Janna Kaplan Transcript

Alexandra Kiosse: This is Alexandra Kiosse interviewing Janna Kaplan at the Graybiel Laboratory at Brandeis University

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AK: I wanted to just start in the background, in the past. What was your experience immigrating from the former Soviet Union to the United States?

JK: It was very complicated. I was a refusenik, which means that I applied for exit visa from the Soviet Union and was refused by the state visa agency, called *OVIR.* [Editor's Note: Russian acronym – ???? – for the Office of Visas and Registration]. The reason for that was because I had access to classified research as a scientist at the University of Leningrad, and prior to being a scientist, I was a student and a graduate student there. Through my research, I had access to classified work. The lab where I did my studies and degrees was Spatial Orientation Laboratory. I studied animal models of how animals orient themselves in space and control their movements and achieve efficiency in whatever they're doing, whether it's a movement or a sensory experience, or both. I was working with bats and dolphins in the study of their echolocation, use of ultrasonic sounds where we, humans and most other animals, usually use vision to orient ourselves in our environment. Our primary sense is vision. In bats and dolphins, primary sense is hearing – ultrasonic echolocation. For the Soviet Navy, I did research on dolphins in Sevastopol, on a Navy base in Crimea. For the space program, I did research in *Zviozdny gorodok*, the Star City, near Moscow, on bats, in echolocation of bats. The space agency was interested in how auditory system can do spatial orientation in an environment where we know how visual system works. To understand that the brain has similar mechanisms for different senses to achieve the same function, bats were a

unique animal model because they navigate three-dimensionally in the air, in flight. Bats can be brought into that environment, like analog environment of spaceflight, what's known as parabolic flight in an aircraft that goes into a freefall. I did that research with bats, in addition to my dolphin research.

Those two areas of research were classified, and I was refused exit visa. That was in 1979. I was a refusenik for two years. Refusenik's life was difficult. We were under constant harassment by KGB. I managed to keep my job because I refused to quit, and the university technically did not have a valid reason to just fire me because I didn't break the law. Immigration, applying for visa, was within legal procedures. It's just the state had discretion not to let me go. They demoted me and marginalized me, but I was able to continue working. Yet, there was constant harassment at work and at home. Life was hard. My brother emigrated by then, and he organized the international community of scientists and human rights organizations and different Soviet Jewry support organizations to stand up on my behalf. Somehow, my name was entered into Ted Kennedy's list, Senator Edward Kennedy's list of refuseniks that he personally and his office supported. Eventually, I was given an exit visa in 1981. As I remember, it was *Shabbat HaGadol* of 1981, in April, when I got my visa. [Editor's Note*: Shabbat HaGadol* is the Shabbat before the start of Passover. It's symbolically tied to the story of the Jews' exodus from Egypt]. I left in June of 1981.

AK: Do you have any stories about your early years in the United States? What were your expectations from the States, and were they fulfilled?

JK: Early years in the United States were extremely hard. In my memory, my whole previous life regardless of which stage of that life you would take, all my life until I established myself here fully professionally and personally – was pretty hard. It was just a chain of horror stories from the moment of birth and even prenatally. Yet, in that whole picture, in my memory, the first few years of immigration were probably the hardest.

Because at every other stage of my life, no matter how hard it was, I had somebody else by my side. My family was very small; most of the family was killed in the early days of the Second World War, so it was just the nuclear family, my parents, my brother, and me. My brother was a year older. There were occasional friends. We lived in Stalingrad, where there were very few Jews, and so it was hard to make friends, but I had a few. At the University of Leningrad, I had friends, and the academic scholarly environment was always something I felt authentically comfortable in. I was always into sciences and math and just loved that. Intellectual “boiler room” environment was where I felt very comfortable. Once I became refusenik, the community of refuseniks – although life was living hell on a daily and nightly basis, the community of refuseniks provided support, and that feeling of community in whose fabric I was an integral element. I felt so connected and so needed, and I needed them. It was just an extraordinary experience of two years in the refusenik community that the hardships – although they were very dramatic and traumatic and painful, physically and emotionally, but there were a lot of rewards of living through all this with the community that, I knew, cared and loved me and was supportive and wouldn’t let me just disappear and nobody would ever know or care. But I emigrated – I left the Soviet Union – alone. Life didn’t become much easier. I’m talking about the early 1980s. I didn’t know how to live in a society where you make your own choices, where you’re not controlled, where you decide what to do and how to do it, and you take responsibility for every action. I was not prepared for that. In the USSR in that era, although there were laws on the books, nobody believed in them, and so you were constantly living in the presumption of guilt or doing something wrong, and nobody was saying the truth. Especially as refuseniks, we would talk one thing in the close friends’ community, another thing outside of it. Kids were trained not to speak freely at school about what’s going on at home. People tried not to send preschool-aged kids to daycare centers because you can’t control what those little ones say. I, for example, was one of the people who organized nursery schools and preschool daycares in the refusenik community to take care of those kids when parents have to work or were arrested for

their refusenik activities. In the USSR, for you to prove that you're saying the truth, you have carry and show what was called a *spravka.* [Editor's Note: *spravka* refers to a piece of paper, often with a signature and stamp, that certifies, verifies, confirms or proves something. Russian: ???????]. *Spravka* was a written document stamped and signed by some official or some organization that certifies that this particular item of information is the truth. I left Russia with a suitcase of *spravkas,* and everything I would say, I would try to pull some such paper out. Nobody needed it. Nobody wanted to look at it. Nobody even knew what the hell it was. The disconnect between how we were conditioned to live in the USSR and how one lives in a free society – it was so hard to switch those gears. The train rails in the Soviet Union are of different gauge, the rails past the Soviet western border are of a different width. The train has to change wheels. You can't just run a train through the border. It was almost the same with emotional and social issues, and anything concerning human interactions of any kind – relationships, personal, professional, whatever; it just didn't work.

Also, the abundance of everything was overwhelming me daily. In the Soviet Union, I would stand in line for hours to buy pure necessities of low quality, like bread and rice. In the US, there were items that I couldn't even name – and I knew English very well – I didn't know those words, how to name those fruits, or vegetables, or just items of food or personal care. I remember the packages that we got from Jewish immigration officials from *Sochnut* (Jewish Agency for Israel), HIAS and Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) who picked us up off the airplane in Vienna. Among the items were sanitary napkins. They were hygiene products for women, and I had no idea what they were. I had no clue. I thought it was a kitchen table-top sponge to wipe kitchen counter with it. So, I put it on my kitchen table. People would come and say, "Why is this here? It shouldn't be here." "Where else should it be?" That level of ignorance and disconnect.

My immigration wasn't straightforward, even after I left Russia. Usually, the routes were: you go to Vienna, and from Vienna, if you decide to go to Israel, within a couple of days you go to Israel. My brother, by then, emigrated. He emigrated in 1979, and he lived in France. The reason he went there is he got an offer for a graduate school position in one of the universities in Paris. He went there and settled in Paris. I learned some Hebrew in an *ulpan* in Leningrad. [Editor's Note: An *ulpan* is an intensive training in Hebrew.] We had a very extensive network of Jewish education. Before college, I graduated from a dual curriculum Russian-English school in Stalingrad, and I spoke English fluently. I was one of the in-between persons between refusenik community and English-speaking Western European, American, and Israeli visitors who would visit refuseniks.

I was twenty-seven years old when I finally got my exit visa and lest the USSR. I was completely alone. I knew I didn't want to live in France where my brother Boris settled. There was no logic in that move for me. In my field of life sciences, in animal sonar systems and spaceflight human factors, there was absolutely no research going on in Israel. The main research in those areas in the Western Europe was in Germany. In those days, Germany was divided into the Soviet-controlled Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. There was extensive research in West Germany, some in France, some in England, but primarily in the United States. Especially in space research. The only other Western space program in the world then was the American space program.

I really wanted to get on my feet professionally. And, I wanted to get married. I wanted to have kids. I was twenty-seven years old; by Russian standards of those days, I was "off the market" – all my friends were married at twenty, had kids by twenty-one, twenty-two. I was desperate. I decided to go to America. But because I had visited my brother in France where the French scientific community sent me to a major conference in my field in West Germany, in order to cross borders, I needed to get travel documents in France to go from France to Germany. The immigration office, HIAS in Paris convinced

me to get a refugee status in France so that I can attend the conference in Germany to make contacts with scientists from America to get myself a job. Then, they sent me from France to Italy where most of the Soviet Jews were being processed for America.

That was a very good plan, which eventually worked, but in real time had disastrous consequences for me. There were laws which nobody knew of, even the immigration officials, that once I got refugee status in France, I lost my right for refugee status in the United States. I lost the right for an American visa. That was a terrible shock for me. I had no plans to stay in France, but that's the only country I could stay legally and have a work permit After three months in Rome, I was refused the American visa. To immigrate to the US now, I had to obtain a job in America first, and that job would have to sponsor my Labor Certification giving me the right to permanent residence. It took me a year to find such job that would sponsor my Green Card. The contacts I made in Germany and in France did help me with that because my field was so unique, and I was highly qualified in that research and had publications. The job I got was as a research assistant at the University of Texas at Austin. In June of 1982, exactly a year after I left Russia, I finally came to America. But I was a broken person. I was already physically and mentally exhausted when I left Russia. I had been briefly imprisoned in Russia for my refusenik activity, endured KGB beatings. During that miserable year in Italy, I had no income, no place to live. Once, I was attached by a motorcycle gang who stole my purse with whatever little money I had and all my documents. Most of the time, I was homeless there and slept on the railway station benches, and at times was literally collecting pizza crusts out of the garbage bins to eat. By the time I came to Texas, I had a job, but I was deeply unhappy, confused, and completely alone. The Jewish community in Texas was a very wealthy, well-established people. They were very kind to me and tried to help. Yet, they had no understanding of my situation. Because I was denied American refugee status, I wasn't getting financial assistance until I got my first paycheck, which came at the end of the first month. Nobody asked me how I'd live through that first month, I had no money – I left Russia with $100 that were stolen from me in Italy. The first months of

life in Texas was quite terrible, because of the depravity, the lack of understanding of how to relate to people, how to live day-to-day. Soviet upbringing and survival strategies intrinsic to living in a hostile society resulted in habits of lying and weaseling oneself into a better arrangement of this or that, – stuff that was very hard to weed out of one's system. Nothing worked in my personal and professional relationships, nothing. I felt as if I was completely failing at everything. I became very depressed; I just wanted to cease to exist. I really was at that level of despair.

I tried to get a synagogue membership with a Conservative shul; they sent me a membership bill for, like, seven hundred dollars. Seven hundred dollars?! I didn't eat every day! I called them and said, "I don't have the money." They sent me a reduced bill for four hundred and fifty dollars. That made no difference, I still didn't have it. The lack of understanding of where I was in my life was just so profound that I just felt that I totally don't belong, that I was a failure. Every day was a suffering. I tried to join another shul; that was no better. Someone there told me that I need to shave my legs because it's indecent for a woman not to have her legs shaved. Shaving my legs? I didn't know how. I didn't know why it was indecent. Then, they said, if I don't shave I should wear pantyhose. Pantyhose!!? in a hundred-and-ten-degrees heat!!? All this was so confusing to me, I just didn't understand those things. I finally ended up with Chabad. I saw a house near UT-Austin campus that had Hebrew sign on it, so I just walked in, and it was a Chabad House, the Lubavitchers. They didn't ask for any money. They immediately took me in. There was dinner. There were kids. There were *Erev* Shabbat services and meals. It was just like family, and I settled with the Chabad. That became my family in Texas. I learned a lot with them, and was very happy with them … until I wasn't, but I'll talk later about it.

I struggled with the pressures and the depression. At work, I knew my field of science very well, and it was only at work that I felt confident that I can do what was expected of me. But then another thing hit me completely unexpectedly – I developed an allergy, a

very severe allergy to the mealworms which I used to feed the bats, my lab animals. The allergy became so severe – probably escalated by depression and stress, that I was approved for workman's compensation and could only work with daily injections of antihistamines. Even work has become a horror story. I didn't think I could not handle all this anymore. I literally didn't want to live. Sometimes I'd get drunk, knocking myself completely out of my senses. What kept me alive was that sense of responsibility I felt for the refuseniks back in Leningrad. Here I was, one of the lucky ones. I got my Soviet exit visa. I achieved my freedom. I had everything going for me. I was young, well-educated, I spoke English, I was sociable, I easily made friends, and yet I was this complete crumbled rubble, useless nobody who contemplates suicide because of how hard my life is. This would undermine the whole idea of the struggle for freedom, it would send a message that we – Soviet Jews – are not deserving of freedom because it is hard and we are unable to cope with it. Somehow, I pulled myself together.

A friend suggested that I see a psychiatrist. I called a psychiatrist's office to make an appointment and was told it'd cost ninety dollars. [laughter] That was a non-starter. I didn't have that money, and the insurance did not cover mental health then. At the Chabad House, about a year into my living in Texas, they decided that I now was settled well enough with them that they can take control of my life. They planned to send me to some *yeshiva* for women in Minnesota to prepare me for marriage. I decided to quit everything in Austin and move on. And so, again, I was back to being alone, disconnected, desperate.

But something did change in me. What I did understood by then was this: that I will not allow anybody to control my life anymore. I finally understood that my decisions about my life are mine alone. I quit my job at the UT, and started looking for work. Because I worked at the UT for a year and a half, and quit for a medical reason well documented and covered by workman's compensation, I was entitled to unemployment insurance. I was approved for unemployment and welfare and that would let me survive for a few

months, to move and to find a job. With brutal clarity, I have set my three priorities: 1) I wanted a job that can support me. 2) I was in search of a Jewish community where I could belong just the way I were, poor, desperate, with unshaved legs and other such things. 3) I wanted to get married to a Jewish professor, and I wanted to have kids. Those were my priorities, in the reversed order.

Marry Jewish professor. Okay. How about Boston? That's a place with a Jewish community. There are a lot of Jewish professors. I applied for jobs everywhere in the US, but also in Boston. I got several job offers from Texas, some were very good, actually. Baylor Medical was the highest-paid job. UT at Dallas job was good. Brandeis job was, compared to other offers, the lowest paid, and they did not cover relocation costs. Yet, remember the Jewish professor part. [laughter] I took the Brandeis job, and I moved to Boston. That was the best thing, and I am still here. This lab where I work at Brandeis specialized in space research, human factors of space research. I didn't work with human factors in the USSR. I worked with animal models, but scientifically it was a very similar concept. I certainly knew the field. I met my husband here, at Brandeis. He is a professor of French and comparative literature and Religious Studies at Brandeis. I met him about a year and a half after I moved and started my job. He's an American Jew, third generation. We married in December of '86. He writes books about Michelet, Baudelaire, other 19th Century French writers and poets. He is a biographer of the Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel and did a lot of studies of Heschel and comparative religious philosophies. He was a founder of the Religious Studies Program at Brandeis. We had two kids. My parents eventually immigrated in 1989, settled in this area.

About four or five years after I immigrated, I would say that my life became stable, with normal joys and sorrows, and not just only sufferings and nightmares. Happy times and not just hardships. But the first years, even the first couple of years here in Boston, still were just the years of working out how to live in a free society and especially how to build

relationships based on what you truly are and not the persona you make yourself out to be, backing it up with all kinds of documents, *spravkas*, certificates, etc. That kind of authentic honesty in relationships, personal and professional, I learned on my own. It took me, I would say, between four and five years to completely get that Soviet crap out of my system. Did I answer your question?

AK: [laughter]. Yes, that was good. Okay. It sounds like your career and your love of science influenced a lot of your decisions. My question is, how did you get into science and into space research specifically? When exactly did that happen? I don't know if you remember how you became interested in it.

JK: I remember that very well. I actually have memories going back to very early days of my life when I was maybe two years old. It's because life was full of, not just troubles, but cataclysmic and catastrophic and horrible events happening back-to-back, so it was unavoidable. I was born in 1953. 1953 was an interesting year. Stalin died four months before I was born. By then, my parents and my one-year-old brother were living in internal exile in Novozybkov, the region of Bryansk. My brother was very sick with bronchial asthma, which at that time in the USSR was considered a fatal childhood illness, and doctors would not even bother to treat it. Doctors were telling my mother, sometimes in my presence, "Revekka Namumovna [mother's first name and patronymic], don't spend any money on him. He's going to die anyway." That's how we lived. Mother kept him alive heroically. My father was a professor of theoretical physics, and my mother was a professor of classics and taught Latin and ancient Greek languages and literature. She also taught German. In Novozybkov my mother had no job. Nobody needed classics there. My father taught physics in some vocational school. Three years after Stalin's death, my family was allowed to leave Novozybkov, but not allowed to move back to Leningrad.

The second part of my childhood was in Stalingrad. My parents found jobs in Stalingrad at the *Pedagogicheskiy Institut* which was a teacher's college, where my father became a professor of physics and the chair of the theoretical physics department. [Editor's Note: Stalingrad Pedagogical Institute. Now, the Volgograd State Pedagogical University.] My mother was teaching Latin to the students of three academic disciplines: the curricula of romance languages required Latin; students at the medical school had to take Latin; and Latin was required for the students of law. Mother taught Latin, and when she needed more income, she would teach part-time German in some school. Both parents worked full-time.

I was always interested in talking with my father about physics, his field was elementary particles and high energy physics. Elementary particles were living objects in my imagination since I was pre-verbal. Then, the launch of Sputnik in the late '50s made a huge impression on me and my brother, a year older, who was also gifted in sciences. In 1957, when the first Sputnik was launched and then, later, the second and third, we were able to go outside and find that bright dot of light moving over the night sky. That completely blew me away. My brother started primary school in 1959, and I went to school in 1960. We had a shortwave transistor radio, and my brother was able to catch those Sputnik beeps on some frequency. Then we would run outside see the Sputnik. This was extraordinary. Stalingrad was good to see the stars because the city was completely destroyed during the Second World War. It was being rebuilt mostly by prison labor of captured Germans. There were many thousands of Germans who were never declared under the Potsdam Conference's exchange of the prisoners of war. They were kept in the Soviet Union as slave labor, and they worked on construction. They literally worked until they died. Stalingrad was being rebuilt when we moved there. Some housing blocks were already built – huge cement blocks, multi-apartment buildings, usually five, six-story high complexes, but around them there were big undeveloped areas with no paths and no street lights. You can go out there and just see the sky in its primal beauty, which we did. We didn't know how dangerous it was because of a lot of

unexploded war-time mines and unearthed bombs. I lost a couple of friends to those explosions because it was in those areas that we the kids played, and Boris and I watched the stars there.

Then, on April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight happened. Then, other spaceflights. I was completely captivated by that. I really felt at that time that I want to be a cosmonaut, or that my life has to be connected with spaceflight in whatever way. Some 'wise' people explained to me that being a Jew and a woman, these kinds of dreams were dead on arrival. But science became an instrument for me to at least try achieve that dream because if there is a spaceflight, there has to be space research. I had enough neurons in my head to understand that.

Around that time, in early 19960s, a book was published in America by John Lilly, a medical scientist, about dolphins. The, book, *Man and Dolphin,* was translated into Russian, the first book available in the USSR about dolphins' echolocation. It was about training dolphins on a Navy base for research and also for aquatic circus shows. I read that book – I was probably around 10 years old. That became another passion of mine, to work with dolphins. The only work with dolphins in the USSR, like in the US, was on Navy bases. So, again, that was a non-starter for me. But there were also bats. There were two labs in the USSR who did research in bat echolocation: one at the University of Moscow and one at the University of Leningrad. Being aware of my parents' exile from Leningrad, and that when we were allowed to leave Novozybkov, we were never allowed to go back to Leningrad, I had this urge to live in Leningrad! It was just that kind of a stubborn thing, "I am going to live in Leningrad, you bastards!" Upon graduation from high school, I would apply to the University of Leningrad.

I graduated high school with a Gold Medal. Gold Medal exempted me from discriminating against Jews college/ university entrance examinations, except for one: the so-called *profile* or main exam. Gold Medals were usually given, like, one or two per

city. The only exam that I needed to take as a biology major – and I had to get the highest grade, 5, for it to guarantee admission – was physics. I knew physics. I could do physics in my sleep. Still, it was very difficult. The examiners were grilling me for two hours. The average time a student spends with the examiner was fifteen to twenty minutes. You are given three questions or problems to solve, and twenty minutes of preparation time. Then you're called to face the examiner and show your work. Then they give you a couple of extra questions or problems. Then they give you a grade. The exam is oral, face-to-face. My examiner had a notebook, and he kept peeking into it. He kept giving me more and more questions, and they were getting more and more difficult. This was going on for two hours, and I was beginning to feel brain dead. He kept going. In the end, I did get the grade 5 on that physics exam, so I was admitted into the University of Leningrad, biology department, neurophysiology section, – where that bat lab was. What was your question? How I got into science? [laughter]

A lot of decisions in my life were calculated decisions. I feel kind of strange about this. I'm a very impulsive, emotional, spontaneous person, and yet so much was so calculated! Like the Brandeis job, for example, –I want to go to a place where the frequency of occurrence of Jewish professors is high, and maybe I can also get a job. In Austin, I had a friend who was an old Jewish jeweler. I was talking to him about my choices and my priorities. He said, "Janna, you said your main thing is to get yourself married to a Jewish professor." I said, "Yes, definitely." "Well, hon, if you want to shoot ducks, you ought to go where the ducks are. Go to Brandeis." I did. But that would be much later.

Going to a university, I thought that bats may very likely become animal subjects in space research. For me to get into space research, I have to be in a scientific field of interest to the space program. Human factors of spaceflight would be hard for a Jewish woman to enter, so I need to do it through animal research. Bats are the only animals that use auditory system in spatial orientation. Not only bats were similar to dolphins as objects of

research in terms of how echolocation works, but bats may become of interest to the space program, in which case, space program can either hire the lab in Moscow or the lab in Leningrad to do research for them; there were no others. It's a fifty/fifty chance. Because I wanted to live in Leningrad, I bet on Leningrad. (Also, University of Moscow was known to much more antisemitic than the University of Leningrad.) In the end, it worked! I started the University of Leningrad in September 1970. In in 1973, the Soviet Space Center – *Zviozdny Gorodok* or Star City – contacted the Spatial Orientation Lab where I did my bat research and contracted the lab to study bats as possible animal subjects in spaceflight. That was my third year at the university. It would be here like I were a junior because in the USSR, the university education is five years, and the fifth year is like a master's degree equivalent, *diplomnaya rabota*. [Editor's Note: *diplomnaya rabota* means "diploma work." Russian: ??????? ??????]. Fourth year is *kursovaya rabota*. [Editor's Note: *kursovaya rabota* is a senior thesis. Russian: *???????? ??????*]. The space center awarded us what was known then as the *dogovor*, it's like a grant or subcontract – to study bats in parabolic flight, which is what I now do here at Brandeis and with NASA studying humans. Airplane goes high up to about forty thousand feet and then goes into a freefall for about ten thousand feet. By laws of physics, freefall is a weightless environment, and I can study free-floating and spatial orientation in Zero-G. Unlike in a spaceship, I have only twenty-to-thirty seconds of freefall per parabola to run a study trial on a bat, or a human. The parabolic flight consists of up to 40 repetitive sequences of High-G, Zero-G, High-G cycles. High-G is 2g, so your body weight doubles. While at the Leningrad University Spatial Orientation Lab, I was working on both bats and dolphins. The work with dolphin took place at the Sevastopol Navy base. Bats were studied on site at the lab in Leningrad, although we travelled to Crimea to capture them for research. At that time, I was the only senior student involved in the project. There were two older professors who could not fly parabolic flights as that required an Air Force level physical which I passed with flying colors. That's how I got into space research and worked in Star City, in their research facility in parabolic flight. How about

that?

AK: As a Jewish woman and as an immigrant, later on, how has that affected your experience in a predominantly male field?

JK: That's a very good question. Those were the two main limitations, my Jewishness, and my female gender. I got an excellent primary/secondary/high school education, and was getting a phenomenal university education in my field. Not a broad liberal arts education like in an American university. In the Soviet Union, I couldn't take courses outside of my major no matter how interested I may have been in European literature or history or arts, or anything else. Couldn't even take courses in Russian literature; I was in the biology department, neuroscience section. In that, I got an extraordinary education. I had ideas, professional dreams and aspirations, and every time I would try to follow them, there would be roadblocks. Was it because I was a woman or because I was a Jew? Usually both. There was a tremendous amount of sexual harassment. It wasn't just words, or remarks, or glances; there was physical assault. My boss was trying to rape me many times. Lucky for me that I avoided it. I know other undergraduates who were assaulted or raped by him. One got pregnant, tried to complain, and was kicked out of the university in a jiffy because the lab director happened to be also the Communist Party boss at the Biology/Neuroscience Department. He was a alcoholic and a sexual predator, and there he was – a full professor and a party boss! We had to guard ourselves. There were no laws protecting women from sexual harassment. In the fifth year, before graduation we had to take a course in labor law. The only thing I remember from it is that the law did not allow an employer to force a female employee to work with a jackhammer, supposedly because jackhammer's vibrations were not good for a female uterus. Here I am being raped by my boss, and I'm told that my only legal right is not to work with a jackhammer. [laughter] It was so absurd, but was just a fact of life. There was no vocabulary to even put into words what was happening, no Russian words for sexual harassment. No Russian word for privacy. Those words did not evolve

linguistically in the Russian language. There was a word for rape, and we knew that each woman just had to take care of herself. If a guy assaults you, that means that you provoked him. You are guilty of that. If you are sexually attacked, or raped, it's your own fault.

Being a Jewish woman, what allowed me to work in space research was that I was a student. I was just a 'nameless' assistant of those two older professors – an avatar doing the research for them. But in my own right, I couldn't build a career in space research. I could build a career in researching bats, but not dolphins and not space research.

I became involved with the refuseniks through my brother, who emigrated two years before me in 1979, he never was a refusenik. But it's through the refusenik community that I started learning that I am a person with a history, belonging to a people with a history, and that I now have a community. Those things I never had, not up until then, and I was in my mid-twenties. I previously thought that whatever difficulties I had or bad things that were happening to me, it's because I'm not up to anything better or because I did something to cause these hardships that come my way in life, work, relationships. Learning who I am as a Jewish person, as a Jewish woman, as a Jew with a history gave me a sense of dignity, a sense of self-worth. I've never had those things.

I was becoming more and more driven to see if I could make something out of my life, if I could get myself out of the life's dead end where I found myself. I graduated high school with a Gold Medal. As a university student, I won the Lenin scholarship*, Leninskaya stipendiya*, an extremely rare honor for overall academic excellence, above and beyond regular level of excellence. Lenin Scholarship was about the size of my salary as a scientist once I graduated. I was very active in the *Komsomol*, and in students' science organizations. I had science papers published and presented at conferences. [Editor's Note: the *Komsomol* was the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, ages 14-28. Membership was not obligatory, but without it one does not get accepted to

a university, and cannot build a meaningful career]. I really was thriving at the University of Leningrad. I graduated best of my class, with highest honors, the so-called Red Diploma of Excellence. After I graduated, the lab where I did my graduate work gave me a job as a staff scientist. But I was denied a permit to live in Leningrad where I was registered to live as a student, but KGB refused to give me a permit to live there post-graduation even though I was employed there.

Here I was, in another dead end. I had a job that I loved. I was best suited for it, better than anybody else in my class. Yet, I wasn't allowed to live there. As a student, I lived with my aunt Riva in one room of a large communal flat where other rooms were occupied by various unrelated people or families. All shared one shower, one toilet, and the kitchen. but I had no *propiska*. [Editor's Note: *propiska* is a residence permit or residency registration required for living in any area in the USSR. Russian: ????????.] While aunt Riva was alive, I lived with her relatively unharassed. After aunt Riva died in October 1979, there would be regular KGB raids, they'll kick me out, and then I'd secretly crawl back in and barricade my door. That was how I lived there. Eventually, the decision started to form and ferment in my mind, and the goal was to survive and to live where I want to live with dignity, to fulfill my professional aspirations, my desire to learn more about my Jewish identity and Jewish history and Jewish people and Jewish religion and Jewish culture, this will become my lifeline. And it would not be in the Soviet Union. Emigration became the goal.

AK: How would you describe yourself in terms of your Jewish identity? How important is that identity to you? Has it changed over time?

JK: Yes, it definitely changed over time. My real name is not Janna. It's Evgenia. Janna was the nickname by which I knew myself from birth, but once I went to get my passport at age 16, I had to dig up my birth certificate, and it said, "Evgenia." That was my name. My patronymic was from my father's name, Emmanuel. My mother's name

was Revecca. My family name, my surname, was Lipmanov. Lippman was the original name, but at some time during Stalin's purges and my grandfather was able to bribe some secretary somewhere, add "ov" to it, and became Lippmanov, which my father changed into Lipmanov. So, I was Evgenia Emmanuelovna Lipmanova, which was clearly a Jewish name, except for Evgenia. I didn't look very Jewish, but my brother did, and both my parents did. Somehow, I didn't know much of antisemitism as a child. I didn't understand that our whole life was what it was because of antisemitism. The exile, and my brother's illness, and my parents' hardships. I didn't connect it with our Jewishness. My parents never talked about it. As a young child, I did not know that I was a Jew. I had no idea that I was any different from other kids except that I had no friends growing up. There were so few kids around me in Novozybkov, and there were some in Stalingrad, but there was no awareness of Jewishness at all. Kids in preschool beat me up a lot, and picked at me, but I thought that was because I was socially awkward, and did not know how to make friends. Because of my brother's illness, every summer, my parents would take us to some resort where there would be treatments for asthma, like mineral waters in Kislovodsk at the Caucasus resorts, or sea baths in Sochi, or Yalta, Yevpatoria, or some other place in the Crimea. We would go to those places to see where my brother felt better and where the natural treatments worked for him. I remember I was five or six years old, in Kislovodsk. There were a lot of hiking trails for recreational walking. That summer, near one of them there was a gypsy camping; gypsies were traveling in the area with their encampments and doing all kinds of circus tricks and palm reading, begging, and selling dry goods here and there. My brother and I we were running ahead of our parents along one of the park trails. Suddenly, two gypsy kids jumped out of the bushes and collided with us. The kids hissed at us and said, "Oh, Jews (*evrei*), kike-kids" (*Zhydy*). We didn't know those words. We ran to our parents and said that the gypsy kids called us Jews and kikes. What does this mean? Parents were very upset. My father said, "How would the gypsy kids even know?" My mother said, "It's pretty much written on Boris's face' – my brother – this is my brother [shows a

photograph to interviewer] – did look Jewish. I didn't. That's how we discovered that we were Jews.

Then the next "Jewish" experience was in the first grade. Then Soviet schools started with first grade, not with kindergarten or pre-K. I loved my first-grade teacher very much. One day, she called on every child to stand up and say his or her nationality, which in the USSR was ethnicity, not religion. Kids would say, "I'm Russian – *Ya ruski*." Or, Ukrainian – "*Ya Ukrainets.*" Mostly they were Russians. There were some Ukrainians, a Belarus guy. There was a Georgian boy. There was even a girl from Khazan, a Tartar – "*Tatarka*". I stand up, and I'm not saying anything because I knew I was not Russian. But I also thought that nobody else knows the word Jew (*Evreika*) because I myself didn't know it just up until a few months before. So, I said nothing because if they asked me what *evrei* is, I wouldn't know how to explain. I'm just silent. Everyone is looking at me. It was so scary – and then the teacher says – and I didn't expect it from the teacher because I loved her, I literally loved her – "You think that because you're not saying it, that we wouldn't know, and you can hide it? We know that you're a Jew." I was very shocked. I came home that day, crying. I told my parents what happened. Mother went to school, talked to the teacher, but nobody explained anything to me. So much for the favorite teacher! Those were my very first experiences with a Jewish identity and antisemitism.

There wasn't that much more on that topic that I remember, until the Six-Day War of 1967. June 1967 was quite a memorable period. At the end of May – it was still school year – I was fourteen years old. My mother became very ill. She had a duodenal ulcer that was undiagnosed. She was teaching at the Institute, at work, and it burst. She was hospitalized, had surgeries, was in intensive care for a month, and for a long time we didn't know if she'd live or die. My father was working full-time; the family medical leave did not exist. I had to stop going to school because I had to keep house, stay in lines for food, and make meals for my brother and my father. The school wanted to fail me

because I had to skip school for three or four weeks before the school year ended. in the meantime, my father had a physics conference in Uzhgorod, in Ukraine, and he had to go away for a week because he was presenting a paper there. Mother was still in the hospital, and my brother, then 15, and I were staying home alone. My brother had a shortwave radio. I didn't realize that for a long time he had been secretly listening to the Voice of America, the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and the Voice of Israel (*Kol Israel*) radio stations. From one of those broadcasts, he learned that Israel was attacked. I remember he woke me up that night. Like I said, we were home alone. He said, "Wake up, wake up." I said, "What's the matter? Did mother die?" Then I thought, "How would he know? We have no phone!" He said, "There's a war." I said, "Did the Americans attacked us?" Because that's what we were expecting during that cold war period. "No, Israel was attacked." I didn't know anything about Israel. He explained to me that there is a state of Israel, a Jewish state, that it was attacked by neighboring Arab states, that it is not even clear if it will survive. We started listening together. We were able to pick up *Kol Israel*. We became glued to the shortwave transistor radio. Our father returned from his conference a couple of days later and went to work. My father was a world-known scientist. He was really the most prominent scientist in physics at the Stalingrad Institute. He was respected by students who revered him, and by his colleagues. Yet, he came home that day completely ashen and shaken. Students attacked him, spit on him, hit him. He was a handicapped man all his life, physically insecure. He said they yelled, "Go back to Israel, you Jew. Go to your Israel." The Soviet propaganda already went into full gear, but he didn't know about it because he was out of town and didn't read the newspapers; we had *Pravda* newspaper coming to the house every day, but nobody read it. He was in a panic because he didn't know what will happen next. Will the antisemitic campaigns of Stalin's years that he and his family lived through come back, would he lose his job, would they stop treating mother at the hospital and let her die? We didn't know what would happen. But we understood that something had dramatically changed in our lives, for each of us kids individually, for all of

us as a family; I felt we became Jews, openly at least within our family, during the Six-Day War.

Mother survived and after two months in the hospital came home. My parents would never trust their colleagues and students at the Pedagogical Institute. Within three years, once my brother and I left for the University of Leningrad, my parents left Stalingrad. My brother went to the University of Leningrad in physics in 1969, I — in 1970. We never returned to Stalingrad. In the summer of 1970, my parents moved to Yaroslavl, an ancient Russian city about four hours by train east of Moscow, where they both got jobs at the newly established University of Yaroslavl. My father was the founder of the theoretical physics department at the University of Yaroslavl. My mother taught Latin.

I don't think I remember what your question was.

AK: It was about Jewish identity.

JK: Right. As I said earlier, I acquired Jewish identity at the time of the Six-Day War. But my Jewish identity really blossomed when I became a refusenik. That reignited my interest in and exploration of what it really means to be a Jew. My participation in the community life of Leningrad refuseniks started, again, with my brother Boris. Like my father, Boris was a physicist, and a lot of physics and math professors and scientists became the early dissidents and the early refuseniks in Moscow and Leningrad. We knew a lot of them from my father, through conferences we kids went to when it was possible to combine father's meetings them with our family vacations. Years later, as a university student, Boris reconnected with some of those scientists he knew from childhood. Through them he got interested in dissident activities and refusenik activities. He already knew a lot about Judaism and Israel through his shortwave radio exploits. He connected with refuseniks community in Leningrad, became friends with them, eventually applied for exit visa himself while a graduate student in physics at the University of Leningrad, and introduced me to his friends, who were vibrantly Jewish. Openly Jewish.

Studied, socialized, celebrated. Refusenik community had a lifeline to resources in Jewish learning through Western tourists, even dual citizenship Israelis arriving via a third country, and through the outreach from various human rights organizations and Soviet Jewry support groups. Once I got involved with refuseniks and especially after my brother applied for exit visa, I started experiencing tremendous persecutions at work and the KGB raids at home. The harassment increased dramatically. After Boris emigrated, it quickly became clear to me that even if I could hang on to my job, the constant KGB harassment was affecting my physical and mental health. I endured one brief imprisonment, a few days only, but I left the jail severely ill. Life was becoming harder and harder. Eventually, I decided to emigrate because, by then, I wanted to live as a Jew openly, and to achieve what I deserved. I didn't want to face a dead end in every facet of my life, personal life, professional life, social life, cultural life. I wanted to become a free person. My Jewish identity was thus built through the extraordinary refuseniks' network of Jewish communal life and adult education. I learned a lot. When I immigrated and worked at the University of Texas, I was asked to teach Sunday school at a couple of synagogues. Eventually, I taught Sunday school or Hebrew school courses on Soviet Jewry in those congregations and interacted with families with limited knowledge of Hebrew or of Jewish history. I felt that through the refusenik community, I got Jewish education. It was not systematic. It had a lot of omissions due to lack of resources. But I became a lifelong Jewish learner. A few years ago, I took Me'ah. I did a lot of Jewish studying. I'm part of two study groups which I've been with for over twenty years; one in Mishnah and the other in general study of contemporary issues sourced in Jewish texts, Torah, Commentaries, Midrash, etc.

AK: Following that, I wanted to ask what your involvement is in the Jewish community today and how do you consolidate it with your involvement in the STEM [Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] field.

JK: When Ed and I married, we knew we'd be having kids: both of us wanted to have children as soon as possible. We wanted our kids to be fully Jewish, and not just by ethnicity, but by total Jewish awareness. It was surprising for me to learn that Jewishness in the West was a matter of religion and not ethnicity. I remember when I was filling out papers for my first job at the University of Texas at Austin, there were Xeroxed forms to fill, that was way before computers. The lady at the personnel department said, "Nationality here." I wrote, Jewish. She crosses it out and wrote, Israeli. I said, "I'm not Israeli. I'm originally from the Soviet Union." She crossed out Israeli and wrote, Russian. "I'm totally not Russian. I'm a refugee. I'm stateless. I am originally from the Soviet Union, but I'm of Jewish nationality." [laughter] She is by then completely confused, crosses everything out and writes, "came from a different culture."

So, Ed and I wanted our kids to be educated, aware Jews. We joined the Newton Centre Minyan, which is a kind of a Conservadox community of prayer that is not institutional. We rent space at Hebrew College. Previously, we rented space at the Baptist Church in Newton Centre. There are a lot of rabbis who are part of our Minyan, but no congregational rabbi. The Minyan is participatory, so members take turns *davening* [praying], *leining* [chanting from the Torah], setting up chairs, preparing *Kiddish,* but it has no Sunday School. By school age, we enrolled our children at Schechter School. By that time, I forgot most of my Hebrew, and our kids were learning Hebrew meteorically. I didn't want to be left out of that. Several mothers, including me, formed our first study group to study beginner Hebrew. There were ten or eleven of us, and we hired one of the Hebrew teachers from Schechter's first grade and studied for several years. Then one of us died of breast cancer, and we disbanded for a year, but then we got together again and started hiring teachers to study *Torah*. Then, several of us together enrolled in Me'ah. After Me'ah, we put together another group with the core five or six people from that original group. That group still continues. Then a few years ago, I became part of a group of five people to study *Mishnah*. We started studying when one person who was raised Orthodox lost his father. In the Orthodox tradition, when you lose a parent, you

study *Mishnah* for eleven months. I was invited to join that group. The group fell in together, there was just such amazing chemistry between us. Then somebody else's parents died. Then nobody died, but we still wanted to continue just because the group was so interesting and had such beautiful cohesion. Two years ago, my brother died, then half a year later my mother died. We never had a reason to disband, so I think we are going to go in perpetuity regardless of the death in our families.

Early on, in much of my life I was "swimming against the current" as a Jewish woman scientist, which was, and is, heavily male-dominated. I was very shy as a child. My daughter who is now twenty-six, as a young child was also very shy. I saw a lot of myself in her. I wanted her to never experience the kind of limitations one faces because one is a woman or because one is shy. I was observing her development in preschool, then at Schechter. At Schechter, I started comparing girls' and boys' intellectual and social development in an educational environment, in science enrichment groups I organized in afterschool. Many girls at that time wanted to be doctors or engineers, or astronauts, or scientists. Then, four years later, the same girls from my little science after-school had downscaled their dreams. The one who wanted to be a doctor, now wanted to be a nurse. They didn't have as high aspirations. Even if they did, they lacked confidence. "I don't know, maybe it's too hard for me," or, "I don't know if I can do the math." They started developing fear of math. When they got the first computers at Shechter, boys were much more assertive getting their computer time. I started noticing that all the visuals in in classrooms were portraits of great men. Wall banners and displays were all in male gender. Over the Schechter entrance, there was a banner that read, "He renews His work of creation daily." It was from *Birchat Yotzer Or*, the morning blessings. I started noticing those things. Since early days in Schechter, I had conversations with other parents and with Schechter administration about being cognizant of gender bias in so many things that may not be in-your-face obvious, but they are all around. The administration was very upset with me. I became, like, a pariah. But I'm obviously not the type to give up easily. There was a group of us parents who started working with the

school and trying to see where we can make change. Afterschool, for example, was more flexible than the core daytime school curriculum. I started organizing science classes after school, raising money privately, and hiring teachers for those afterschool groups. I started designing afterschool enrichment courses in science that would specifically target the outreach for girls. Little by little, the school put a couple of pictures of women scientists in the classrooms, and they eventually took down the banner about "He renews His work of creation daily." The *imahot* [meaning mothers, referring to the inclusion of the matriarchs in prayer], the inclusion of *imahot* in the *Amidah* during the *Kedusha* part of the Shabbat service was also a big issue with Schechter and with my Minyan, too.

Because my attitudes to most issues are usually research-based, I did that with gender issues in Jewish education also. I became friends with Shula Reinharz here, her Women's Studies Program office at Brandeis was just above mine. We became very close friends. In 1996, she and I decided to organize a workshop at Brandeis to explore issues of gender in Jewish education. She raised some private money, maybe a hundred dollars. We thought we would do a two-hour workshop for teachers, and we started studying sources and talking to professors, specialists and scholars in relevant fields. That generated so much interest that we were able to raise more money, and instead of a couple of hours' workshop, we did a full-day conference that became a national conference. Maybe even international, as there were a few foreign participants. It became the first conference in the United States on gender issues in Jewish education. We published the proceedings of that conference. Here, you can have it, actually. [Gives a copy of the publication.] Please give it to the Jewish Women's Archive.

AK: Thank you.

JK: We were doing a lot of other things. Shula and I connected with a group called Project Kesher. Project Kesher sponsored model Seders for Russian Jewish émigré

women which Shula and I started organizing. We ran Seders for nine years, first through the JCC [Jewish Community Center of Greater Boston] and then at Brandeis. The Seders got national, and then international attention. I created a tri-lingual English-Russian-Hebrew *Haggadah* for our Seders because most participants were Russian Jewish émigré women who didn't know how to conduct Seders or navigate a regular Haggadah. We started with a small group; I think our first Seder had twenty people. Then, it grew every year. After the JCC, we would rent Brandeis Faculty Center here, the faculty club that seats two hundred people, and it would be sold out. It really became a movement. The year we stopped running our Seder, I think it was 2009, that year my mother became very ill, and I wasn't available to work on it any more. Our Seders ended, but the tradition of women's Seders continues, and women Seders became very popular in Jewish communities all over the world. But that was a great experience for us all, to meet so many women with so diverse Jewish histories and levels of Jewish knowledge who would come together and learn and celebrate. I remember one particularly extraordinary and rewarding experience. I'm a swimmer, and I used the JCC pool. At the JCC, they organize yearly Jewish book fairs. Whatever year it was, it was a couple of weeks before the Passover, and they had tables with Jewish books in the lobby. I was going by those tables, and I overheard two women speaking in Russian, holding a couple of *Haggadahs* and discussing which one is better because it has a particular texts or pictures. Those were the women whom I remembered from my first Seder who didn't even know what Seder was then, and now they're evaluating *Haggadahs* that would be better for them to lead their own family Seder – my God! Nothing is wasted. That's just one example of my Jewish involvement.

I did a lot of STEM work at Schechter. I would organize science enrichment afterschool activities; and, I took Schechter groups of young girls to MIT science workshops. Through all this, I actually realized that I love popularizing science to people who are scientifically lay people. I love space research. I love what I do. I also feel that there are so many levels where what I do and love professionally is affected by who I am

personally, me being a Jewish woman with my particular and unique life story. So, talking about space research and using my own personal journey as a case in point became an interesting model for my presentations. How did I become a space scientist? Or, how would I become an astronaut? Not a generic scientist or astronaut, but a scientist or an astronaut with my unique identity. How do I bring that identity into what I do? What does it mean to be an astronaut and Jew? For example, you can't light candles in weightlessness because there is no gravity to create convection air currents necessary to sustain a burn. You can't pray facing Jerusalem at specific designated times because, in orbit, you have sunrises and sunsets every hour and ten minutes. How do you design rituals that are respectful of the tradition, compatible with the tradition, and yet consistent with the spaceflight environment? You can; you just have to be creative. You have to give it a thought and a good faith effort. I'm interested in those things.

Another example has to do with the founding of JCDS, the Jewish Community Day School. A small group of Schechter parents including me shared our discontent regarding the weaknesses we saw in the science and math curricula at Schechter, as well as the gender bias not only with regard to Jewish studies and Jewish religious observance, but with regard to girls' access to resources in science and math, Jewish educational layouts of classrooms and buildings, and much more. We decided to explore a possibility of founding a Jewish day school that would address all those issues. A new school that would have a truly, fully integrated curriculum. Like, if I can bring Jewish awareness into science, can I bring science into Jewish awareness? Yes, I can. Let's find ways to do it! History, literature, science, math, languages – everything can be sensitive to Jewish awareness but can be also enriched by Jewish awareness. That was the set of guiding principles that group of parents had when they were founding the JCDS. I was involved in all that at the time. I interviewed their first science teacher. But I decided that my kids would stay at Schechter. Yet, I was still working with that group and consulting them on some issues, and I'm still friends with that group of founders of JCDS. That's how it all started. Gender issues and STEM issues were at the root of the foundation of that

school.

AK: Following up with that, what social issues, whether in America today or now in Russia, in the former Soviet Union, do you feel are most pressing currently?

JK: I think with regard to social issues, specifically for the Jewish community in America, it's the issue of intermarriage and acceptance – or lack of it – of non-Jewish family members, friends, partners, children. I'm a scientist, an experimental scientist. I study data, I see how the patterns form. Analyzing patterns and trends, I acquire predictive ability about the process I study. This is the scientific method. In the Soviet Union, we were locked into the state-sponsored antisemitism, quotas and antisemitic exclusion of Jews from certain achievements, schools, jobs, professions; there was little intermarriage because, well, who wants to voluntarily deal with this shit? Sorry…

AK: No, it's okay.

JK: But in a free society, it's impossible to "lock" people in. The reason I came here is to be free. The reason I left the Chasidim was because they wanted to control some parts of my life. The Jewish community needs to understand that intermarriage is not going away and that we need to develop creative and meaningful ways to embrace those families, make them comfortable in the Jewish community, and make their children feel welcome. The Jewish continuity may be enhanced by intermarried families, mixed marriage families of whatever kind. If they want to be part of the Jewish community, the Jewish community should invite them to be part of it. The Jewish communities and congregations are struggling with it. My community at the Newton Centre Minyan struggles with it. Both of my kids and my stepson have married non-Jews who are very embracing of Judaism. They don't want to convert, but they want their kids to have awareness of what it means to be Jewish. They certainly love the families they've married into, but I couldn't have an *auf ruf* for my son or my daughter at the Minyan. [Editor's Note: An *auf ruf* is the Jewish custom of a bride and groom being called up in

the synagogue for an *aliyah*, the recitation of a blessing over the *Torah*]. I couldn't announce their weddings at my Minyan. It doesn't hurt me. I understand that this is a Conservadox Minyan. Yet, I know that going forward, my kids will not be likely to belong to the very Minyan where they became b'nei mitzvah.

At Brandeis, a lot of programs were formed to work with Soviet Jewish immigrant kids or kids from that heritage. Genesis Institute at Brandeis was founded in the early 1990s and designed to train Russian Jewish émigré kids, or heritage kids as they're known, in Jewish leadership qualities. They don't have to become religious, they don't have to speak fluent Hebrew, but they will gain qualities to become leaders in the Jewish community. It was a remarkable Institute. I was one of the founders of that. A lot of Jewish kids that I meet at Brandeis are dating non-Jews. That doesn't make them less Jewish, but that makes them less community-involved Jews. They will raise their kids without a Jewish community. They're less likely to have the continued Jewish awareness and involvement. That, I think, is the greatest challenge for the Jewish community right now. In Russia, I really don't know. I have been back to Russia only a few brief times. Last time I visited Russia was in 2010 when I took my kids there. These are my kids. This is Aaron, and this is Sima. [shows photographs.] They're both in doctoral programs. Aaron is twenty-nine; Sima is twenty-six. I took them to the places where I lived – none of them have the same names that they had when I lived there – Stalingrad became Volgograd, Gorky where I was born is now Nizhny Novgorod. We went to Moscow. We went to Yaroslavl, where my parents lived after I left for Leningrad which is now St. Petersburg. I don't think I'll be going back. I don't really have much contact. I don't know what the Jewish situation is in Russia now.

AK: I think that was my last question. Is there anything that you would like to add or anything else you'd like to say?

JK: I think that finally, in the last few years, the Russian Jewish community in the Boston area has a good organization and a lot of activities on behalf of Israel. They have a special relationship with the city of Sderot, which is halfway between Tel Aviv and Gaza Strip, and it suffers a lot of terrorist activities from Gaza. The organization is called the Russian Jewish Federation. Russian Jews, originally, in the refuseniks times and in those years, were very welcomed by congregations and Jewish organizations, but somehow there was a disconnect, and Russian Jews did not stay with those organizations or congregations. I was trying to understand why so, because I was desperately in search of a community when I first came. In Texas, I had tremendous problems finding a community because of this disconnect, because of not knowing Hebrew, or not understanding a synagogue culture. Another thing was the awareness. The Jewish awareness in the Soviet Union was based on ethnicity. We were ethnically Jews. I was a Jew because my father was and my mother, and I couldn't escape it. If I were a religious person, I could convert to any religion I wanted, yet it would still say "Jew" on my passport. Here, in the West it's a matter of belonging to Judaism, which is a religion. If you are an Israeli Arab, you're not a Jew. Yet, an Arab in Israel who converts to Judaism becomes a Jew. That whole switch from ethnicity to religion has always been very limiting for Russian Jews, Russian Jews completely didn't belong because of how Judaism was classified. It's less of a problem for the kids of those former Russian immigrants of my generation who now have kids of their own, and they speak fluent English. They can join congregations and have a Jewish religious awareness. The Russian Jewish institutions and organizations are still segregated. That's an issue for the American Jewish community in general. In Israel, to a lesser extent. Jews of Russian origin there have their own political party and a lot of political clout, and they're siding with extreme right, as Russian Jews largely do in America as well. The more segregated you are, the more right-wing you are, really, because the left is too diverse, there are too many choices. Do I make sense?

AK: It makes sense, yes.

JK: Okay. Just to finish, I love literature, and Russian literature is extraordinary. I wanted all my life to also study literature. If I were in an American university, I'd triple major in sciences, arts, and literature. Leo Tolstoy is my favorite author. I read his novels many times at different stages of life, and every time I learn new things. The very first time I read Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was in middle school, probably seventh grade, or eighth. I was just completely overwhelmed by that novel. I had, in those days, very good memory, so if something really makes an impression on me, I remember it verbatim, whether it's poetry or prose or a math equation. Some pages of *War and Peace* I remember by heart. There was a paragraph there which is at the end of *War and Peace*. Did you read *War and Peace*?

AK: No, I started it.

JK: You'd have to read the whole thing to get to that paragraph. It's at the very end, in the second Epilog, where Pierre Bezukhov is already married to Natasha Rostova and they have a family. Pierre goes on trips to meet with some like-minded people who formed organization to have a constitutional monarchy in Russia. He comes back, and he talks to Natasha in the bedroom, he shares with her and says – do you want me to say it in Russian or in English?

AK: However you want.

JK: Is your Russian fluent?

AK: Yes.

JK: And then he says, [Recites paragraph in Russian]. This is what, to me, the right and the left mean. That the left is so diverse, it cannot fully unite. The right has easier time convincing people to vote even sometimes against their own best interests; it's easier to mobilize when you have that binary clarity, when you evoke – or provoke – the most basic emotions and fears, it's much easier to mobilize and achieve unity. Whereas on

the left, it is so much more difficult. A lot of people on the left and in the center stand for very good things. They just differ from another group that stands for something else that's good, and maybe the other good group, so there's so much to negotiate and such diversity of the details of goodness. I trace all of this complexity to that statement from the *War and Peace* that Tolstoy wrote back then, in the 19th century. This is the paragraph in English. "All ideas that have great consequences are always simple. My whole idea is that, if persons who are evil are united between themselves and thus constitute a force, then people who are good should just do exactly the same. How simple." Simple indeed! Yeah, that's it.

AK: Okay, thank you so much. That was really great. Thank you for giving me your time.

JK: Okay, Sasha. Nice to meet you.

AK: Nice to meet you.

JK: If there's anything, any questions you want –

[END OF INTERVIEW]