

EXODUS Project

Interview of Luydmila Savranskaya

July 13, 2016

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EXODUS

Luydmila Savranskaya.mp4

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Lynnie Mirvis: This is Lynnie Mirvis. I'm here at Temple Israel on July 13, 2016 and I am here interviewing Mila...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Savranskaya.

Lynnie Mirvis: Savranskaya. Did I say it right?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Almost.

Lynnie Mirvis: Almost. Why don't you tell me what's your name for the Exodus Project? Yes.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Okay. Mila Savranskaya.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay. Mila Savranskaya. Mila, tell me, what is your date of birth?

Luydmila Savranskaya: I was born in April of '57.

Lynnie Mirvis: And where were you born?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, I was born in Ukraine.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: My parents, by that time they lived in Moscow, but my grandparents, my mother's parents, lived...still lived in Ukraine so my mom came to her parents for delivery.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, so they came...and they were in a public city or town? So it was Moscow?

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was...the city I was born called Vinnytsia and Vinnytsia is a famous area for Jewish shtetls because around Vinnytsia was big Ukrainian area for shtetls.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh, for shtetls, is that what you said?

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Luydmila Savranskaya: Mm-hmm.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you were born there. Okay. So what was it like for you growing up in Moscow?

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was nothing Jewish in my life.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Because, as you know, when Bolsheviks came to power, religious was forbidden in the Soviet Union.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So even my grandparents did grow without going to synagogue, without knowing rules, without knowing traditions and my parents were born in the beginning of _____. They also didn't know anything.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: I was third generation of people who were growing without knowing traditions and religious.

Lynnie Mirvis: And Jewish holidays are nothing that you can...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, my great-grandmother, my father's grandmother, was still alive. She...she passed away when she was 104.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So she kept some traditions and family would gather around the table. She would cook with help of her other relatives so we celebrated Passover, we celebrated Purim, but without knowing why we do that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: We had the gefilte fish on the table, during Passover we had matzah on the table, but on another side of the table we always had bread.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: We didn't...our relatives just didn't want great-grandmother to know that we had bread on the table. They were hiding it from her. So it was just a choice for family being together.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And then during the '70s when I still was very young majority of family moved to Israel, moved to United States, so my youth years were...I didn't have any Judaism around me.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: And basically what we learned being already adults, having children, we learned it here in Memphis when we came in 1992.

Lynnie Mirvis: Well tell me...tell me about what did your parents do for a living? We'll go back there.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, my father, he had a master's degree in engineering and he was having very big position. He was in charge for doing all artificial leather in the country. And my mother, she had education, she graduated from Kiev University philosophy department.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: But she was working in the school. In the Soviet Union it was a combination of...we didn't have separate middle...elementary, middle, and high school. It was school. So she was working in the school teaching history.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. So did they tell you stories about what their life was like, you know, before you were born?

Luydmila Savranskaya: A lot of stories were about the second world war.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Because when second world war started, they were little children and their parents had to be evacuated from the area they lived and they had very hard several years of their childhood. It was hunger, it was cold, it was...in my mom's case extremely hot because they were in the capital of Uzbekistan. It's a lot of stories about them moving on the trains during _____, about different stolen things, danger. There were a lot of stories about that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: But I don't want to that all my childhood was filled with horrible stories. Of course it was a very nice childhood, very happy childhood.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was loving parents, loving grandparents.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you have some...does anything special stand out for you in your childhood? Like what you did for fun?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Nothing special. Just every child, every Soviet child.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: What I do remember, when I was maybe 5 somehow I found my father's passport and the system, the documentation in the Soviet Union was like that. Everyone was supposed to have a passport which was equal to driver's license in

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the United States and it had five lines. Name, middle name, last name, date of birth, and nationality. The fifth line was nationality. So Judaism was considered to be a nationality in the Soviet Union and by the way, I think United States is only country which doesn't consider it as a nationality because Israel also takes it as nationality. People who move to United States considered to be citizens of Israel even if they have Jewish blood. So in the Soviet Union it was called fifth line, so when I found my father's passport and I read on this fifth line that he is Jewish, I was...it was a shock. I started crying because children at such age, they want to be the same as everyone else. You know? There are certain ages when people don't want to be different. So probably it was that age. And for my parents, before that, it didn't come to their mind that they had to explain to me. It was so natural for them that by blood we're Jewish. And after that they were trying to explain to me. I don't remember details after that. I just remember this first moment. "I am different from everyone else and I don't like it at all."

Lynnie Mirvis: Ahh. What did you think it meant? Did you...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Just being different.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ahh. Being different. And what about school? When you were in school what was that like?

Luydmila Savranskaya: I think that my parents tried to keep it secret that they were Jewish.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: They couldn't keep a secret about that of course because even their face features looked different, their last name looked different, but we never discussed it among other people. In my class, we had two more Jewish students. We also never discussed it. It was kind of a forbidden subject. People didn't like to talk about that and, well, I found out one family with people who were talking about this openly. For me, it was a new world. Okay, and I don't remember a lot of details because I was maybe 10, maybe 12 years old but it was a new discovery that Jews can talk about their Judaism. Wow.

Lynnie Mirvis: Something new happened.

Luydmila Savranskaya: I even cannot describe. Did I think that they were brave or what was in my thoughts? I don't know right now. I just remember that it was something absolutely new.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did you experience anti-Semitism in school when you were a child?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Again, you know, it's everything...it's very hard to explain because if there's problem, someone can tell that you're a Jew. It's not...if there are no problems, life goes on. When people tried to join universities and tried to find job positions, here the problem starts because this not written rule about 5% of Jews in the universities. They were since all times. Did you know about those rules? Not more than 5%.

Lynnie Mirvis: 5%.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: So only 5 Jews for 100 students. It was not written rule but it worked.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So to help me in my life, what my parents did, one of my grandparents, he was Ukrainian.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So my parents managed to make passport for me which in my passport, fifth line said that I was Ukrainian.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ahh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So it was helpful for university but still last name was talked about a lot, so we had to go through some obstacles with that.

Lynnie Mirvis: What kind of education did you receive?

Luydmila Savranskaya: I became a chemical engineer.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay. And what was that training like?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, it was an interesting time in university. Subjects were not very easy and...but again, people live everywhere so I had very interesting student years because government tried to close everything, government tried to keep control over everything but you know, it never works because always there are little shoots of something, sprouts of life...life sprouts of interesting creation, student theater, underground exhibition, interesting music. So it was...to be honest, it was a very interesting life. Maybe it could be more interesting if the country would have been more open. I don't know that. Maybe.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you managed to go to plays but they were underground?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, students did a lot of that. It was not completely underground, it just...you know, somehow you find in another university people decided to make theater and they just directed the play of writer which officially were not forbidden but still you cannot find books of this writer in the book stores.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: All those tiny details.

Lynnie Mirvis: Lots of details. So how did you meet your husband?

Luydmila Savranskaya: We were students from the same university.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And we knew each other for many years before we were married.

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Lynnie Mirvis: What was the university? Where were you...

Luydmila Savranskaya: At...well, I don't know how to say it in English. Now it has different name. Maybe Chemical Technology University, named by Russian chemist, Mendeleev, who came up with famous table of Mendeleev.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you met at university?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then at university, it's what I told you, every department had their own students' theater. It was very strong competition between them and they were very talented, very interesting. Directors, musicians, actors.

Lynnie Mirvis: So even though you were in the chemistry...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Even though in the chemistry.

Lynnie Mirvis: ...you had a lot of...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: ...the arts.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, it's...this specific...it was very _____ because also, don't forget, it's something interesting. I will try to tell it if I could. The most famous big universities tried to not accept Jews and the most talented Jews, they had to go to the universities kind of not Ivy League but kind of lower level and they had so many talents...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: ...that they did not do only math, only physics, only chemistry. They did a lot of very interesting things.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. So you met your husband in theater?

Luydmila Savranskaya: He was a university celebrity. [Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: Really? [Laughing] Can you describe that more?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Because the student theater he was participating in was very famous and all students in university knew them, knew all those people from the theater.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. What was your role in the theater?

Luydmila Savranskaya: No, no, no, no, no. Nothing. No, I was just a regular student.

Lynnie Mirvis: You were? You loved to...wow. Do you have any mementos from that time? Any, like, playbills or any kind of documents or any kind of pictures...

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Luydmila Savranskaya: Oh, yeah, of course.

Lynnie Mirvis: ...from your university?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, well it is interesting actually. Me and my mom, we are...well, it's not a very nice expression but there is an expression. Archive rats.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's kind of packrat but for...

Lynnie Mirvis: Packrat.

Luydmila Savranskaya: ...archives.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my gosh. **That's a relief.**

Luydmila Savranskaya: So me and my mom, we brought so many different documents. Old newspapers, pictures, some kind of...even memorabilias. Recently we spent several nights with _____ going through all that and it was amazingly interesting. And I was making pictures of those documents and pictures, sending them to my friends who live now in different countries. Now we have a lot of ways to send those pictures and people were mesmerized by what we have here in America. [Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: It's amazing. Okay. We're going to talk about that later. [Laughing] So about the decision to come to America.

Luydmila Savranskaya: _____ in the Soviet Union.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: New life. Finally, the borders opened and people can move Israel or to United States without long time being through Italy and Vienna. I will not describe those details because I haven't been in such a situation and a lot of people know about that. My husband's family decided it would be better if we move to the United States because we had children, we had boys. The war in Afghanistan was over but still we knew the Soviet Union or Russia can start any war, any time and...help me with the word. How do you call when people are supposed to...drafted to the Army?

Lynnie Mirvis: Drafted.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Drafted. Yeah. Drafted. It still exists in Russia so when you have boys in the family you definitely don't want them to die for some unknown people for negative purposes.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Wow.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Because when we're talking about Israel we know what goes on.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: We know that military supports and saves country. In Soviet Union, you never know why there's a fight. Just...we have recent examples of that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. So you have how many children?

Luydmila Savranskaya: I have two boys.

Lynnie Mirvis: Two boys.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, they're not boys anymore, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: So you wanted to come for the family and for the...

Luydmila Savranskaya: For the family. Yeah. And it was a time...it was a very dangerous time in Russia at that time.

Lynnie Mirvis: When was that? When did you come?

Luydmila Savranskaya: We moved in '92.

Lynnie Mirvis: '92.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Mm-hmm.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And actually it was a big wave of former Soviet Jews...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: ...going to the United States and then several months even in Memphis. Even the Memphis Jewish Federation accepted I think at least 10 families. We came almost simultaneously.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, at the same time.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Like in two months, maybe even more than 10 families.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. So let me ask you something. How did your life change after deciding to come to America? You know, what happened when you made the decision? Was it...

Luydmila Savranskaya: You want me to be honest?

Lynnie Mirvis: Yes. Yeah.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Actually I didn't want to move.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: For me, it just...for me it's a lot of things which I don't like to change in my life.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: I don't like to move from house to house. I don't like to change friends. I like stability.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And moving to another country, it was completely different from what I like so for me it was a hard experience, not because I didn't like something here, just because of my nature.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: My own nature.

Lynnie Mirvis: It was hard to leave.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was just hard to leave. It was hard...everything was new. What is interesting that...I think it was the spring of '93, 1993, channel 10, public television, they made a movie about our family.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And _____, who at that time she was working at the Jewish Family Service in Memphis, JCC. She was interviewed also. She understood everything, what happened with us and then this interview she said, "Everything is different for those people. Even smells, even scents."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And she was absolutely right because even...

Lynnie Mirvis: Can you describe that, what was...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Again, it's only me.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, sure.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's nothing...don't think that it concerns _____ people, yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, yeah. Certain smells. What smells were different?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Just smells from the place I was growing up.

Lynnie Mirvis: What kind of smells did you...

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was supposed to be the smell of birch tree after the rain. You can laugh at it but it's very important to people and I'm sure psychologists and psychiatrists know a lot about it.

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Lynnie Mirvis: So the birch trees after the rain.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's some certain scent which I was looking for.

Lynnie Mirvis: This was in Moscow? No.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was...I was...yeah, in Moscow. Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And...but there were smells of certain flowers which don't grow in Memphis. Even that was very depressing for me. And I was depressed. I had real...I never was diagnosed but I know that I had problem called nostalgia. How do I say that?

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Nostalgia?

Lynnie Mirvis: Nostalgia?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Nostalgia, yeah. I felt smells of certain things which supposed to be in the Moscow air in this time of the year. In March it's supposed to be scent of melting snow. In springtime it's supposed to be scent of open leaf buds from certain trees. And I definitely...I felt the smell. And I was crying all the time. [Laughing] But then we found a way for me to go back to Moscow for a couple weeks for vacation and I found out that my friends still are my friends, that nothing changes in the world, that everything is the same, and I was completely recovered after that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, that's beautiful. What could you take with you when you were leaving?

Luydmila Savranskaya: We could take reasonably big luggage with us. At that time _____, they allowed to have a lot of bags, very heavy bags, so we took...I took memorabilia. It's what I told you before.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's what you...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah. And I never was sorry about that because when we came to a completely new place, when we came to our apartment, and I was able to put things which my friends gave me during all those years, it was like home again.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ahh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And I still have those things.

Lynnie Mirvis: Could you describe some of the things?

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's...it's nothing important.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's okay.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: Someone would give some figurines, someone would give ash tray, someone would give tea set or something like that. It's absolutely not important things but I know who gave me that and when and why.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. Ahh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So when I have guests in my home, I like hiding the museum. [Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. Wow. So who came with you when you...

Luydmila Savranskaya: My husband has a reasonably big family so part of his family came in 1980 I believe and we were joining this family.

Lynnie Mirvis: Who was that, that was...

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was...my husband has an aunt and uncle so his aunt with parents and two children, she came in 1980 probably. I don't remember for sure. '79 or '80.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So we were joining this family, and then it was another big part of my husband's family.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. And so your...did your family come?

Luydmila Savranskaya: My family came later, a little bit later. Maybe...

Lynnie Mirvis: Who was that?

Luydmila Savranskaya: We came in '92 and my parents and my grandmother came probably in '95 or '96.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So it was times when we had big family gathering, about 25 people around the table.

Lynnie Mirvis: Are they still here in Memphis?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, the elders, they passed away little by little. Children, they moved to other cities so now we of course don't have such a big family here in Memphis.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. What about your children? Are they...

Luydmila Savranskaya: My children, they don't live in Memphis. One of them lives in Atlanta and the other one lives in the Boston area.

Lynnie Mirvis: What are they doing? Are they...

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Luydmila Savranskaya: The one who lives in Boston area, he...

Lynnie Mirvis: What's his name?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Well, he's _____, nickname is _____ and he's got a baby girl just a few weeks ago, June 21st. Yeah. [Laughing] And he is doing...right now he started...he changed completely his education because he was in the veterinarian area and then he decided he wants to work with people so he is a psychotherapist and he is starting his practice soon. The young one, he's in the movie production business, graphic design. He was working with his father, my husband, in Moscow. He was...help me with the English. How do you call major...

Lynnie Mirvis: Filmmaker?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Uh, no. Major cameraman. Photography.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. Like a videographer. I know what you're talking about. Yeah.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's...

Lynnie Mirvis: The camera.

Luydmila Savranskaya: The guy who's in charge for making the movie.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Two important people, the director and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Producer.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Director and the guy who knows what the camera is supposed to see.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was just here a moment...I cannot...anyway, major cameraman, let's put it...

Lynnie Mirvis: So he was doing that.

Luydmila Savranskaya: My family will be able to remember that.

Lynnie Mirvis: What's your son's name?

Luydmila Savranskaya: He's **Mihael**.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay. **Mihael**.

Luydmila Savranskaya: **Mihael**, yeah. So back in Russia he did two very big projects with this father as being, again, they would laugh at me.

Lynnie Mirvis: So he lives in Atlanta?

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Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, he lives in Atlanta.

Lynnie Mirvis: And...wow.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And he also has a daughter who is 3 ½ now.

Lynnie Mirvis: Alright. So he's married and...wow. So when you came, your children were little?

Luydmila Savranskaya: They were 10 and 8.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. What was that like for them? Did they...

Luydmila Savranskaya: It's interesting that they were accepted to ____ Charter School and we still cannot express our appreciation, how nice it was. Because it was a wonderful education. They had...they came up with an idea how to teach those children who came from former Soviet Union because it's what I told...____ it was a big wave of families with children so they somehow managed...this poor girl was teaching children who don't know English at all. But what was funny is that six months later I was called to a teacher parent conference and a wonderful teacher who lives now in Plough Towers, Ms.... Mmm, again, somehow I...

Lynnie Mirvis: She was one of the teachers?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, she was one of the teachers. She told me about my young son and she said that, "Everything is alright now. He is sitting at the table during the class." Of course, I made a face and she said, "Yes, he was sitting under the table for the last six months." Can you imagine what this child, what kind of...

Lynnie Mirvis: He was under...on the table?

Luydmila Savranskaya: ...horror he was experiencing and how wonderful the teachers were if they accepted it and they were teaching him when he was sitting under the table. [Laughing] Wonderful school, wonderful teachers, we were very lucky with that and really appreciate it.

Lynnie Mirvis: So that was a good...a good fit for you. So what were you able to do once you came here? Did you work outside of the home or were...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Me and my husband were extremely lucky because one of the wonderful professors at the University of Tennessee, **Leonard ____**, he was looking for a lab technician in that time.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And him and his wife, they decided to help someone who came as new Jewish refugees because his grandparents came from Odessa in 1905 and they wanted to help new immigrants. So he called the Jewish Community Center asking if they have anybody who came as chemists and here I was so he accepted me and we are...I worked with him for many years, almost 18 years and we are very good

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friends. They even had a chance to go with me to Russia and I was able to show them Russia and the Ukraine and it was an interesting time. Wonderful person, wonderful family, we are very close friends with his wife, **Judy _____**. And so it was wonderful work for me and my husband was also very lucky because Germantown High School had wonderful program for fine arts which was created by Frank Bluestein many years ago.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And rumors, connections, I don't know, but somehow Frank found out about my husband and he wanted my husband to work with him and they worked together for almost 14 years, shoulder by shoulder, helping each other. It's a wonderful, interesting program, including theater and TV studio. At the time, Germantown High School had a cable studio which was showing TV for Germantown. Germantown citizens were subscribers of this program, so Memphis did for us the best which was possible to give for newcomers.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: This is what sounds like _____.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did you have a...was there a family that adopted you they didn't do that then? You know, were there volunteers...

Luydmila Savranskaya: No, no.

Lynnie Mirvis: And what about when you came here.

Luydmila Savranskaya: No, it was a wonderful family who just helped us. They supported us. They introduced to other people. It was **Herman and Sally Marucs. (29:39)**

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, oh, yeah.

Luydmila Savranskaya: You know them of course.

Lynnie Mirvis: _____. Where did you live when you came? Like how did that work when you first got here?

Luydmila Savranskaya: When we was...

Lynnie Mirvis: When you first got here?

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was an apartment complex on the corner of Cherry Road and some other road.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay.

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was old, worn out apartment but it was wonderful because the owner...I think the owner helped the Jewish community somehow. They kind of support each other and the rent was very low.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: And by the time when we came, Jewish Federation helped new families.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: We were given...I believe we were given a check for \$1,000 or something like that to...just a gift from Jewish Federation.

Lynnie Mirvis: When you first came. Uh-huh.

Luydmila Savranskaya: For us to be able to buy the things which were the most important. Furniture, dishes, whatever it has to be in the house. And for the first I believe three months they were supporting us, giving us cash money. It was if I'm not wrong \$400 in '92. It was enough to feed the family.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Of course, it was enough for food and also people were helping us with clothes. Well, there were sometimes struggles with that because sometimes my children would wear clothes of their schoolmates.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ooo.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Can you imagine a child who is 10, 9 years old and suddenly his schoolmate says, "Oh, it's my t-shirt." It was very hard for them. But you know what they told me later, that it was very helpful. It helped them to live easier after that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: To find out what the real value of life is.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Luydmila Savranskaya: So they're never sorry about that time. Even I was very sorry for them.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. To go back to something about the actual trip over, do you... what do you remember about that, about how you traveled and did you go nonstop or was it...

Luydmila Savranskaya: It was not very complicated. It was just a shuttle flight provided by HIAS and we just...Moscow Airport, we arrived to New York. In New York, it was a little bit rough, you know? The people in there who work with new immigrants, they're former immigrants also, the majority of them.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Luydmila Savranskaya: And you know sometimes what happens when people finally get power. They want to show this power so it was not very nice. It was not a bad experience but, you know... For instance, when we were hungry and we wanted...my

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husband...we were...they put us in one room and when my husband realized that we're hungry and he has to buy something for us in the airport, they didn't want us to leave this room. You know, something ridiculous. But it was a couple hours. We survived it.
[Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: You felt sort of like under arrest or...

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah. It actually basically felt the same. No, we didn't have anything terribly negative, and when we arrived there already were people from JCC, **Herman Marcus** and...a senior moment. Joanne? What is...no, no, no, no. Forgive me.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, we'll remember.

Luydmila Savranskaya: I hope no one will see that I cannot remember her name.

Lynnie Mirvis: We'll come back.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, it will come back so they met us with the rest of the family.

Lynnie Mirvis: Sue Ann Lipsey? (33:33) No, no.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Sue Ann.

Lynnie Mirvis: Sue Ann? Was it Sue Ann Lipsey?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Sue Ann. Sue Ann.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay, so they met you at the airport?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Yeah, they were meeting all newcomers. It was...

Lynnie Mirvis: Did you come with other people you said or...

Luydmila Savranskaya: They came with members of our family who were already was here.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, right. Was that **Rita**? No.

Luydmila Savranskaya: **Rita**. Yeah, **Rita**. And my husband's parents already came at that time. They came several months before us.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ahh. So they came and met you. Did they hold up a sign?

Luydmila Savranskaya: And we were very lucky because we already had this apartment and with the help of Jewish Federation with this check, basically cash money they gave to us before we came, so my husband's parents were able to set everything in the apartment.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

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Luydmila Savranskaya: Some people gave us old furniture, some people gave us curtains. You know, everything. The fridge was full of food. We had everything including dish detergent and a sponge for washing dishes, you know? Everything. So we were very, very lucky with that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, wow. Wow. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you want to add before we close the interview? Is there something...

Luydmila Savranskaya: I'm so talkative that if I start to add you would never finish.
[Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: [Laughing]

Luydmila Savranskaya: Because I have a million stories.

Lynnie Mirvis: A million stories. Is there a story that stands out for you that needs to be told?

Luydmila Savranskaya: Now I want to express my love to Memphis. It took a while because in the beginning of course it was a dramatic difference between Memphis and Moscow and by the way, **Sally Markell**, she recently moved from New York to Memphis and, I mean, recently...just before we came from Moscow and even having such barrier with language, we had exactly the same feeling. For her it was cultural shock, for me it was cultural shock. Very similar. But little by little, I've grown to love Memphis and when I have visitors now from the States, from Russia, from Ukraine, I am able to show them such Memphis people want to move here and to live here.

Lynnie Mirvis: What do you show them? Tell me. What do you show them?
[Laughing]

Luydmila Savranskaya: I just show them people. I try to start conversations with people in grocery stores, on the streets, in the museums, everywhere. I take people from Russia, I take them to garage sales because garage sales is the best way to show how people live, how they communicate. You don't have to buy anything on garage sales but you come, you say, "Good morning, how are you? Wonderful day." People start conversations. And it's very interesting and very different from people from big cities like New York for instance and for people from other countries. They can see who Americans are, who Memphians are. It's my own discovery, garage sales.

Lynnie Mirvis: I love that. I love that. What qualities do you think you discovered in the people at garage sales? What kind of qualities or characteristics...

Luydmila Savranskaya: It just...

Lynnie Mirvis: ...of Memphis. What do they...

Luydmila Savranskaya: People are very...people are very open to communication, very polite, very helpful, very nice. Actually, what's interesting, sometimes in Russia, just some stranger who finds out that I live in America, when they ask me, "How...who they are? Who are those Americans? How can you describe them?" I say, "Well, I think that the average American is much better than the average Russian." [Laughing]

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Lynnie Mirvis: [Laughing]

Luydmila Savranskaya: Maybe it's not a nice expression but it's what I feel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Thank you so much.

Luydmila Savranskaya: Turn it off. [Laughing]

EXODUS/pti:ec