoxes. Of course, there is a boring part to every job, but, for the most part my job requires a lot of thinking. The other thing I like about it is that it pays very well. This combination of intellectual interest and good money, I think, is absolutely unbeatable.

Now, there is a big demand for lawyers with knowledge of Russian. Unfortunately, not in my field, not in bankruptcy law. Those who are needed are mostly straight corporate lawyers. Of course I could change my profile, but this kind of job would require making constant trips to Russia and dealing with the class of new Russian businessmen which I really don't want to do. I have had some Russian clients during my eight years in the firm. And every time when it happened, when I had to take a Russian client, I thought to myself: "Why am I doing this? I left Russia in order never to see these people again. Why do I need all this!"

A couple of years ago I represented a Nikolaev Aluminum Plant sued by some companies in New York. The case had nothing to do with bankruptcy, but was given to me because the clients did not speak any English. It was a very unpleasant experience, having to communicate with the General Director of the plant. At some point I told him directly that he was an anti-Semite, and that I hated talking to him. I remember we were shouting at each other for about an hour. Funnily enough, after this incident he seemed to develop respect for me. But anyway, I am trying to avoid such experiences as much as I can.

When I first came to America, I remember I felt like being on Mars. America was not just another country, it was another planet. Everything was new and mysterious. I often miss this feeling, when perception was so keen. But then I like my present life. What I like the most is that I'm independent and self-sufficient. And I like that. I like that a lot.

29 Sergey Atrushkov

He comes from the St. Petersburg artistic underground. He came to America in 1989 for a visit and soon found himself translating the Book of Mormon. He talks about a sense of safety. He misses his friends, though he thinks he might have drunk himself to death as some of them did.

Questions: age

I left Russia to visit my friend who lived in America. I came here in April 1989, after Michael Iossel, an old friend who had emigrated a couple of years before that, sent me an invitation. Misha was working at the University of New Hampshire at the time. Not long after I arrived, he found me a job.

It was a translating job that Misha, himself, didn't feel like doing, so he turned it over to me. The job was to translate the Book of Mormon into Russian. Our clients were the Mormon Sectarians living in Kansas City. They had split with the official Mormon church in the 19th century over the issue of polygamy. The project was meant to last a year. I was supposed to do the rough translation, and Misha to edit it later. But no editing was really needed: the book was written in the stylized language of the bible. The same expressions and rhetorical figures were used repeatedly throughout the text and after the first 100 pages I pretty much knew them by heart. So, I ended up typing the pages, sending them to the Mormons with no proofreading, and receiving the money.

The fact that I had such luck from the very beginning strongly influenced my decision to stay in America. I could spend the entire day wandering around, then, in the evening, type a couple of pages on the computer, and still make enough money to live on. The Mormons were paying me \$20 dollars per page.

The other reason for my decision: the feeling of physical safety that I felt in America. It became obvious to me that my life in Russia was accompanied by a constant sense of physical danger, which I didn't even feel while there, but did when the feeling was gone. Every moment in Russia I lived in the constant fear of humiliation, and in my readiness to accept it. I never believed the Soviet State to be an instrument of my personal protection.

I lived an odd life in Russia. I lived in Leningrad, repairing computers. The job was bringing me enough money and gave me a free schedule. In my spare time, or, should I say, my primary time, I was actively involved in the life of the cultural underground. I was attending all the literary discussions and readings at Club 81. I was doing some translations for the Pretext literary magazine, published by my late friend, Sergey Khrenov. That was my life, mainly devoted to socializing. Perestroika didn't really change anything except it gave my friends and me an opportunity to make money. For instance, by working in a cooperative, I was able to earn enough money to take my trip to America. Perestroika gave me not only the financial, but even the physical opportunity to come to America, and for that I am forever grateful to Mr. Gorbachev, personally. He didn't have to do what he did, nobody pushed him really.

Subconsciously, I had always wanted to emigrate. What prevented this desire from surfacing was an insufficient level of fear. I was never prosecuted as a Jew, because

I'm not one. Also, I had no belief in my potential, no self-confidence whatsoever. That's why, I never gave the idea serious consideration.

However, once I found myself in the United States, my decision to stay there matured and came to fruition pretty quickly. First of all, I had plenty of friends already here, living in different parts of America. Some were in California, some – on the East Coast. Many of my school mates, and even more of my college mates, had emigrated from Russia. Now they all were telling me: “Don't be so foolish as to go back to Russia.” They also explained to me how to apply for political asylum. I described my life in Russia, my connections to the underground. I got the status of refugee. So, after I finished translating the book of Mormons, I started looking for a job in the computer repair field and found one. I stayed at that job for almost four years. After that, I took some computer classes and my next job was much more sophisticated, and much better paid. So is the job I have now. I'm dealing with computer networks, serving as a Network administrator.

My only difficulty in America is a loss of a social context. In Russia we all were used to being part of a community. That was the way we were raised. My communication with Americans, for the most part, is very formal. Formality provides a protection against an offense. America is a nation of immigrants and its culture is based on this individualistic mentality which needs to protect itself. It creates certain formalized ways of expressing emotions, formalized ways of communication. It doesn't allow you to get inside another person, to know him in depth. It amplifies the distance between people to a safe distance. And I think, historically, it has helped people who came here from various cultures to coexist in one place and to live in peace. These advantages, I believe, far outweigh the whatever shortcomings such a system has.

Heavy drinking was part of socializing in Russia, part of the social culture we grew up in. Drinking gave a sense of unity with the group, created certain oneness. But it also killed a lot of people...including many talented people. I truly believe that had I stayed in Russia, I would have drunk myself to death by now, as so many of my friends have.

SNIPPETS

30 Snapshots

30.1 Taboos

She is 20, a straight A student with a job on the side where she works 40 hours a week. She is looking very tired. "It's a pity that you work so hard that you are always tired." I say.

"That's America," she says with her easy laugh.

"What do you mean?"

"America is so much more stressful than Russian and most other countries."

"I'm writing a book about Russian immigrants of the last wave." I tell her.

"Why?"

"Because I'm interested in why people move."

"Nobody knows," again the laugh.

"Really?"

"The first year you're here, everyone asks you. By the third year, it's a taboo subject."

30.2 Gennady Katsov, poet, cafe owner

What I like about America the most is that it has everything. Including problems. All kinds of problems. And Americans are the first to admit it. And that what makes them a strong nation. I believe there are strong nations as well as strong people. Strong people are not afraid to talk about their problems, they try to overcome them. Weak people – they act out the old joke of Brezhnev times: when the train is stranded on the track and the train operator says: "Let's make an u-u-u-u sound and pretend we are moving"

Infantilism is so characteristic of Soviet people because we never felt responsible for anything. We could vote for one person out of one, buy the only brand of vodka that was available in the stores, share the same sausage and discuss the same article in the newspaper. Russia still remains juvenile. That's why it throws itself from one extreme to another. It's scary what's happening in Russia. Shukshin, a Russian writer, said once, "We never knew what it was like to live well. Why should we start now?" I wanted to know. That's why I left Russia.

30.3 Milk

Sophia, an engineer in her 50s: "I realized I was dealing with an unpredictable system, which gains its strength by abusing people. In a way, I'm living my second life now, different from the first one. The principal difference is that an educated person in this country can live with style, modesty and decency. And that was impossible in Russia, just on a practical level. You had to bend in order to get certain things, to be humiliated just to have a piece of bread and a glass of milk."

30.4 The Importance of Medical School

Andrey Gritsman, a pathologist and poet: "My father was a soldier in World War II. Their generation was an interesting one, because, on one hand they were saying that everything is going to be all right if you work hard, try to achieve your goals, and don't make too many waves. On the other hand they had my father told me: 'You must be a physician, you must go to Medical School, because if one day you'll be imprisoned and get into a concentration camp, you'll have to be able to survive, and you've got a better chance to survive if you're a physician.' "

Now I work in a very closed system, a very exclusive, wealthy medical community operating on old money. I'm good so I was accepted into this community. I realize now, that regardless of how important it is for these people to belong to a local United Jewish Appeal, a Greek Orthodox Church, or a Lutheran Church, what they really care about is how to make money as smoothly, as expeditiously, and as relentlessly as possible. So, you have to play by certain rules. But if you're good and if you understand these rules, then you're OK. It may sound very bad, but it's also very good, because it is entirely non-ideological. But the same things I like about this system, I hate as well. This flatness and relentlessness. Basically, I'm an alien. I don't belong anywhere.

30.5 Nobody Cares

Larisa Kabrinskaya, in her forties, lives in Houston: "Only here, in America, have I understood what personal freedom is. I don't think I would ever understood that have I stayed in Russia. Because the one interesting thing about freedom is that it's not only freedom for you, but for everybody else around you as well. It took me some time to understand that... But I remember the moment when I did: I was walking in the crowd, in the airport, and all of a sudden it became clear to me that nobody, not a single person in that crowd, paid any attention to me, cared who I was. I was used to getting people's attention in Russia – maybe because I could never quite fit in. But here, in this crowd, nobody cared about me... that was a very freeing sensation, somehow. People around were all so different from one another, but it was OK to be different, it was normal. Nobody was bothered or alarmed by that. I suddenly felt I could be whatever I wanted in this crowd, I wouldn't be punished for being different. I can be ignored – that's another side of it... but I won't be punished. That was a very pleasant feeling..."

30.6 Prodigy

Victor Boyko, 13 year-old freshman, comes to the director of undergraduate studies for computer science led by his professor. It seems Victor is too good.

Director: What do you know about computer science?

Victor: C, C++, Pascal, Prolog, Fortran.

Director (a little skeptical): What was the most sophisticated project you did in any of those languages?

Victor: Nothing too sophisticated.

Director: Try to give me an example.

Victor: Well, I wrote a package to simulate particle flow in high temperature superconductors.

Professor and Victor then had a conversation about the differential equations Victor used. Victor clearly understood the material.

Director: What do you know about “data structures”?

Victor: I don’t know. What do you mean?

Director: Well if I insert a sorted list into a binary tree, what shape does the tree take?

Victor (after 5 seconds): Well, it looks like this I guess (he draws a sloping line to the right, the correct answer).

Director leaves for a while. Professor and Victor are talking about graph algorithms. When the Director returns, Professor and he ask Victor to write a high level algorithm to count the number of connected components.

Victor writes an algorithm in set notation. One of the stopping conditions requires comparing two sets. Professor asks him how to do this efficiently. Victor responds that he would use “bit vectors.”

Professor says that marking would be better and then a flag that indicates that something has changed. Victor stares at Professor for a few seconds. He says, ”Yes, I see, but then it wouldn’t be so pretty.”