

# Diana Shklyarov Transcript

Diana Shklyarov: – especially for Refuseniks.

Aaron Hersh: It's incredible. We heard much about it.

DS: When he went to Russia, it wasn't for the first time – not for the first time. And then, he'd go to Russia, to Leningrad. I gave something [to] my parents. I was not comfortable [bringing] something more because it's maybe too heavy. I brought something like a wooden scarf, like hat, gloves, something like this. He said to me, "Diana, come on. Look at this package. Size like this? Size like this package?" Everyone whose parents still was in Russia or relatives brought something to bring to – it was a group. It was Roy [Einhorn]. It was Rabbi [Bernard] Mehlman. It was Fran Putnoi. She was the director at that time. It's amazing. If you want to know more about [inaudible] or about me, whatever you prefer or both of them.

AH: We're going to ask about both.

Gabriel Weinstein: We're curious about both. I have this little script that we're going to read, and then we'll start.

DS: I'd like just to talk to you.

GW: I'm Gabriel Weinstein. I'm here with –

AH: Aaron Hersh.

GW: We are here with Diana Shklyarov.

DS: Shklyarov.

GW: We are here with Diana Shklyarov to record her history as part of the Soviet Jewry Oral History Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Today is November 10, 2016. We are at the Temple Israel Library, 477 Longwood Avenue, in Boston, Massachusetts. Diana, do we have your permission to record this interview with you?

DS: Yes, please.

GW: All right. Thank you very much. So our first question, Diana, is, what year were you born?

DS: I was born in Russia in Leningrad in 1938. [laughter]

GW: Wow. And were you an only child? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

DS: I had a sister. She died several years ago in Boston.

GW: And what was her name?

DS: Her name was Clara.

GW: Clara?

DS: Our maiden name was Dumova.

GW: How do you spell that?

DS: D, as in David, U-M as in mother – O-V-A – as Victor – A on the end.

GW: Clara Dumova.

DS: Yes.

GW: What were your parents' names?

DS: My parents was – Raya.

GW: Raya? How do you spell that?

DS: I'm not sure. Actually, it's a Hebrew name. It's Hebrew name. I think it's R-A-Y-A.

AH: I can see that, yeah.

GW: That was your mother?

DS: It's my mother. My father was [inaudible]. I think his name from birth was Abram. How do you pronounce?

GW: Abram.

DS: Abram, yes. But we called him [inaudible].

GW: What did your parents do for a living?

DS: My father was Army officer. It was during the war [inaudible] to the Army during Second World War. He went to volunteer [in] (Valencia?) to Army, and he stay in the Army until he retired. My mother was [an] accountant.

GW: Accountant?

AH: Accountant?

DS: Yes.

AH: What type of school did you grow up going to?

DS: I grew up in usual Soviet Union school until I graduated high school. Then I went to – it was called – not university, not college. It was institute. For five years, I went to college for studying psychology, children's psychology. Then I worked [with] children.

Then I decided to take more classes [as] a librarian. And then, until I left, I was librarian in the public library.

AH: Adding to that, how many Jewish students did you find in school? How many Jewish students went to school with you?

DS: In high school? In school, it was several children, as I remember. Then, I became [inaudible] one Jewish girl in the institute. Then I don't remember anybody else.

GW: What about in elementary school? Were there many Jewish students at your elementary school?

DS: I don't remember.

GW: Don't remember. Okay.

DS: Actually, we didn't talk about it. In school, we didn't talk about it.

AH: People didn't talk about religion.

DS: Yes, didn't talk about Jewish or not Jewish. I don't know what teacher thought about it. In elementary school, I didn't feel nothing. In high school, I didn't feel any – of course, I knew about antisemitism, but in the school, because we have a lot of Jewish teachers in math and literature, it's wonderful teachers. Of course, I know that Jewish – then, I decided to go to Leningrad, very prestigious university. I didn't get – not because my – I have very good grades. Actually, I was very good student. It wasn't enough grade, I was told. When my father put [on] a very beautiful blue uniform and go to rector in the university, he said, directly like this, “Why [don't] you let your nice, smart girl go to this university?” “There is a lot of different schools; she'll be let in very easily.” Then I went to some different school for college. This was actually directed to me. First time to see antisemitism for me.

GW: What did that feel like?

DS: I was depressed. I very much, as we all very much believed – all of us believed in Soviet Union. We believed. What could I say? Only my mother was very skeptical. She just turned off radio when somebody like [Joseph] Stalin or somebody talked. She said, “I couldn't hear it.” I was very upset. I so believed. It was last time I stopped believing when I didn't get in university.

GW: Why was your mother skeptical?

DS: I could tell you. Because some of our family – I didn't know these people, some cousin – go to Gulag and just disappeared. Disappeared. Never heard anything about them. It's from mother's side.

GW: Wow. What did your father believe in about the Soviet Union?

DS: He was in the Army. You know about [Nikita] Khrushchev. Everything changed after Stalin died, and it was talking about that a lot of mistakes was done. My father said [inaudible] has a right to make a mistake. It was [inaudible]. But he was okay when we were going to go to America. He was still alive at the time. He even went to visit me to airport. He was staying in the window, looking [inaudible] airport ground outside, and he just stayed like this. I see him [inaudible]. That's it. He died just before they were going to go also to America. Just six months [before]. My mother came to America with my sister and this whole family because I can do affidavit for them. They came after [inaudible] after I left.

GW: Did they come to Boston, too?

DS: What?

GW: Did they come to Boston, too?

DS: Yes, everyone, because my husband's parents were in Boston at that time.

GW: Going back to growing up in Russia, what was your Jewish upbringing growing up?

DS: It's a little bit. A little bit I know about some Jewish holidays. I know through food, I could say. I know Jewishness through food – gefilte fish, matzo balls, something like this. I know nothing. I knew the word Hanukkah gelt. I know nothing about Hanukkah. My grandmother taught me about Hanukkah gelt; they gave me some money. I was [inaudible]. I don't know why [inaudible] mean Hanukkah. I know gelt is money, but I didn't know why, what does mean [inaudible]. I didn't know about Passover – just matza because I like matza. If we could buy – not actually to buy matza. We're supposed to buy some flour and go to synagogue, give them flour. They gave us matza. It's a way to keep some holidays.

AH: And your family didn't attend any type of synagogue as you were growing up?

DS: No, no. My family, no.

GW: What about your grandparents? It sounds like they had a stronger Jewish identity or more knowledge.

DS: My grandfather – no, no, my mother's side. [Her] father was very educated. He was like a lawyer or something like this.

GW: So, grandfather on your father's side.

DS: Mother's side.

GW: Mother's side.

DS: On my mother's side. He was orthodox. From father's side, I think everyone [from the] older generation [who was] Jewish really [was] orthodox. Maybe my grandfather

from mother's side was more – how would you say? Because he was a lawyer, and he was Orthodox, but he was maybe a little bit more Reform. I don't know, but still Orthodox. This I know.

GW: What about your parents? What was their Jewish knowledge like?

DS: Because of parents?

GW: Did your parents know much about Judaism?

DS: My parents?

GW: Yes.

DS: Because their parents were Jewish, my father could speak Yiddish. My mother wasn't – she knew a little bit because my mother was [inaudible] the same –my [inaudible] was born in [inaudible]. Because Jewish [people] didn't go in the big cities at the time, but he was really educated [inaudible] live in [inaudible]. His brothers – and I know about. I found the book actually – picture book – eighteen-something. I found the name – no, 1911 – who is who. I found name of some great uncle, something like this – the same last name. What question? Something else?

AH: Well, what I want to understand is before you met Rabbi Mehlman [and Rabbi Friedman before they came to the USSR, did you become any more involved in Judaism?

DS: Yes. I have a friend, Jewish friend. Once in a year, we went for holiday for Simchat Torah to synagogue. I think everyone could tell you if they live in Leningrad – [inaudible] the same. I met my husband, actually, in synagogue. Then, outside, in the [inaudible] synagogue, [inaudible] and I knew his friend, and they introduced us – how I met my husband.

GW: What year did you meet your husband?

DS: What?

GW: What year did you meet your husband at the (Beit Yaakov?) synagogue?

DS: Say it again.

GW: What year?

DS: What year? I think it was '60s.

GW: In the '60s.

DS: In the beginning of '60s.

GW: So what were those celebrations like at the Beit Yaakov synagogue on Simchat Torah?

DS: It was dance. It was a lot of songs, dance with each other, then go to somebody's house because we have bigger apartments that mostly kids [inaudible] to my house and celebrate. They don't know what that means – [what] is holiday, actually? We know this is holiday. This is just holiday, a Jewish holiday, and we celebrate it openly. It was a lot of [inaudible], a lot of pictures.

GW: Why was Simchat Torah the major holiday celebration?

DS: I don't know. Maybe because it wasn't in synagogue. Maybe it was not in synagogue. Maybe because it's outside. I really never thought about it. You asked a question. I never thought why this holiday –?

GW: And so there were no –



DS: Maybe a lot of music, a lot of dancing. We don't need to go inside a very Orthodox synagogue. There is men and women in a separate – of course, I step in a synagogue because I need to know.

GW: Just to make sure I understand correctly, the celebration was outside the synagogue?

DS: Yes.

GW: All right. Just outside and [inaudible] –

DS: No Torah. I don't remember it was dancing with the Torah. No, I don't remember.

GW: Just dancing?

DS: Just dancing, singing Jewish songs.

GW: Like what?

DS: Like Yiddish songs. Any songs. We can dance.

GW: Yiddish?

DS: We didn't know Yiddish. Just music. Some can sing something. You're asking about my father. I don't know why, but I went to study Hebrew. Suddenly, I decided I need to study Hebrew. Because my father – of course, he went [inaudible] in the school when he was [a] boy. Of course, he could read Hebrew. But he said, "You don't need it." Okay, I don't need it. Then I went to classes for Hebrew here. [inaudible] took classes in Hebrew.

GW: Why did you want to study Hebrew growing up in Russia?

DS: I don't know why I want to go. I want to feel Jewish.

AH: Strengthen your Jewish identity?

DS: Yes. If you know about stronger Jewish identity, when I came to synagogue for the first time – I went [to] several synagogues before I found Temple Israel. When they came in, how they met me – Rabbi Mehlman – I said, “This is my synagogue. This is my rabbi.” For my first in my life Shabbat on Friday night, I was told I can come on Shabbat night. If you want to be involved in synagogue, I can go for Shabbat. I went to synagogue. When I started to listen, listen to all these sounds and songs, I started crying. I don't know why. I told Rabbi Melman, [and] he was laughing. He said, "Oh, Jewish identity."

GW: Growing up, you and your family never celebrated things like the Passover seder? No Hanukkah candles? No Purim celebrations?

DS: Especially the no Purim, not Hanukkah candles.

GW: No Passover seder.

DS: No seder, never.

GW: No one knew about these things.

DS: No. I learned from the beginning.

GW: Yes. I want to go back to more of your family life. Your husband's name was –? What is your husband's name?

DS: Isaak.

GW: Where was Isaak from?

DS: His family was more Jewish – identity Jewish. Of course, Jewish. Identity Jewish. Because his grandfather was Orthodox. He was Kosher. Of course, he was Kosher. It

was very difficult to be Kosher.

GW: Was Isaak Kosher or his grandfather?

DS: No, no, his grandfather. Not Isaak. He knows nothing about Kosher. We eat whatever we can get. If we get something, we're happy. We didn't ask, "What is this? Kosher or not Kosher?"

GW: And so, you and –?

DS: His mother – I think she went to synagogue for Yom Kippur. I did know about it. "Where is your mother?" "She went to synagogue because it's holiday." That's all I know. Holiday is holiday. Jewish holiday [inaudible]. But what kind of holiday? Then I started to [inaudible] because it was Yom Kippur.

GW: And what year did you guys marry?

DS: We married – it was in special place. [There] wasn't [a] chuppah. My chuppah was here [inaudible] after twenty-five years of marriage; we had chuppah. Actually, if you want to see –

AH: So, you got married before moving here, but you had a ceremony here in Temple Israel?

GW: Well, Jewish ceremony.

AH: Jewish ceremony.

DS: No, no Jewish ceremony. Never. I will just show you. [inaudible] our chuppah in synagogue.

GW: Here in Temple Israel?

DS: Yes.

GW: Oh, wow. That's beautiful. What year were you married in Russia?

DS: Married [inaudible] wedding palace.

GW: No, what year?

DS: What year? We were married in '63.

GW: 1963?

DS: 1963, yes.

GW: Was Isaak from Leningrad as well?

DS: Yes.

GW: Were you guys the same age? What year was Isaak born?

DS: Isaac was born in this town called [inaudible]. G on the end. I don't know how to spell it. A lot of famous Jewish painters came from this place.

AH: So, it was a Jewish neighborhood.

DS: Yeah, very Jewish. Marc Chagall came from [inaudible].

GW: Was Isaak also born in 1938?

DS: 1939.

GW: Okay. And what did Isaak do?

DS: He graduated university. It's equal [to] MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. It's a Polytechnical Institute, but it was very prestigious. It was easy to get in for Jewish people in this place.

GW: What faculty was he on? What did he study?

DS: He studied mechanical engineering. It's something connected with something – (hydrographic?) something. I don't know how to pronounce it. Something like this.

GW: What was the name of the university he went to?

DS: It was Polytechnical. Institute.

GW: It was called Polytechnical Institute.

DS: Yes. You know [the] Gilbo Family?

GW: We know of them.

AH: We've heard of them.

DS: Yes, it's my neighbor in Leningrad.

GW: In Leningrad? Were they there?

DS: Yes, my neighbor in Leningrad.

AH: Did you guys stay in Leningrad? Did you raise a family there?

DS: Yes. Not us. My daughter was born in '64. Then we left when she was very much pregnant, and we stay in Vienna for six months [inaudible] grandson was born in Vienna. [inaudible] I need to tell you somehow, maybe after your questions.

AH: Did you have any other children while you were still in Leningrad?

DS: No, I have only one daughter.

GW: Oh, one daughter.

AH: Okay. Makes sense.

GW: Did you and Isaak raise your daughter in Leningrad?

DS: Yes. She was twenty-one when we left Russia. She was already married.

GW: What's your daughter's name?

DS: Inna, I-N-N-A. Her last name is Vidrin.

GW: Inna Vidrin. Did you raise Inna with any Jewish rituals?

DS: Not ritual, but we know we are Jewish, very much also identity – Jewish identity. Her husband is Jewish.

GW: What types of Jewish things did you do with Inna when she was a child?

DS: [inaudible] food.

GW: Food?

DS: Just food. Gefilte fish, as I told you. Matzo ball. On the New Year, honey. Just food. One day, I took a class [inaudible] – “Jews Through Food,” exactly for Russian Jews. “Jews Through Food.”

GW: What was it like for Inna to go to school? What was it like for you to be a parent of a young Jewish girl going through the Soviet school system in the '60s?

DS: It was difficult because she had some antisemitic children in the class. One day, she came to me. I think she was in the third grade – little girl. She said to me, “One girl

said to me that all Jews [are] thieves and bad people. Why? It's right?" I said, "No." I talked about all our friends. We have very Jewish community. I said, "Do you like this one?" "Oh, yes, I do." "Do you like this one? Do you like your uncle?" "Yes, I do." "We're all Jewish." She was wrong. She said to me – my daughter said about this girl. When I told her about – "Do you like these people?" "Oh, they're so good. I like him. Why did she say –?" I said, "I don't know why." "Maybe she didn't know any Jewish people." I said, "Yes, you're right."

GW: Were there any other episodes like that that your daughter encountered?

DS: Yes. Yes.

GW: What were some other examples?

DS: As I remember, it was – because I remember, it was not so far ago. It started immigration of Jewish from Russia to Israel or whatever. One girl left much earlier than we are. One girl. Of course, everyone knows. Teachers know. One boy said to me – said, not of course, to me. Said [to] my daughter something – very nasty things. She just didn't tell me what he said. Just she told me about this.

GW: What would you say to your daughter after these encounters?

DS: "Don't pay attention. He's a goy. What do you expect?"

GW: While you were raising Inna, were you working as a librarian?

DS: Yes.

GW: Where?

DS: In the public library.

GW: The public library.

DS: How I know Gilbo – because they went to my library, and they were neighbors. Then they were refuseniks. We were refusenik also – how I know Gilbos.

GW: Isaak had studied mechanical engineering. Did he work as a mechanical engineer?

DS: Yes.

GW: Where? At a company?

DS: It was company like elevators. Something like that.

AH: An elevator company?

DS: No. It wasn't company. It was – how do you say?

AH: Factory?

DS: No, no. It's like just drawing.

GW: Architecture or design?

DS: Design. It's called design. It's right word. I couldn't find the word to translate it.

GW: He worked at a design company that designed elevators.

DS: Yes, yes.

GW: And he was an engineer there.

DS: Yes, yes.

GW: All right.



DS: It was called – everything was engineering in Russia. Everything. Only doctors and teachers and art – everything [else] was engineering.

GW: Did you have any trouble at your job at the library since being Jewish?

DS: No, no. Because I work at a public library, half of library is Jewish.

GW: What about Isaak at his company? Did he have any trouble?

DS: Also, they have a lot of Jewish people. His boss was Jewish. No, you can work. It wasn't a problem. He couldn't find it. It was very difficult to find a job. But always somebody – actually, [inaudible] somebody's recommendation or whatever, and he could find a job. But he worked at the same place until we left, practically.

AH: When did you decide that you wanted to leave the USSR?

DS: I started from [inaudible]. When some people [started to] emigrate, it was a problem because I have parents, and his parents didn't want to go yet. But I wanted to go from the beginning.

GW: Why?

DS: I started to think about it when it started some immigration movement. We spend some time in Lithuania. It's the former Soviet Union.

GW: Where? Sorry.

DS: It's called Lithuania.

GW: Lithuania.

DS: [inaudible] bench, is my daughter eight years old. She said to me, "I think you're Jewish." I said, "Yes, I am." "Why [inaudible] here? You have to leave. [Sich] beautiful

girls. You have to leave," he said to me. I said, "[inaudible] good idea," but we didn't.

AH: Who is this that said this to you?

DS: Just a person.

AH: A stranger.

DS: Just a stranger. He actually was an artist. He asked permission to draw my daughter, and he started to draw. We started [to] talk, talk, talk. He said, "Why [are you] here?"

GW: Was this a Russian artist?

DS: Yes. Lithuanian. He speaks Russian.

GW: So, you and your daughter are in Lithuania. Were you there on a family trip?

DS: We spend vacation.

GW: You are on vacation in Lithuania. You're on a bench, and then this artist starts painting your daughter and says, "Are you Jewish? Why are you here?"

DS: Yes.

GW: And then you're like, "Yeah, why are we here?" So that's how you [inaudible].

DS: But my daughter was eight years old.

GW: This is 1972, roughly?

DS: Yes. I think the movement started in '70s, the movement to Israel. Jews immigrated to Israel in '70s.

GW: I want to go back one second. Did your daughter have many Jewish friends growing [up]? Who were her friends? Were her friends mostly other Jewish people?

DS: She doesn't have a lot of friends, but when she grow up –

GW: When she was growing up –?

DS: – and she go to – she graduated college. [inaudible] like program engineering, something like this. She has friends, but not from school. Somehow, some met each other, Also, [inaudible] group of people she befriended.

GW: Were most of her friends Jewish?

DS: Yes.

GW: Why do you think that was?

DS: You told yourself – Jewish identity. You feel comfortable.

GW: Yeah. Who were most of you and Isaak's good friends?

DS: He doesn't have a lot of friends. He actually is a very introverted person. Actually, my friends became his friends.

GW: So, in 1972, you decided that it's a good time to start thinking about leaving.

DS: Yes, but just thinking. Not talking.

GW: When did you apply for a visa for the first time?

DS: First time was in '80.

GW: 1980?

DS: Yes, and we got it in – we started to be refused.

AH: If you don't mind me asking, Rabbi Mehlman and Cantor Einhorn, Rabbi Morrison – they've mentioned their trips to the USSR during this time. That said, were you in touch with Temple Israel when you lived in the USSR?

DS: Yes, only when I came to America.

GW: Only when you came to –?

DS: Only. We came in 1988. When I started looking for my synagogue – because I read a lot of translation from Yiddish – *Shalom aleichem*. I always read that where Jews go, if there's some problem, they go to their rabbi. I dream about such a rabbi when I can go to [inaudible]. Maybe someday I will have some rabbi. When I came, and I met exactly in '88 Rabbi Mehlman, I said, "It's my rabbi." "Rabbi Mehlman, I have a problem." "Okay. It's four o'clock. I have some time for you. Can you come?" And I was in the synagogue.

GW: So I want to go back to Russia. What happened after you applied for that exit visa in 1980?

DS: We were lucky because my husband didn't [lose] his job. He was taking his position. He was – you call – senior in some lab. Then he was just engineer, no – it was taken his salary, his position, but he still worked. It was important [that] he still worked because I couldn't work at the time.

GW: Why?

DS: Because I was sick, and I couldn't work. But I got some kind of pension, like disability.

GW: So he didn't lose his job.

DS: No, he didn't lose his job.

GW: Was your daughter affected when you guys applied?

DS: She was in college at that time, and she studied in the evening. Not daytime.

GW: Did she work during the day?

DS: Yes. She has to work some.

GW: What did she do? What was her job?

DS: Cleaning. Something cleaning. Then finally, she got work as a programmer.  
Program is how you say it?

GW: Yes.

AH: Yes.

DS: Somebody recommended her, just brought her to some relative of my husband.  
They said, we have [inaudible] position. [inaudible]

GW: Do you know why you guys were denied in 1980?

DS: 1980?

GW: Yes.

DS: I try to translate. It's very stupid. It's not reasonable. I don't know. It's not  
reasonable. That's it. No explanation. Nothing.

GW: What was that like to get that rejection back?

DS: It was difficult. It was difficult. But we tried to send the application every year. And every year, it was the same answer. We didn't see any reason it will be maybe better for you to leave. It just – to say something.

GW: How did you and your family try and maintain good spirits during those years?

DS: Because it's our nature – positive. And like [most Jews], hope. *Tikvah*, “hope” in Hebrew. Hope. I think it's very Jewish all this hope.

GW: Were you ever in touch with groups in the United States during those years?

DS: Yes. His parents left in '79.

GW: To Boston?

DS: First of all, to New York.

AH: Oh, very good.

DS: To New York, then to Boston because his sister – I didn't tell about it because his parents and his sister left Russia in '79, and they sent us hidden invitation or [inaudible] whatever you call it – just invitation. They stayed in New York. Then his sister moved to Cincinnati. They return to Boston, and they live in Boston.

GW: His sister?

DS: Because his parents and his sister live in Boston, we came directly from Vienna to Boston.

GW: So, during those years, when you tried to leave, you were corresponding with Isaak's family in the United States?

DS: Yes, yes.

GW: Were you corresponding with any American organizations?

DS: No.

GW: Really?

DS: No.

GW: Wow.

DS: No, we didn't know about it.

GW: So you didn't know about –? You said you were neighbors with the Gilbos.

DS: She didn't talk about it.

GW: Really?

DS: We started [to] talk only because our daughters went to the same school, but their daughter was one year older. I think girls talk among themselves. We didn't talk about it.

GW: Why not?

DS: I don't know.

GW: I think I'm right. The Gilbos were in correspondence with American groups.

DS: Yes. They were very active.

GW: And you didn't know that?

DS: No.

GW: But your daughter knew?

DS: No, I don't think so.

GW: Because didn't a lot of Americans –?

DS: I knew [that] somebody visited them. They visited them, and it was a doctor, I think, from California, and he met their daughter, and they married – Jewish American. [That's how] I know that they communicated. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I knew they communicated [inaudible]. They communicated with Isaak's parents. It's communication like this, but not [inaudible]. I didn't know about organization.

GW: So you didn't know about Action for Soviet Jewry?

DS: No.

GW: Or rabbis like Rabbi Mehlman?

DS: No, no.

GW: You had no idea they ever came to the USSR?

DS: No.

GW: Were you part of a group of other refuseniks that would get together and socialize?

DS: Not really. I know some people through my daughter, but it was young people. I don't know [if] they were active. I don't really know.

GW: So, you left in –? Go on.

DS: We sent the application every year – just waiting. When [Mikhail] Gorbachev [came to] power, they let us go. In twenty-eight days, we left Russia – the twenty-sixth day.

GW: Can you remind me what year this was that you were able to leave?



DS: We were on vacation at that time in Estonia. Suddenly, my daughter called and said, "Somebody from [inaudible] organization who gave permission." I think they call, and I think maybe we got permission to go. We left. The same day we left, [we] came to Leningrad. Next day, we go to [inaudible]. It's called [inaudible], and they let us come. We started to pack. Yes. Left behind everything. It was difficult time because it was difficult. We have huge library, and we just left everything behind to give [to] some relative who stays. We just left Russia.

AH: How did you feel telling everyone around you – those you worked with, your friends there – that you were able to leave?

DS: I have friends who knew. My friends who didn't leave – they're still in Russia. My very close girlfriends – they're still in Russia, and we talk to them at least on Skype every week.

GW: What was it like to leave your parents behind?

DS: It was very difficult. It was my sister and my parents. It was very difficult, especially [for] my parents.

GW: What were you thinking about it when you left?

DS: My father said to me, "You go. It will be better for you. I care only about you." It wasn't easy. But my mother came. After four years, my mother came with my sister and her family. They came to Boston.

GW: Before you left, what did you know about the United States?

DS: What I know? Music, movie, jazz, and Voice of America on the radio.

AH: With that, how did you prepare to come to America?

DS: The preparation was mostly for my daughter and for my husband – learn English. Learn English. For myself, it wasn't enough money for me to take private teacher. I took Agatha Christie and started to read and translate – I dictionary, M dictionary. Because I learned English, German and French, I knew alphabet, and it was easy for me to start to read, but it was a problem for me when I came because I started to talk [and] nobody understand me because it was like in German. For example, “enough.” I couldn't say “enough.” I didn't know. I said, “enuk” like this. It was [inaudible] preparation. That's it. We live our life. We tried to live our lives because our daughter – we want her studying. We live just very private life, actually. Only close friends – two girlfriends and their husbands. We live very private life. Here I became very active. In Russia, I never was active.

GW: Why?

DS: I hate it. I hate all these organizations. I hate it. When I come [inaudible] something like this, and I got to be party member [inaudible] , my husband.

GW: What did you know about the American Jewish community before you came here?

DS: I was [inaudible]. There's a huge Jewish community, of course. I read books and some Jewish authors. It was translated. Some of them were translated to Russian, and I could read it. I have at home all volume of Shalom Aleichem. It's not (modern?), of course, America, but it's American community.

GW: What was the hardest part about adjusting to life in the United States for you and your family?

DS: Language.

AH: Language barrier.

DS: Language barrier. My husband couldn't find work right away. He works something like usual for an immigrant – cleaning, drawing, something like engineering drawing.

GW: Drafting.

DS: Drafting, yes. Right. Drafting something like this. Not drawing. He was more like draft, not design.

GW: Yes, yes.

DS: I became very much involved in Temple Israel – very much involved. It started my volunteer job. I never have had any [inaudible] job – never – in some organization. Never. I started here. Temple Israel was special program for us.

GW: For Russian Jews?

DS: For Russian Jews. Special program. I think by Mehlman [and] everyone in Temple Israel. It was Russian-American adoption. It was some dinner with American families. We have to bring some – like potluck dinner. We brought some food – Russians, Americans. Somehow, I became – how do you say? – [inaudible] with this Russian – I don't like this very fancy word. I [would] help Russian who came in the synagogue. Because I was very eager to learn English, I could somehow translate something. Usually, these people call me if they need something, and I talk to Rabbi Mehlman. Rabbi Mehlman, I'm sure [he] didn't tell you about this. For example, one day, I was in the library, and he called me. [I] go upstairs. "Somebody called me, and they speak to me in Russian." I don't know. I came. Pick up the phone. Some grandfather called synagogue to rabbi because his grandson has pain in his tooth. He went to some doctor [who] then asked [for] money. They didn't have money for the doctor. He called the synagogue. It's how we think about synagogue. [inaudible] synagogue [inaudible]. It's just example like I told you. I translate to him. He said to me, "Okay. Put down receiver," and I call somebody. He found some Jewish dentist. He gave phone number.

I told this guy the phone number. I said, "Go to this person, this doctor. He'll do whatever you need." This was Rabbi Mehlman. I can tell you a lot of things like this. It's most memorable.

GW: Did you take any of the classes that Temple Israel offered about adjusting to American life for Russian Jews?

DS: Not yet. No. My English wasn't good enough – wasn't good enough to take English classes. Temple Israel to send me and pay for me for volunteer librarian in the Hebrew College in Brookline. I even have certificate for this. It's fun because it was very easy. Because literature/*literatura*. History/*istoriya*. It was very easy because – catalog/*katalog*. It was very easy for me. It was difficult – the word "basically." I couldn't understand. "Why bicycle?" I couldn't hear it. For me, it sounds like "bicycle." I understand everything, but – "Why bicycle?" In the school – it's funny story.

GW: I have to ask about Vienna. We've kind of mentioned it in passing.

DS: Through HIAS. In Vienna, it was different.

GW: You were there for six months.

DS: Six months. This organization helped us with money, housing. They rent for us some hotels. It's interesting story because they told us about some Christian family from Finland. They pick up some trunks with some clothes. We left with one suitcase for a person. That's it. It was August. Then it was September, October, November – January. But it was cold, and they told us about this HIAS, this office. There's some organization who helps Jewish immigration from Russia. [inaudible] for us [inaudible] first time for Hanukkah. I have a picture [of] my first Hanukkah. I also started to volunteer. I started to help them somehow because I couldn't just take things [inaudible] back. It's my Hanukkah gift. I wrap it for us, for everyone who came at that time. It was mostly refuseniks. It's not connected to what you're asking for, but it's just about me that I

started to be a volunteer to wrap gifts for Hanukkah.

GW: No, it's very much part of the story.

AH: So, on that note, how much more active in Judaism, in observing the Jewish rituals, did you become after –?

DS: When I came to America.

AH: When you came to America. After being part of Temple Israel.

DS: Yes. It started from Temple Israel – everything. My Shabbat, my Passover dinners – everything.

GW: You mentioned meeting with HIAS in Vienna.

DS: Yes.

GW: You knew at that point you wanted to go to Boston? Was there any discussion about going to Israel?

DS: No, his parents were in America. It wasn't a question about – I wanted to go, actually. I wanted to go to Israel.

GW: Really?

DS: Yes, I don't know why. Why I wanted to study Hebrew, I don't know. Why I wanted to go to Israel? And it wasn't a question.

GW: So what did you do in those six months in Vienna? What was the focus of those six months there?

DS: It was just waiting.

GW: Just waiting?

DS: Just waiting [for] interview with American Embassy. Waiting. I was twice in the hospital, actually, when I was in Vienna. We waited until my daughter gave birth to my first grandchild.

GW: Your first grandchild. Why were you hospitalized in Vienna?

DS: I have complications after diabetes. This was the problem.

GW: What was it like the first day you guys arrived in the United States?

DS: I couldn't find the [inaudible]. I couldn't [inaudible]. After Vienna, I was excited, but after I [grew] up in Leningrad, I live for six months in Vienna. For first time, I was abroad. [inaudible] for the first time. Vienna is beautiful. When we came to Boston, we lived in Brookline, a very suburban area. Private houses. Nothing [inaudible]. I couldn't see anything. I said, "Boston is a beautiful city. Where is it?"

AH: You were outside of it.

DS: Because one grandchild and second grandchild – in the evening, I have to go to Hebrew college. I didn't have a lot of time for myself. But when I have time, I just walk downtown from Brookline to go downtown because I have no money for public transportation, and suddenly I saw Boston.

GW: What was it like to see Boston?

DS: I like it. I love it from the beginning.

GW: Why?

DS: From the beginning, I love.

GW: Why do you like it? Why did you love it?

DS: Everything was different and beautiful.

GW: Transitioning back to integrating into American culture, did Isaak ever find a job as an engineer, or was he always a draftsman in the United States?

DS: No, no. This is different part for us to go. It's about, again, Temple Israel. It was the director of special program for Jewish Jewry. I got this right?

GW: Yes.

DS: She called us and said there is some college – community college. It's not expensive. You can take [classes] to get a new profession, new field. Is right word?

GW: Yes.

DS: It's biotechnology. Because he went to go anywhere to get a job, he went to study at fifty years. He was in school with young people. He was fifty at that time. He graduated this. It was internship. They offer him a job. He's a smart guy. Then he worked in biotechnology – different company – until he retired.

GW: Wow. What was the name of the –?

DS: First of all, it was Worcester. In Worcester, it was [inaudible]. Then it was [inaudible]. Very interesting company because it was really international company – by people. It was not international company, but with people. It was Chinese. It was Vietnamese. He was Russian alone in this company. It was nice company. Really. Then, he found another job. It was in Canton. He worked in a different company. Last one was Biogen in Cambridge – it was last company.

GW: Biogen.

DS: Biogen, yes, in Cambridge. He retired from this company.

GW: What about your daughter and her family? How was their integration?

DS: My daughter works – the beginning, she worked in daycare, like a teacher from the beginning. Then she doesn't want to work as a [programmer]. She doesn't want – she started the work [in] bookkeeping in the beginning, and then higher and higher and higher. She took also a lot of classes through computer. Now she works as an accountant.

GW: Accountant.

DS: Accountant, yes.

AH: Never since your work at Hebrew college in the library – have you just been working as a librarian –

DS: As a volunteer.

AH: – as a volunteer ever since then?

DS: Yes. Until today.

GW: What did it mean to you for Temple Israel to pay for you to go to Hebrew College and get this certification?

DS: They said to me, "Don't worry about anything." They didn't ask anything. Said, "Do you want to?" Simple question. "Do you want?" I said, "Of course I do." They even didn't ask, "Can you afford it?" They know we're sensitive about this. I'm still here. [inaudible] My bar mitzvah of my oldest grandson was in Temple Israel, bris on my middle grandson – bris was [inaudible] in Temple because we couldn't afford to – we didn't know about hospital, they can do, but we wanted ceremony. It was Rabbi



Mehlman. It was Roy. They invited some surgeon from Children's Hospital to do procedure. It's a special story about my oldest grandson. He became Hasidic at thirteen years old. I know nothing about Hasidism. I know just that it's Orthodox, very Orthodox. I was very scared. Now, he didn't want to [inaudible] to do – we are not Hasidic. We're even not Orthodox. We're just Reform. I wear pants. I was very, very frightened, really. [inaudible] chose to go to rabbi and called him and said, "Okay, we'll talk. What happened? What happened?" "David became Hasidic." He said, "Oy vey." "Now, what happened?" He said, "Nothing. Your David will always be your David." And he's my David. He has three children – his own. Now, I am great. I have great-grandchildren. David is still mine. I'm very proud of him because he's so tolerant, and he always said, "We're all Jews." When I started to [inaudible] him, "Don't tell me. We're all Jews." How do you like –? Hasidic.

AH: He's Hasidic.

DS: [inaudible] from Eastern Europe. They just opened synagogue for everyone. But you have to keep [yourself] dressed properly to go to synagogue. Respect.

GW: Was there a large Soviet Jewish community here at Temple Israel?

DS: It was big. But now I didn't – I think it's now some young people with young children. But when I came it was [inaudible], but some people move, some people became really older because they waited for a long time, and some people because they move in different areas, it was too far to go. Now practically, [inaudible] met some Russian people here.

GW: You said your in-laws were here in Boston?

DS: Yes. They stopped going to synagogue.

GW: What was it like to reunite with your husband's family here in Boston?

DS: It was amazing. His sister – she's amazing. She rents an apartment for us when we came, and in the apartment was – how to say – a bed for baby.

AH: Crib.

DS: Cradle. Cradle, yes. [There] was some food in the fridge. There was some furniture. It was enough furniture. But then, when I became a member of Temple Israel, they helped us a lot, [the] people of Temple Israel, congregants of Temple Israel. If you need some – I still have a memory, some family that made me furniture. I still have it.

GW: What did it mean for the membership of Temple Israel to be so warm and welcoming to you and your family?

DS: [inaudible] It was so touching, so unusual. So many people I didn't know. I didn't know they cared. If you need something – you need a pot, you need whatever for kitchen – whatever you need. When we came, we just eat some dishes, cheese, meat – in the supermarket. [inaudible] we don't have it. They gave us everything. I'm very sensitive to this subject, all this still, twenty years – ten years in America in Temple Israel, and I still can't talk about – just talk.

GW: Did you live close to your family in the Boston area when you guys moved here? Did you live in the same neighborhood as them?

DS: Yes, of course we did.

GW: Their being here for about nine, ten years before you guys – how did that help you and your family with your transition?

DS: Actually, Temple Israel helped me transition. Actually, it was Temple Israel. My parents-in-law hardly speak – they speak English, to go to supermarket and to say food for something or [inaudible] this food. It was Temple Israel. We spent together holidays.

Some holidays, I always invited in my house for – I started to do Passover in my house for whole family. I started to do things for holidays.

AH: So, they helped you –?

DS: They were old.

GW: Your in-laws?

DS: My in-law. She was [inaudible] wheelchair, my mother-in-law. It was just family.

GW: Your sister-in-law was also in Boston, too?

DS: Yes.

GW: How did she help you guys? Was she able to help you at all at that point in her life with adjusting to the United States?

DS: No. Mostly I told you.

GW: Temple Israel.

DS: We came in January. In March, I became a member of Temple Israel.

AH: They really helped you. Temple Israel helped you with everything.

DS: Everything.

AH: Learning about the area, learning about Judaism.

DS: Yes.

GW: How did your Jewish identity change? How has your Jewish identity changed since you moved to the United States?

DS: I learn a lot.

GW: Sorry?

DS: I learn a lot about holidays, about Jewish community, about everything.

GW: What's been the most meaningful part about –? Are you now a United States citizen?

DS: Yes.

GW: What was it like to get your [citizenship]?

DS: Oh, this is a question. I have to prepare for this, how to answer questions. Then I would study like this. I was afraid. I was [like a] student before serious test. We celebrated. The same – when we got passports, my husband and I went to some restaurant to celebrate, just two of us. It was exciting.

GW: Your parents eventually came to the United States.

DS: Yes.

GW: Did they like living here?

DS: Mostly, we were by ourselves. We just came to bring some – show up – something help – what they need. To talk on the phone or something when they can't do it. Mostly, my sister-in-law takes care of them. We just visited. Just came – visit them. These are parents-in-law.

GW: No, your parents.

DS: My parents came four years – my sister came four years later. Four years later. It was '92. After perestroika, they came with her family. My sister. My sister.

GW: What about your parents?

DS: Only mother.

GW: Only mother.

AH: Only your mother.

DS: Only mother. My father died.

GW: What was it like to have your –? What was the day –?

DS: I think my mother really didn't understand change. She was glad to see me. It was in the beginning of Alzheimer's, beginning just, but she always recognized me until she died. For my sister and her husband, it was very difficult. For them, it was really very difficult. They couldn't adapt as soon as I adapt. I just take it, like, right now. I became Temple Israel member. It's [a] new life, and I left my life behind – old life. I never have nostalgia – never. I never come back to Leningrad. I don't want to. I just want not anymore – it's a beautiful city, but a lot of beautiful cities around the world. We started to travel a lot. My husband started work. I always thought [after] your first normal job, we go to Israel, and we went to Israel.

GW: What was that like?

DS: I like it. It was absolutely unusual. I didn't see what Israelis see. I didn't see. I was a tourist.

AH: When did you go to Israel?

DS: I think it was '91.

AH: 1991. Yes. Or '90. I don't remember. Or 1991. We went to visit. We went all around Israel. I like everything. I wanted to see more, but it was only two weeks. I

wanted to visit all historical places and modern [inaudible] Tel Aviv, of course, Jerusalem, and Tiberias, and [inaudible]. We went everywhere. It was a Russian group and Russian guide. Why Russian? Because my English wasn't good enough at that time. I wanted to go once more with some Jewish organization to see more – to visit (Knesset?), something like this. But I don't know. I always hope something like this.

GW: Why did you continue to still be involved with Temple Israel today?

DS: Because it's my home.

GW: Do you still have friends in Leningrad today?

DS: I have two girlfriends in Leningrad.

GW: Are you in touch with them?

DS: Every week?

GW: Really?

DS: On Skype.

AH: You were saying before, yeah.

DS: Very interesting. One of my friends stayed in Leningrad. Her children stayed in Leningrad. But her grandson graduated in Haifa – Technion.

GW: Technion.

AH: Technion.

DS: Technion. And now her granddaughter [is] in Jerusalem to study graphic design. She's a painter.

GW: Are both of these friends in Leningrad Jewish?

DS: Yes.

GW: What did they tell you about Leningrad and about Russia today?

DS: "We have everything now. We have enough food." Most funny thing – they do it now everything in the worst way what you're doing in America. It means – you know something? – a lot of commercials. I can speak on the phone and a lot of commercials. I can do it. When I left, I can do invitation for all Isaak's cousins. At that time, it was possible. I came [on the?] invitation from my very close friend when we were in Vienna. We did it in Vienna, and they sent them invitation to leave Russia, and they came to Boston and New York. They're in New York now. They came to America before we came to America because we stayed in Vienna for six months. They left right [away], and we keep in touch, of course. Still, we keep in touch. Then he retired now. She lived in one of the towers that was struck by bomber. She retired just two months before this happened. She retired just two months before. This is also a story.

GW: Is your husband still alive today?

DS: Yes.

GW: He is?

DS: Yes. He retired.

GW: Is he as involved in Temple Israel as you?

DS: No. He visits with me. Of course, he visited Shabbat and holidays, always holidays. He drives me to Temple every time when I need to go for my class.

GW: Is Isaak involved in Temple Israel?

DS: No, he doesn't. I am volunteer.

GW: Aaron, any other questions?

AH: Is your daughter still alive?

DS: Yes, yes. Yeah.

AH: What is she doing now? What's she doing at this point? Has she ever been involved in Temple Israel with you?

DS: No, only me. Only me. She mostly involved – she go to some synagogue like Chabad House in Newton, and she studied Torah. She studied Torah, [took] Torah classes for women. She shares with me what she reads. I share what I read, and we're very close. We're a very close family.

GW: You have two grandsons. Rabbi Mehlman was telling me –

DS: Two grandsons and granddaughter.

GW: How old's your granddaughter?

DS: Granddaughter graduate – Maimonides.

GW: Oh, congratulations.

AH: Very good.

GW: Is she in college now?

DS: She's going to. She sent to some college, and now it depends on financial aid because my son-in-law lost his job. She sent to Cornell, and very expensive. They didn't get scholarship. She couldn't go to this university. Maybe my son-in-law will find a job.



We hope. She's very ambitious girl.

GW: Is she eighteen?

DS: She's very involved in Modern Orthodox. She's very involved in this program from Jewish Modern Orthodox. She went for Shabbaton to Connecticut, to New York. Now she's invited to go to Washington. She's very involved. She's very active. You see it?

GW: Yes, it's the circle of life.

DS: If only my grandfather or Isaak's grandfather could know this, it was always said like this. My son-in-law's grandfather came to Boston when he was one hundred and one years old. He died when he was one-hundred-seven. He was always Orthodox. He always [kept] Kosher. It was very difficult in Russia to keep Kosher. It was very difficult, but he [kept] Kosher. Now, his great-grandson is also Orthodox. It's something.

GW: What does it mean to you to see after your family nearly lost its Judaism that you, your daughter, and your grandchild are now really involved in the Jewish community?

DS: [inaudible] Amazing. God send us.

GW: Excellent. I think with that – I don't have any other questions. Aaron, do you?

AH: I don't either.

GW: Diana, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

DS: No, I think just I'm lucky. I'm lucky to be in Temple Israel. I'm lucky to have such a [inaudible]. My middle grandson – I didn't brag about my middle grandson.

GW: Brag about him.

DS: Yeah. HE graduated [with a degree in] psychology in Northeastern University. He did master's degree in Harvard. Now he's a doctoral student, and his subject – I don't know how to say it – is brain. Like ballroom dance, now modern dance – he likes dance. Quite opposite to another brother. Brain, movement, and rhetoric. Very strange.

GW: Is he getting his Ph.D. at Harvard, too?

DS: No. He will do it in London.

GW: Wow. Congratulations.

DS: But now he's in Japan. He went to Japan. He needs something to write down. He's working. He was in Stockholm. He was invited to work with a dancer [inaudible] just mostly – he didn't (choreography?) just (motor science?). You see?

GW: You have a lot to be proud of. Unfortunately, we have to go.

DS: Have to go. I talk too much.

GW: Thank you so much, Diana.

AH: Yeah, Thank you.

GW: This was excellent.

DS: Thank you.

GW: We really enjoyed it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]