

EXODUS Project

Interview of Alla Olswanger Lubin

December 6, 2016

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Lynnie Mirvis: Hey! I'm Lynnie Mirvis and I'm here with Memphis Jewish Federation with Alla Olswanger Lubin. It is December the 6th 2016. Alla, what is your full name?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Alla Olswanger Lubin but my maiden name was Alla Yanovskaya.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yanovskaya. Ok and what is your date of birth?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I'm old. 03/16/56.

Lynnie Mirvis: And your place of birth?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Kiev, Ukraine.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ok. So you came from Kiev, Ukraine. So can you tell us about what it was like to grow up in Kiev?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was very interesting for me because I was super young. I always watched my grandfather going every Saturday to synagogue and I always watched my father getting upset with him for doing it and every so often my father would break up and just saying to my grandfather, "You know you are jeopardizing my career. You know what you are doing. I will be thrown of the Communist party." My father was a criminal attorney and later after he died, and he died in this country, I find out that he represented Russian mafia. Growing up, I never knew that. So therefore, my sister and I were living in a little bubble. Every so often, I remember my cousins and me we were always playing together as we get into my grandfather's _____ open it and try to play and grandfather would _____ sit us on his lap, "You just can't do that. This is very important," and my father would say, "Do not even go there," and pretty much every morning, I was reminded when the lady who took care of us, my parents reminded to both of us, to me and my sister, "Please do not tell anybody you're Jewish. Don't tell anybody you're Jewish." So I did not really have to say that I had dark hair, dark eyes, olive complexion. Majority of Russians and Ukrainians are blue eyes, blond hair. So therefore, I stood out. My sister had sort of blondish hair so therefore for her it was easier. For me, it wasn't because I just stood out like a thumb but it is what it is, you

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know. I made it, had some moments in my life but I had a good life as a child. I had an amazing childhood. It has nothing absolutely to do with Jewishly. The only thing we ever did Jewishly, it was Passover _____ and we ate matzah all week and that was my favorite week because I loved matzah and I still do. So, it was a late night and I remember coming home like at 1 o'clock in the morning and every single year, my parents said it to both of us, "You know you can't tell anybody what you did last night and you have to go to school. You can't miss school." So everything was hush, hush. It was being Jewish under the table and that was basically how I was raised. I didn't know anything about why we do things. If I ask my grandparents, they were afraid to say so they said, "Because it is. That's the tradition," and I'm like, "Ok, why do we eat matzo ball soup when the Passover?" "Because it is." "Why we eat brisket?" "Because it is." So you ask those questions and it was like, it was really, I remember when my grandmother died, I was 7 years old, my mother's mom, and I remember that her casket was open and it was in my grandparents' place and someone sat next it and they brought me there to say goodbye to my grandmother because their traditions was my generation was not allowed to go to the funeral because I was number three generation and 7 years old. I don't know. My sister and I was not allowed to go. So I walked in and everybody walked in the socks, I do remember that. It is the only funeral I remember because my grandmother before this one died when I was 3 and everybody walked in the socks and it was right in my grandparents' place. She was in the casket and this person was sitting there. I could never spend the night there again. I was terrified. I just, I still am, I'm visualizing that place and I'm thinking, how difficult it was maybe for my grandfather who never remarried and never liked Ukraine, because my grandparents actually immigrated to Argentina before my mother and my mother's sister were born and came back because they were homesick and their family kept saying things are better. So you know the story, it was a tough come back for my grandfather. They came back with nothing. They totally undressed them, took everything away. Going through Customs was a nightmare for them, literally humiliated my grandmother. Actually, my grandmother was pregnant then with my aunt. So my grandfather never liked it where he was.

Lynnie Mirvis: This was after World War II?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My grandmother died when I was 7. I was born in 56. It was 1963 when she died. I remember because I was in first grade and I remember I was only allowed to come and see the open casket and say goodbye to my grandmother. It was just like, it was so different, and it's made such an impact. I'm 60 now and I remember like yesterday. It was in my grandparents' bedroom and I was wow and I never went to the funeral so I don't know that whole thing how it went and what actually happened but I know exactly where my grandparents buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev. _____ my grandparents so does _____ my sister. She is buried in between my grandparents. So you know, it's one of those things.

Lynnie Mirvis: It's hard.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I'm still to this day sending money to some strange person every single year supposedly taking care of the graves and sends me pictures back because my aunt does, I still have my dad's sister living in Brooklyn and that's somebody that she is supposed to know and I ask my aunt just last year, I said, "Listen, how do you know that I get a picture, that it was taken 10 years ago or 20 years ago?" She says, "Because I know." That's it. This is it, because I know. I'm like, "Fine. You know whatever this little money I send to that person, if that person beats me out of that

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money, that's okay. I have no proof, you know. I can't. I really wanna go back to Kiev just for that reason but I, right now, I'm concerned about what is going on there. I'm not so sure if I wanna jeopardize. My kids really want to go because they have never been. They wanna see where their mother was born and my sister's daughter. My late husband and I, we adopted her after my sister died. She was 12. We brought her here. Lana grew up in whatever few years that she had, six years that she had, in White Station and _____ (8:12) and grew up Jewishly. Then, she went to Wellesley on full scholarship and she never came back. I mean, she comes to Memphis because _____ (8:22) I'm like well the boys call her sister. They recognize her as their sister. So anyway, it's a lot of tragedy in the family but we just witnessed all that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Do they talk about the holocaust? Were they ___?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My father had three holes in his back and my father traveled with a piece of paper that allowed him to go through security because the metal is still inside, some pieces of metal was inside of him and they traveled and every so often, a piece would get closer to the skin.

Lynnie Mirvis: Was he in the Soviet army?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: He was 18 years old when he was recruited and actually, he was in a pile of dead people and some random lady that he never was able to find out who she was saw him breathing and she pulled him out of the stack of dead bodies. Her and her husband basically saved his life. It was in a small village somewhere deep in the Poland-Ukraine territory right on the border of Poland, Poland and Ukraine and they saved his life and they moved him from there to Kazakhstan because they find out that he was Jewish. So after they cure him that he, I mean he was going to be putting under the ground and they saw that he was breathing and they pulled him out.

Lynnie Mirvis: Is that why, because he was Jewish, that they tried to kill him?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I don't think so. I think it was just a pile of soldiers.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, they were soldiers.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: He was on the front line. He was just a kid, 18 years old. So he got shot at 19. He lasted less than a year and he got shot and every time we went on vacation, when we were vacationing, my dad always wore a T-shirt because he got tired of people asking him what those holes are. Yes.

Lynnie Mirvis: So in Kiev, what do you remember about school? Is there anything that stands out there?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My school was 20 percent Jewish because we lived in that area sort of like is Memphis. Everybody around their schools, they live around. Well the school was not was in the walking distance but it was the only school and I'm sure it is still there and I'm sure it is probably still look exactly the same. It was not what any schools, it looks like one of the schools on the islands when you go to, when we went to Aruba we saw the school there. I remember. I mean it's a little bitty _____. So the school was pretty Jewish. I thought it was great. I had lots of Jewish friends and I had a lot of non-Jewish friends but no one ever talked about religion.

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Lynnie Mirvis: That's what you said before. Right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Everybody always knew that we were Jewish because we did not look like them but they never, some of them ignore us. As they got older, they ignore and but no one ever did anything that it would pushed me to leave country because I, like I said, my childhood was, we had bodyguards living in the house. I did not know who they were so there was some people that my parents were trying to help. So it was totally different upbringing where windows were breaking. My sister and I were moved so quickly that I could not even blink that fast. It was really different lifestyle that I lived there not knowing that, because the way we, like if my children would have asked, I would ask my children to do something and back then when they were teenagers and I said, "I want you to do such and such" and "Why do I have to do that" and "Why not" and I said "Well but you can't do something for instance because _____ something else" and "Why not." If I would say that to my parents, I would probably would be grounded for quite some time. It was a statement made at the dinner table and everybody we never ask, my sister and I never ask. We just know our dad is an attorney and we knew that he was one of those people that hard to get appointment with but that's all we knew.

Lynnie Mirvis: You said he was an attorney and what about your mother?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My mother was a general accountant for the company that makes baby carriages. So both of our parents were going different directions in the morning. We had a lady that my father rescued from Siberia. Again, we did not know until she told us her story. Natasha, who probably died, is one of the richest people because we left everything, my parents left everything to her. Everything. Because they could not bring anything. So they left everything to her.

Lynnie Mirvis: So when you were growing up, what was your house like and?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: We had a big apartment. Natasha was taking care of everything. She could not cook so my mother always cooked because she grew up in Siberia.

Lynnie Mirvis: So they rescued her.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My father did. When he find out her story.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was her story?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Her story was terrible. She was a kid. She lived in a small town in the Ukraine. Not Jewish. Natasha was not Jewish and she sold a cow to make some money, like under the table sort of, I don't know, and it was during Stalin time and she immediately, when they found out, they shipped her to Siberia and I could not understand why she could not leave the place because she was not actually in jail. So it was really interesting set up but I could never get a straight answer from either one of them why but I do know that she got married, had a family and her first family, husband and two children, drowned on a boat fishing. That's her first family. And the second family was killed in a car accident. She had so much tragedy and she decided never to get married again or to have children so she was leaving. She was like totally working nonstop like twenty hours a day working, four hours of sleep. That's her lifestyle was. She did not know anything. She did not even know, sort of like when we rescue Ethiopian Jews and we had to teach them everything from A to Z. That is when she

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worked at our house. My mother was like, "What are we going to do with her?" and my father said, "We're just going to have to help her." She did not know that underclothes exist. She had two dresses, one pair of shoes.

Lynn Mirvis: What made your father do that, do you think?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I don't know. I don't know. It's one of those things he never talked to us and as we got older, she moved in with my grandfather after my grandmother died to take care of him. So we always, she was always in the family. We always took care of her and she took care of us so it was like we always ask her questions like when my parents were giving a party saying like, my sister play the piano and I dance in the ballet, so we had to perform and then Natasha took us and put us in bed and we were like, "Natasha tell us how was your life." "Nothing like yours." She stayed in our house. She lived in this house because she did not have anybody else.

Lynn Mirvis: Yeah. So how do you think your life compared with some of the other people in the town?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Probably totally different. Probably much more. You know it was a communist country so it was no upper class. It was upper class was under the table. Definitely no middle class. Everybody else was sort of equal. A doctor would get 120 dollars a month so does engineer have 120 dollars a month. So Rubles, I'm sorry, Rubles. So it was one of those things that I don't know. It was really, my parents tried to make sure that we grew up like everybody else but most of the times we were picked up, my sister and I were both picked up, from school by the car. Right after classes is over, we're in the car out.

Lynn Mirvis: Why was that?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Not a lot of interaction. I guess they were worried about Russian mafia. I don't know. I just don't know. We always had the same chauffer, Boris. It was, he drove my dad's car. Well my dad never drove because he had no reason to drive. We were dropped off and that is just how, we never ask any questions. My sister went to conservatory and I had to pursue the accounting degree. My parents, my father actually, made me quit ballet. I was in the ballet school.

Lynn Mirvis: You loved ballet.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And went and pursued my accounting degree.

Lynn Mirvis: So he wanted you to go into accounting.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Well actually, he wanted me to be an attorney. I went to law school for only less than half of a semester and the college that I entered in Kiev, it's called University of Kiev. It is beautiful, beautiful. Just recently saw pictures. It still looks exactly the same. On my entrance exam, face-to-face, that is how you enter college, it is face-to-face entrance exams. I remember this professor said to me, he says, "I've never had a Jew in my school and I promise you I will fail you. You will not graduate." University of Kiev never had a Jew. So that is what he said to me. That was my first shock. I was like so shocked I'm like. "Wow that would be _____." So I remember telling my father and he said, "Ignore him. You don't have to worry about him. He is nothing." That's what my father said and I'm like, "OK." I did not know what mean

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he is nothing. I did not know what he mean. I mean, I was 17 years old. I didn't know. I was growing up in such a bubble. Everything around family, the friends. Like going out was not an option, my sister and I like going to a party. There would be someone else going would be going with us. It was just a total bubble. I felt so like isolated. So my upbringing was totally different. There was not a lot of freedom. My best friend was not Jewish. She was the only child. Her parents knew very well I was Jewish. We were very close. So I spend the night at her place or she spend the night at my place. That pretty much was but it was watched carefully, everything we did my sister and I and when my sister graduated from conservatory, she started performing so she had to practice for hours and hours and hours a day. So she was busy. She was so into her music. She got married, had her daughter, Lana. I just graduated from high school when Lana was born.

Lynnie Mirvis: How did you feel about giving up ballet?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Oh I was terrified. I actually never, I told my father, "I will never forgive you for that." But he was right. I would be, I would never make it. I don't have. Russian ballet is very competitive. I definitely do not have the body or neck. They always judge by the neck, by the size of the neck, and the pear shape does not do well in the ballet and the pear shape would just it's they knew that at age of 9 at looking at my body on exam. _____ exam. I remember we were in the ballet outfits and a bunch of people were sitting in a table and stood there and they were looking at us and I totally believed that I got in because of my dad but he did not want me to be there just to be somewhere in the back of a stage. So in a way, he did me a favor, but it is not all about always being in the front you know it's, it's sometimes it is good to be in back. It's one of those things that you learn how to grow to be in the front. But that's was not my dad, so that was not an issue. It was not up for discussion. It was a statement. It was done.

Lynnie Mirvis: It was done and you went to the University and what happened after that?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I graduated, got the job.

Lynnie Mirvis: What kind of work was it?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I worked in accounting department in the entrance. My mom could not hire me because it wouldn't be, it wouldn't be right and then shortly we left. We left. We immigrated. I was only, I immigrate in '79.

Lynnie Mirvis: In '79.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I enter United States in 79 so I left the end of 78.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was that like, that decision to come? What made you ___?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: What pushed me totally to the limit after my first incident with the professor, it was interesting that when I was very, very pregnant with Jon, who is now 39, very pregnant and I never really stayed in lines to buy anything because I was spoiled. I mean my parents, it was Natasha would clean. It was delivered to our house a lot of stuff.

Lynnie Mirvis: Many people.

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Alla Olswanger Lubin: Some of the people that I know. There is a lady came every single morning. My father liked fresh milk from like fresh from the cow and then got the cheese freshly made. She brought us every other day. It was delivered to us. She was carrying those huge things. I do remember that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Whoa.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I know.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you have got married. You met your husband in Kiev.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: We graduated from high school together.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ok.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was, I thought it would be my ticket out of the house but no, my parents made him moved in in our house.

Lynnie Mirvis: He went to your house.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My father did not like him so that was it.

Lynnie Mirvis: How old were you when you got married?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: 19.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, so you were young and you went to University, I see, and what was he like?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was unbelievable. He is still here. He in Seattle. He is a dreamer. He is not realistic like I am, you know, he is not a person who thinks of tomorrow very well. I guess my accounting background is always makes me worry about tomorrow and as tomorrow gets more expensive than today therefore, there has got to be something put away for tomorrow and I came here with zero English. He spoke English. I took French in school. He took English. So it was, so I stood in line and I was very pregnant and I was in the back of a line and this lady breaks through the line and the people got upset. I don't even remember what I was buying and she ignored everyone else and just so mean and I was all the way in the back. I said, I knew better not to say a word because I didn't want to start anything being Jewish. She looked at me and she says, "And you," there is a bad name she called me in Russian, "your place in Israel. I don't know why you are still here," and I looked at her and I'm very pregnant so I can't defend myself because I'm worried about the baby and I said, I don't know how did I. I've never been so brave. I remember saying to her, "At least I have a place to go and you're going to _____ here," and I just turned around and left and I started walking so fast. Hopefully, I was thinking she's not going to follow me and she won't throw me to the ground you know because it is not me, the baby I was worried about, and she didn't. I got lucky and we didn't already have those conversations about leaving but I was not going to, I didn't to leave my parents and I was quite happy with what I did and where I was and that pushed me and I sat down and talked to my dad because they had to sign permission that they had to give us permission to leave. Not to

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Eugene. Eugene had his own parent. But to me, not knowing that they ever see me again, what is going to happen. So my parents really was difficult. It was difficult for me to break through and when I told my dad what happened to me I said, "Dad, I can't give my son what you give me and my sister." I said, "I just can't. If I get out of here, there is a chance for him to grow up with knowing his father. If I let Eugene leave by himself, he will never know his father. And I don't think I can give him a life, a free life as a Jew to be who he wants to be here without you." So he signed it.

Lynnie Mirvis: He signed it. So what was it like when you actually left?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My mom signed it too.

Lynnie Mirvis: She signed it too. So how did your life change after they signed it and you decided?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Oh it was every day. It was sadness, a lot of sadness in the house. I have a painting that Marty, my late husband ordered from Paris. It is called *Homecoming*. Iris Harkavy did it. And it's about family sitting on the front porch _____ airplane leaving and it was my request. When I married Nathan, I have to have this painting right next me. It is the best gift I ever received and knowing it from Iris it's special because they the one who actually resettled us.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And I'm such good friends with her kids. It means so much to me. So it's faceless people because it's really, that was amazing what she did. They did not know if they should be happy for me or. Of course, they were sad because they didn't know they were, I never got to see my grandfather, I never got to see my sister again. She died after I left. So, you know all those things happen but I wish I would be there but.

Lynnie Mirvis: You had to leave and

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It change.

Lynnie Mirvis: Everything changed. Sad.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was a lot of ups and downs when we came here. Which I learned that later when I start working at the Jewish Family Service how difficult adjustment is. Especially without language, if you did not speak language.

Lynnie Mirvis: Without the language it's so hard.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: When I went to heart to heart mission for Federation last February, I was, at the last minute, I decided to be bat mitzvah there because I was never bat mitzvah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Where was that in?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: In Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: You went to Israel.

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Alla Olswanger Lubin: Yeah and my kids were very upset because I never told them. I said, " Well I did not know if I'm gonna be brave enough to do it and I did it."

Lynnie Mirvis: You wanna describe what you did? How did it work?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was unbelievable. You can ask the girls who was with me from my past. Shelley Robins, Debbie Lazarov, Debbie Harkavy Lazarov, Jill Notowich. It was amazing. It was. So what happens there is there was some ladies from former Soviet Union who were getting bat mitzvah too and they wanted to say their story and there was no one there to translate and I just couldn't take it. I stood up, grabbed the microphone and I said, "Hi guys. Let me help you." And it just broke my heart. I remember those days when I look at people and so I could do smile I was like a good dog. I could understand much more than I could say. So it was like a sort of brought me back and they pair us so we saw one of those ladies like happened to be mine was from Poland but I can understand Polish. Pretty much because Polish is a combination of Ukraine and Russia so the Polish is not as hard for me as like other Russian languages, other republics. So it was a very moving experience. It was, I have no regrets that I did it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Where was it in Israel? Where were you?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: We were, we went to the wall first. They welcome all the newcomers with the challah and say welcome home. One big challah and we all share it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Challah? Challah bread.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Welcome home. It's a very strong European tradition when you move in your new home, you get a bread and salt.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right yes.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Because it's, that tells you that you'll never be hungry. You will always have a bread and salt because you know you have bread.

Lynnie Mirvis: It's a Jewish tradition.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Yes. Right. Jewish tradition exactly. That's what I grew up with so I, it was so amazing to me that in Israel they still continue to have the same tradition.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow. That's beautiful. Wow.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was. The rabbi was fantastic. She was a female because it was a woman's mission. It was 115 women from all over United States and it was like wow.

Lynnie Mirvis: It's so beautiful. Could we go back? I just wanna go back for a moment to when you actually were leaving. Like what did you decide? How did you know what to take with you and what to leave behind?

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Alla Olswanger Lubin: I didn't really. We lived with my parents helped me to pack. Whatever they thought I need to. They took most of the stuff away from me at the customs in Russian border.

Lynnie Mirvis: They wouldn't let you take?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My parents, my father was there with my father-in-law and they just took it home. At least they give them back. They didn't keep. Well I don't know what they got because it's a lot of, we didn't talk to each other for a long time.

Lynnie Mirvis: So who came with you when you left?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My ex-husband and Jon. Jon was 2 years old. And now he's 39 so that's 37 years ago. It's like Whoa. It's another life.

Lynnie Mirvis: Can you remember the trip? Like where did you, how did you travel?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: We were on a train to Vienna and each of us had 300 dollars. That's all we had and they took all away the food. That's what I really got upset because I had, Jon was 2 years old. We didn't have any food. So the bag with food they would not let us bring it. So I think the first stop somebody was selling something and Eugene with his broken English was able to convince this woman to sell something with like a sandwich for 6 dollars. So from think about. We only had 600 dollars, 6 dollars is a lot of money. That's all we had is 600 dollars. Period.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yes. And so you stopped at Vienna and.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Stopped at Vienna and we're there for almost three weeks and then we moved to Italy_____ I really loved it. It was great. I wanted to stay there. I really did. I wanted to stay _____. He did get a job there so he was working. If I would have too but I had, I only work there on the weekends. I worked for this guy at the market because they have open air markets. I loved it. I learned Italian like that because it's so easy. Those guys are so easy to talk to. Women and men are so emotional and they use their hands and the facial expressions. When you learn another language, the facial expressions, you learn how to read facial like a deaf person, the face means a lot. So I work Saturdays and Sundays I think the market was I can't remember. I remember two days a week so I didn't have to buy any produce. We save a lot of money on that because whatever he didn't sell, I was able to take home as much as I wanted, he told me, on Saturday. Not on Saturday, on Sunday. He said, "I'm not going to take it back." He meant his wife. He said, "You take it to little boy."

Lynnie Mirvis: That's so nice. So how long were you there?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: A long time. Longer than because we didn't wanna really leave but I didn't want to live in New York because I said to Eugene I said, "Listen, I wanna to go to a smaller city where I can really learn how to be American, how to raise my child. If we're planning to stay or spend the rest of our lives there then we need to know their lives and if I live in a Russian community in New York, which I can always move back, that's not going to teach me anything. I will not make friends. My son will not gonna have friends and I was totally right. Majority of people in that community who came in

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my days still their English is lacking and they stay in their community. They did not come out, outside of their community, make friends outside of the Russian community, become to be friends with the American Jews. I think it's important. I think that's how you really learn and there's a reason why we came here. That's what he knew Marcus and I work so hard to embrace them into community. To introduce them into community.

Lynnie Mirvis: So tell me how that worked. How did you get to Memphis and how did you?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Because we were young and then I find out later from Iris the Memphis community had a hard time to resettle older people so they were looking for younger couple and then we didn't really care where we're going as long as it's smaller community. That's how we end up in Memphis. They told us Memphis. I told _____ **(36:19)** serious. The only think I know about Memphis is Elvis and I don't even like Elvis so could you just help me?" And he's like, "I don't know anything else either so we'll find out. We can always move." So that's the goal we set right in front of us.

Lynnie Mirvis: So what were the challenges when you got here for you?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Oh of course language. Right away.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Nancy Sherman was amazing. _____ She was our teacher here. She is a professor of English. I don't think she lives in Memphis anymore and of course Tamara Miller _____. Well I don't know. I saw her two years ago at the ballet, Russian ballet.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was her name?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Tamara Miller. She was a professor of Russian language. She helped me with my diploma. She has done a lot of special things for me. I did not know her at the beginning. I got to know her later and it was amazing what she's done for me that I was able to reconcile and get my degree in just a few courses that.

Lynnie Mirvis: What degree did you end up getting?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Accounting.

Lynnie Mirvis: You've got one here too.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Because I work for Michael Uiberall my first, very first job and I learned he's my cousin. Weird.

Lynnie Mirvis: He's your cousin.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Yes. Andie Uiberall was Andie Lubin.

Lynnie Mirvis: _____. Right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And Andie and I are always been friends for a long time because we get our nails done at the same place for 25-6 years. Same person. She's

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by herself. If she can't do it. I won't have my nails done. I'm like, it's like, I teach to her. We put her through college and we love her. She's like family. So Andie and I was the same days so we become to be instant friends and _____ too.

Lynnie Mirvis: Where they your volunteer families or? Who was it?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: No.

Lynnie Mirvis: No. You just connected with them and you had your first job there.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: _____ was our volunteer family and Danny and Saralyn Weiss. You know, very good. Sally Rosenberg is my best friend now so it is so weird. We laugh about it but it's a good laugh because once being on the receiving line and turning around and being in the giving line, it feels good. If I can just teach other people how important to do that then who came from former Soviet Union specifically. A lot of them don't understand how important to give back, how many Jewish people in need and I'm unaware of their ignorance until I start working at the Jewish Family Service and saw what happening in Jewish community just in a small town like Memphis. I cannot imagine the needs of the cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia. It's got to be unbelievable. It's got to be and of course Israel it's, if we don't support our people, no one's going to help us. Just that's how it works.

Lynnie Mirvis: How did you get connected with the Jewish Family Service as you are now?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Because I'm an accountant, they had a position in bookkeeping and I just had my second baby and I needed to be close to home so I can run and breastfeed and come back. Yeah, Lee was 6 months old and Mary and I had a lot going on financially and we knew that I needed to go back to work so I said, "No problem." He was just building up the business. It's just amazing what he did at such a young age.

Lynnie Mirvis: This was?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: My late husband, the father of my kids. Because I've only been married Nathan not quite five years. Marty's been gone almost _.

Lynnie Mirvis: Eugene and you split up after shortly after you came?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Yeah. Well. The idea of someone not working in a strange country and me working by myself is not gonna help. We ain't gonna go anywhere so I might as well just be by myself with my son and I'll know where I can go because I don't have to, I can live without vacations for five years. I don't have to have a vacation if I have a goal in front of me that there is some X amount of money has to be put away and an X amount of money is necessary for your child's education and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Budget did not exist so I'm one of those people I am, I believe in prioritizing things in life. Again, I think it has to do with my accounting background. I have seen when I work for Michael, I have seen people how careless they, how fast they can have everything and how fast you can have absolutely nothing. Therefore, being careful is important and that's how, that's one of the things Marty admired about me, I admire about him. We both knew we set the goal from day one that tomorrow is very important so I don't really think about Eugene. He was never in Jon's life very much. Just recently, Jon reconnected with him so I don't get involved and it is good for Jon.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Are your children here in Memphis too?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: No. Only Jon.

Lynnie Mirvis: Jon is.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Everybody is everywhere.

Lynnie Mirvis: Now you have Jon and then you have ... Sam?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I have Sam who is a lobbyist in D.C. He's been there ten years. He went to school there and he stayed there. Lana of course went to Wellesley and opened her own business in Boston and there she moved in Seattle. Everybody was just here for Thanksgiving. Even my late husband's mother had to move to St. Louis and she is not happy but every time she comes to Memphis, she stays with me.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh that's wonderful.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I don't know if you ever knew Cookie Olswanger.

Lynnie Mirvis: Cookie Olswanger. I don't think so.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: She's hysterical. It was a tough, tough holiday. We had a lot going on in the house and Lee lives in Nashville. He works for UBS Bank. So I have them everywhere _____ and they were rough because we have ten children between us, Martin and I. So we have kids in Atlanta and Charlotte and Memphis.

Lynnie Mirvis: _____ family.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Busy. Very busy.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you've become very connected here in the Jewish community and how do you attribute that to ___.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I think my job at the Jewish Family Service because being a bookkeeper, I saw what's coming in, what's going out and who comes in the door, especially at lunchtime when I don't know if Martha still works with the Jewish Family Service. Martha the secretary was taking lunch so I would replace her for that hour and then and I see who just people just happen to walk in the door and I'm thinking, wow. I have a roof. I have money for tomorrow to pay bills. I have food in the fridge. These people have nothing. I'm so lucky. So that's what really pushed me and I remember Henry and I work and that's my volunteer job when I was helping translating doing all this and I was constantly busy. We had all kind of things happening in the community, all kind. It seems to be make laughing through everything. I remember when, you remember Penny Gladstein?

Lynnie Mirvis: Sure.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Debbie Weinstein? They were close friends of my mother-in-law, Cookie, I mean Esther Lubin.

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Lynn timer Mirvis: Sure, sure.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: So we used to sit in the kitchen. We had the table like that, not as fancy, in the Jewish Family Service had like a discussion so whoever didn't get to eat lunch ate lunch, and I remember telling them. I said, "Guys listen, I'm going to have a baby." Everybody ignore me. And I'm like, "you did just, are you not listening to me?" This is the one who is 25 now. "Are you not listening to me?" And he says, "I don't care if you're having a baby. I only care if you wanna give this baby for adoption. Then I wanna hear you." I'm like.

Lynn timer Mirvis: Because that's what she did. That's what she did.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Yes and then one day I remember and I see this child quite often now walking in the door after breastfeeding and coming back to work and there is a basket with a note in the basket. This baby is the luckiest baby in the world.

Lynn timer Mirvis: Aww. So they adopted her and you saw that.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Almost 24 years old.

Lynn timer Mirvis: That's amazing.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Penny already work with her. She was leaving in a car. I remember that. We never knew anything about the father. Back then, it was hard for us. I can't remember what all the details with adoptions but she had to know up in the front if it is a mix baby or it's not and we couldn't. Penny could never get straight answer from her. See now I can talk about that. Back then, my lips were sealed.

Lynn timer Mirvis: Right, you couldn't.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I never, because I heard so many things there. _____ I mean there was so much going on in that office and I, the girl just walked out. She could not separate herself with the baby but she did, she knew she couldn't give this child anything. She had nothing and the car was old, beat up. I don't remember details but it was, she never told us anything about the father but the baby ended up being white and it was a huge demand of course.

Lynn timer Mirvis: Ah. So you were there.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: But we, all those adoptions when the actual adoptions happen, it's the most amazing, amazing experience. It makes you look at your body and thinking Thank God. I can do it. Thank God we can do what we're doing so these people can be parents as well.

Lynn timer Mirvis: Right, right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It's a gift. You know, it's hard to be a parent but it's super rewarding.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Right. So your children growing up here in Memphis, where did they go to school and what was that like for them?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Bornblum. The boys went to Bornblum all the way. Jon went to Academy and then he went to public school. He went to Ridgeway for a short time and then White Station immediately, middle school and high school. Sam and Lee went to Bornblum all the way through and from there they graduated from Ridgeway and Germantown High. Well, they all went to MUS for a short time but that didn't work out. None of our boys ended up graduating from MUS. And then Lana went to White Station. She graduated from White Station. _____ was working there. She was a lifesaver at White Station. She was at college and she, I keep telling her, "I worry about Lana's college." She says, "If I would be you, I would stop worrying about Lana's college." Lana got accepted on a full ride to Smith, Wellesley, Emory.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's amazing.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I forgot, what was the other school. Of course she didn't apply _____. We were like, my husband and I were like the money's like we can't, we just can't afford if you're going to another school. She said don't worry. I'll get a little help because it was like fifty thousand dollars back then, Wellesley.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah. It's so expensive.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: But she did it and she work through entire school and she graduated in top 20. Hillary Clinton was a speaker in her graduation because Hillary graduated from Wellesley.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. How wonderful.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And my husband is, you know, Nathan has grew up in Arkansas. So he is close to Clinton family. He used to, when Bill was the governor of Arkansas, Nathan used to fly down.

Lynnie Mirvis: Really? Oh. That's amazing.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Because Nate's dad was a doctor in a small town in Arkansas. He was one of those few doctors who did everything. So unfortunately, I never met Mr. Lubin but.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: I heard he was amazing doctor. Once we got in a restaurant because she said, "Lubin?" and she said, "I knew Dr. Lubin." You know that was like really. She said, "I'll get you in." We're like, "Whoa."

Lynnie Mirvis: That's wonderful. That's wonderful. So you feel that you had quite a life here.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It was. It's a lot and now that I'm embracing this federation. Very, very involved and also I'm on the board of Bornblum so I do a lot there.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Jewish Day School and you sit on the National level. You are also involved with the

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Oh. National board of Philanthropical Women. So it has to be.

Lynnie Mirvis: What's it called? Tell me?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Philanthropical Women.

Lynnie Mirvis: Philanthropical Women.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And it's the ones at level starts from being a Lion of Judah and up.

Lynnie Mirvis: For the United Jewish appeal. So is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to say?

Alla Olswanger Lubin: Oh life is so crazy. I just, I love what I do with Federation, all of that, especially _____ I realize what a small potato I am.

Lynnie Mirvis: You're honored.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: How much I have to learn from these people like _____ like my friend _____. Her and Michael has been, Michael grew up with my late husband. We have been friends. We raise our kids together. It's just absolutely amazing what these people do. Sally Rosenberg, what she does for our temple, what she does for

Lynnie Mirvis: These people are the philanthropists and

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And also givers of their time, of their money, of their everything back and I think it's my entire group of friends is that way. As I look at circle of my friends, every one of us is somehow are somewhere involved. Some days we get more involved, some days we get less. It all depends on the family of course but there's nothing more rewarding to me to know, knowing that when I went on that mission, my last mission, walk into schools and watching these children benefiting from what we do here.

Lynnie Mirvis: To Israel, when you went to Israel? You saw it.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: And also when I'm on the allocation committee and it's only three of us sits in the room at the problem and going through people's needs how we freely can say, I don't want to deprive anyone, any of our children who wants a Jewish education. It feels good to be able to do that. That we have funds for that so their future is secure. That next generation hopefully by watching us will do what we're doing. I wanna work harder because I want this community to get stronger and more successful that I'm, in 25 years, the second person after **Louise Clark** to represent Memphis on a national level.

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Lynnie Mirvis: That's wonderful.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: It's been 25 years since **Louise** was there and my first interaction with these ladies, they were like, I started telling them my story and they sort of didn't want to hear me and I'm like, Ok. That's not gonna do it. I understand Boston have more Jews. I understand Boston is much more established. But Memphis has wonderful people, amazing Jewish community. I have faced that. When my husband got diagnosed with his cancer how everyone, that I didn't even know who they were, were there to help because we had to spend three weeks in Sloan Kettering and two weeks somewhere else and _____ babies, and everyone took a part to help out with food, with carpools, with I didn't even know who to thank.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's amazing.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: So I have a lot to be thankful. It's so far, it's been really good and I want it to be better. I want it to be stronger. I wanna be able to forever for our children and grandchildren to say, "I'm Jewish" and not worry about it who's gonna say what. It's _____. Being Jewish feels good. I love being Jewish. I have to admit it. It's wonderful. So, it's something that I feel deeply. My grandfather told me, the one who went to synagogue, he told me, "It's not as important to be able to go to synagogue" because I was not allowed. "What important is to be Jew in the heart. Always remember even if you don't know all the prayers like you're supposed to. Jews don't judge and if they judge then they're not good Jews. So therefore, you say your prayers what you think you as you feel like to." When I was leaving, that's the last advice I got from my grandfather and I live by that so yes, sometimes I forget and I say the prayers wrong and my grandchildren correct me and I'm like, "Oh well. Ok." But I didn't get a chance to have a Jewish education. That's why it was so important to me that my children will. So therefore, I'm gonna make sure that there will be those schools that will stay alive for my grandchildren and for my grandchildren's children.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's beautiful.

Alla Olswanger Lubin: That's all I can do. Thank you.

Lynnie Mirvis: Thank you so much.

EXODUS/pti:mc