

EXODUS Project

Interview of Marina Levitanus - 2

February ?, 2016

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EXODUS

Marina Levitanus Feb 2016.mp4

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Lynn Mirvis: I'm here at Marina Levitanus's house. I'm Lynn Mirvis and we're doing part two of your interview. So how did you meet Valery, your husband? And we were talking about that and what made you decide to come to America.

Marina Levitanus: Well, we met in 1975 probably. I was introduced by my sister-in-law. My husband worked at the University of Leningrad. He was a track and field coach and my sister-in-law was a **piano player for the gymnastics** and one day she came and she said, "I met this nice Jewish guy and he's single. I want to introduce you to him." And I said, "Okay." And so one day she invited him over and we met and I learned that he was married before and had a child and he's divorced and he was very kind, very sweet, and so we kind of started dating. And my family really loved him. I wasn't, you know...kind of unsure. Very picky.

So anyway, so we eventually...we got married and we had a son, Pavel, he was born in 1977 and then pretty soon I was pregnant with my daughter, Mariam. At that time, emigration was really booming and we always talked about emigrating. So when we get together at my mom's house like on Sunday, it would be, like, a big party. Mom would cook all day and we have this...all this family. Well, at that time I'm thinking about when my brother already left, emigrated, my older brother, they went to Israel. My brother, _____. So we would always dream about how we would emigrate and live in America and life would be so wonderful and there would be no persecution or abuse of the Jewish people.

So...and our dream came true. My brother send us invitation from Israel at that time and so we start to apply for immigration and that was the most incredible, difficult time in our life because my husband worked at the university and once they learned that he wanted to leave the country, well, the word "traitor" would come first in mind. So he very much lost the job, or during that time when they didn't really know he yet, he was afraid to go to synagogue. Well, even prior, before our application they told him, "You cannot show any kind of religious belief. You know, that would be trouble." Because there's really hardly any Jews that work at university. Because my husband was a very known athlete, he was recognized and they hired him as the coach but there's not many students or teachers that are Jewish were working, teaching at the university or being a student. So yes. So that was really, really hard and I was pregnant with Mariam and my parents have to give me permission even though I'm grown woman, independent, my father and mother have to say, "Yes, we'll allow you to emigrate." As well as my

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husband has to have permission from his ex-wife which is...of course, that's a lot of money because she wanted us to pay her.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: Because he was leaving her child behind and my mom gave me diamond earrings for my wedding that was belonged to her mother. It was, you know, like in the family. I had to sell them because we didn't have any money.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mmm.

Marina Levitanus: Yes. It was so sad. Well, they not allow you to take any jewelry more than I believe like \$400 worth. You cannot take it with you out of country so they wouldn't be able to...we wouldn't be able to take them anyway unless I hid them but that would be very dangerous. I would not take a chance. But anyway, I was going to give my mom back to those earrings but we had to sell them to pay off my husband's ex-wife. So to say that, we struggle. My parents help us because I didn't work. I was taking care of my boy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: Everywhere you go to get the paper to sign up the people hate you and they express. They, you know, hatred to you, to Jews.

Lynnie Mirvis: They say things to you?

Marina Levitanus: Yeah. A lot of time verbally and we lived in community apartment and our neighbors, they were so hateful toward us.

Lynnie Mirvis: What did they do?

Marina Levitanus: Verbally. I mean not, like, do anything physically but verbally sometimes is worse than physical.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: And my mom was so sweet. She never wanted to have a conflict. Isn't that interesting?

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: That's what our ambassador said yesterday.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Last night.

Lynnie Mirvis: No conflict.

Marina Levitanus: He said, "Jews don't want a conflict." They always said, "It's okay, we'll work it out. We'll do..." And that's exactly what my parents did.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Mom always would bake her pierogi and all this, give it to this neighbor and that neighbor and this neighbor. My daddy always been so sweet and I...I was just like boiled inside. I said, "They're so hateful to us. Why you so nice?" "Because the kindness will change them." Well, nothing changed unfortunately. I think those people kind of grow up with...they don't even know what to come from but it's just that from internal kind of hatred towards Jews. Yeah, in Russia it's really, really bad. So emigration was hard. My...sometimes I would ask my daddy to come and take care of Pavel. He was such a sweet little boy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Aww.

Marina Levitanus: And my daddy would come and one day was really memorable. I quietly opened the door and my father kept my little boy on his lap. Pavel was a little bit over a year old.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And he was crying. My daddy was crying. He kept saying to him, "They take you away from me. How am I going to live without you?" And I've never seen my father crying or showing emotion. My father was a very kind man but very kind of shy, not really, like, open.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And it was so painful. I just couldn't face it. I shut the door and I stood in the hall and I cried and I composed myself and then I walked in and I just tried to be cheerful. Well, so as...we have to give away our apartment to government because it wasn't ours, it was government. So I have to move in to live with my mom for the rest probably week before we emigrate. So we left December 27 in 1978 and I said to mom...my mom's birthday is December 31st and I said, "Mommy, if you want, I can just stay a couple more days to celebrate your birthday." And she said to me, "The sooner you leave, the better it's going to be. I can't take this anymore." Because we couldn't even face each other. She was so heartbroken and every time she look at me she has the most saddest look in her eyes because by that time my older brother was gone to Israel and now I was going. And it was really hard because she knew she will never see me again. She was older and she was sick and so it was like, "Say goodbye forever." And so mom didn't go to airport to say goodbye because mom hardly ever walk. One time she came to visit me in my apartment. We didn't have elevator and we lived on the fifth floor and it took her 30 minutes to get up.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: And by the time she got in, she was so out of breath I had to give her nitroglycerin.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: And she said to me, "Never ask me to come to see you again." My mom was really, like, tough. She never, like, softened up things. She just said like it is. That's the way it was. But then she was so wonderful and I just adore my mom. So in

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all the years I live in my apartment, she only came to see me one time and I think daddy maybe came twice.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: So we walked to my mom which took...I mean, in the public transportation you cannot take the big stroller. The huge...the Russian one, you know? So we walked...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: ...to my parents' house and it would take us...it took us probably over the hour.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: So imagine I hardly see my parents when my child was born...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: ...because it was really hard. It's not like you're walking in the park. You're walking through the traffic, puddles, you know. It's really nasty sometimes. So at the airport we were...oh, it was so scary. One episode I remember where I had packed everything and of course I was going to have a baby so I tried to get some of that for the future child because I didn't know if we were going to have money, where we were going to live. They only you allow to bring very little money to live on. So I had more overweight of my, you know, luggage and...but this I remember. I bought my husband new shoes.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: Which, like, in Russia to buy anything it's impossible because it's really not much to choose from. And the guy, there was a soldier, you know, they go through your suitcases and they tear everything. You know, I put everything, you know, like, in newspaper and wrapped so it wouldn't be broken. They just throw things here and he took the shoes, brand new shoes, and pick up the heel and tore, looking for money or jewelry or whatever. And I remember when I...I was in shock. I said, "What are you doing?" And he put gun right to my face and said, "Step back."

Lynnie Mirvis: Whoa.

Marina Levitanus: And it was terrifying and then when I...I had to go to, like, office and beg them to let me bring a little bit more stuff for future baby.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And I said to them, "I am six months pregnant."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And I think they finally kind of like, "Okay." Now we're not talking about, like, 10 kg. It was just, like, a little extra. And so my daddy came to airport and I

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never forget that through the glass door he was running with his cane and, you know, he cried. He cried so hard and he knocked so I can see his face and he wanted Pavel to see him because Pavel was so little,...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: ...I don't think he really, like, could acknowledge the whole trauma of our leaving country forever. Yeah, that was a really tough time. And then we left and we were in Austria, and Austria, oh, that's the whole story. Why, you want to talk about it? So in Austria we came very late. We went through Warsaw and then Austria. It was very late but everybody, all the immigrants, were so tired. They put us in hotels. A whole bunch of people and I think, you know, sometimes they suggest if you bring cigarettes you can sell them in Austria and make some extra money because in Warsaw cigarettes...so anyway, I remember Valery was trying to sell some. He took his coat and left it somewhere on the sofa. I was so exhausted, I was sitting with Pavel. We were hungry and we were just...we just...because we flew, we...over, you know, in another country and it was just the whole day. It was so exhausting. And all these people there and our friends left with us. She was in the same situation. She had the new baby...not new baby, like 1 years old, 1-1/2-year-old baby, and pregnant, just like me. So the manager came to us, me and her, and he said, "We understand you're pregnant. Would you like to go to hotel? But the condition is severe." And I said, "What does it mean?" He said, "Well, you're going to have to stay in one room, you know, two family. There's two bed. Like, you know, full bed with babies." And at that point we didn't care. We said, "Yes."

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: So they took us to this hotel and we were young. You know, we just wanted to sleep. The next morning we wanted to buy...it was right at Christmastime so every offices, everything was closed so we kind of were stuck in this hotel until the holiday is over, so we in Vienna and my husband says, "Marina, have you seen my wallet?" And I go, "No, I haven't touched it." He said, "I cannot find it." I said, "Well, look through. Maybe it's in the pocket somewhere." So we went through suitcase for everything and we couldn't find it. And I said, "Where did you leave your wallet?" And he said, "Well, I put it in the coat on my...like, on the sofa, on the chair." And I said, "You just left it there and you were gone to, you know, take care of business?" And he said yes. Well, somebody stole it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: All our money that we were carrying, the money that was exchanged, the few dollars that he made in, you know, Vienna. It was all gone. At this point we have not one penny. So we're talking about, you know, probably like \$600 is gone. And we devastated. And we just don't know what to do and we need to eat. We brought a little bit of children's food and there was a little stove so I could make a little, you know, kids', you know, little hot cereal. But the owner of this hotel was such an anti-Semite. They were awful. They...they knew we were doing something like cooking, they would shut off electricity in our room. They would not let...there was no bathroom there. We had to go in the public, in the home, and there was a shower.

Lynnie Mirvis: Whoa.

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Marina Levitanus: [phone ringing] Okay, wait a minute. [video cuts out] So in hotel, they would...they wouldn't let us take a shower. I think in the week we were there, we only were able to take a shower once because it was a public bathroom and public shower. They would have to give us a key. It was awful. And what happened was they told us we cannot have any friends to come. Well, I didn't have any friends in Vienna but my friend has some Russian Jewish friend who was...who were...stayed in Vienna so one afternoon, the children were sleeping. We were resting and the two young men came to visit our friend.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: So there was a very nice, like, quiet conversation. They just talk about...they, you know, life in Vienna. It was nothing...nothing going on like extraordinary and so they finally...they left. You know, they probably stay the one hour and I remember I was making cereal. Oh, I forgot to tell you, after our money was stolen, that friend said, "I will lend you money. What we're going to do, we're just going to buy everything and divide."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: So that's what we did. At least we had some kind of source of money. So all of a sudden, you know, I was making this hot cereal because kids were supposed to wake up soon and this man barges in the room and he's big, huge guy and he's screaming in German and he's so mad and he scream at us and of course I don't understand. I know he's angry but I know why. I didn't know the policy for once. And he...so my husband said to him, "Can you speak English?" He could speak English and my husband knew English as well. So basically he said to us this: We broke the rule and therefore we have to leave hotel immediately. And he gave us five minutes to pack our stuff and get the heck out of the hotel.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was the rule? What rule did you...

Marina Levitanus: Well, the rule was we're not supposed to have any friends...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Marina Levitanus: ...or company. We didn't drink or smoke. It was nothing. It was just two friends came to visit my friend to say hi. Not to mention we were treated so badly.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: So my husband and the friend of us going downstairs to speak to this lady who is in charge of immigration, Ms. **Bettina** I remember. And to prove to, you know, we need to...more time to leave. We can't just wake up kids.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Marina Levitanus: You know, and pack all this stuff. And so I decide to go downstairs. While the friend of ours was speaking on the phone with Ms. **Bettina** who said that we'd been behaving really badly. My husband was trying to consult or talk to this angry man who was manager about we didn't do anything wrong and he should give us a break. So

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while he was talking, my husband turned around because **Vadim** ask him question and this guy took his fist just like this and hit my husband in the back with...I was watching it. With all the power and hate that he possibly could have. He hit him right in the back. Well, my husband turned around. Well, my husband was an athlete, big guy. He was shaking so bad and he...I mean, he was just, like, crying almost from the pain and he grabbed that guy. He was like, one arm, probably some kind of Nazi. He grab him and I thought, "My husband is just going to kill him." I'd never seen my husband in that despair of the anger and humiliation. It was the most horrible thing, the most horrible humiliation I ever experienced. And he...he said something in Russian to him and he wanted to hit him. And I squeezed myself, as pregnant as I was, between him and my husband I look at his eyes and I said to him, "Please don't do anything. I begging you. We're nobody here. We have no rights. If you hit this man, we're going to be ended up in jail." And so I was so glad that I was there.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: Because really, truly my husband wouldn't hurt a fly. He's so kind and knowing his power, he never used that. And so that was the end of it. We had to go back to room, woke up children, put...dress them up because it was in the first part of January. It was still the holidays and it was so cold and I remember we had all these clothes and strollers and then they sent...they wouldn't even let us to stay inside in the hall. They kick us outside. We were outside waiting for the taxi...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: ...with the children and all this luggage and taxi came for us. It was Mercedes. Small Mercedes. Can you imagine? Four adults, two women pregnant, two babies, and a bunch of luggage. It was so crazy. I had to sit with Valery on the front seat which is so not allowed.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Marina Levitanus: I sat the whole way like this totally, you know, on the side. So... because we had to have all the kids and two adults and luggage and in the back. They drove us in the suburb of Vienna for, like, maybe almost an hour.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: By the time we got there, I was throwing up. I was sick. I was very sick, and they put us in a very little, teeny room which was better than staying in this horrible anti-Semitic place. That was a bad experience.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Very bad.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow, what a bad experience.

Marina Levitanus: And then when we were in Italy...from Vienna we took to Italy...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

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Marina Levitanus: ...and then I think I told you how...it was crazy how all these people were running to their train.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Because we had to go overnight and they pushing all the luggage through the window, they pushing children, they kicking each other. They tried to get the seat. It was so horrible. It was like when I watch the Russian movie, World War II, when the people tried to emigrate and all this, you know, prisoners. It was just reminding something like this, especially when you're pregnant and you're not comfortable and cannot be so quick as the others. We...somehow we squeezed ourself in this wagon.

Lynnie Mirvis: You're going to Italy.

Marina Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: This is to go to Italy?

Marina Levitanus: Yeah, to go to Italy. And then we came to Rome and they told us to find the place, rental place. And so nobody speaks Italian. All the men...we only stay in Rome for, like, two nights and then the men had to go. Of course, I couldn't go because I had...I was more pregnant by that time.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: And the baby, to go...so we went to Ladispoli which a lot of Russians were looking for place and you just go from house to house in the kind of village and you ask on the fingers do you have an apartment available? And they would say, "Adesso, no." Odessa is a city in Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: In Italian, it means "now."

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, it means "now." Oh.

Marina Levitanus: So all the Odessians thought, "Why they so against us?" [Laughing]

Lynnie Mirvis: [Laughing]

Marina Levitanus: Believe it?

Lynnie Mirvis: So they meant now.

Marina Levitanus: So I guess we were lucky. We got a little apartment with no hot water, with just two little room.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my.

Marina Levitanus: It was hard because it was January and February. I was there until...we were there until April.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: Because we came...well, Mariam was born on March 17th.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh. Oh.

Marina Levitanus: And I had to stay there another month...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Marina Levitanus: ...'til the baby is grown so...not even a month. We came here to Memphis when she was 22 days old.

Lynnie Mirvis: Whoa.

Marina Levitanus: But, I mean, the condition we live in was really tough because there was no heated water.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: No air conditioner, no heating system. So we have to heat up the room to wash the baby. It get so hot and all of a sudden, boom, it's cold again.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: And I had to put blanket on the floor because there's no wood in Italy. It's all marble.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: And so I remember when I gave birth to Mariam I wanted to put my jeans on and when I opened the suitcase it was all moldy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Marina Levitanus: It was green.

Lynnie Mirvis: All your clothes? Oh.

Marina Levitanus: Because of the condition we lived. It was really hard. So I really wanted to get to normal, you know?

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Normality.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was that like, to give birth in Italy?

Marina Levitanus: Oh, that's a story. So I wanted to come to United States...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yes.

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Marina Levitanus: ...much earlier. So I kind of lied a little bit to the doctor in Italy. I said that I was really three months old. Well, I was five.

Lynnie Mirvis: Pregnant, yeah.

Marina Levitanus: Why? Because it was...the condition was so hard as I just described to you and I was so concerned about baby getting sick, pneumonia and whatever. And so I don't usually lie but this one I was just kind of like forced for the... being, you know, not _____. **(29:39)** So anyway, so I don't think Italian doctor care one way or another, maybe they don't get really paid for it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Marina Levitanus: I...so I went to doctor in Rome and...oh, they said, "You need to have ultrasound."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: So I did ultrasound and so I thought, "Okay, with ultrasound, they gonna find out that I've been lying and I'm so embarrassed." So I come to the doctor. I keep this folder, you know, in my purse. He never asked for it. He never asked for it. He give me permission to fly.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Marina Levitanus: And I remember it was such a beautiful day and I was walking from the Rome all the way to train station because at that time I was from big city so for me it was nothing to it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: To talk, to be...get familiar, to speak little, to...I was not shelter like I am now. Now I'm just totally intimidated. So I remember walking that day on the high hill. It was beautiful day, so pregnant, I was so ready to give birth and then I said to my friends, "I got permission. We're supposed to leave on March, like, 21st." And, you know, they said, "And you walk?" I said, "Yeah, like an hour and a half. I walk to the train station." Because from Rome to Ladispoli was like a two hour drive.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm, wow.

Marina Levitanus: Ride on the _____. And they said, "Well, you know, you shouldn't really walk before you...if you don't want to have a baby so soon." I said, "Oh, I didn't know that." Not that I have, you know, a second child.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: So that night I woke up in the middle of the night. Oh, and when you get permission to leave country they take away your green...whatever card. I don't remember color, they give it to you, that allow you to go to the doctor for free.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

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Marina Levitanus: And we lived in Ladispoli so that night I woke up and I told my husband, "I think I'm having contractions." And my husband goes, "Are you crazy? We're leaving, like, in two days. There's no way." I said, "Okay." So I go back to sleep and a couple hours later, "Valery, I think I'm having contractions." He said, "Oh, my gosh, what are we going to do?" I said, "We're going to have a baby." So that morning, afternoon, we're walking to the clinic. Now it's a local clinic.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Marina Levitanus: I walk here and there's probably 100 people, patients sitting. Russians sitting at the...in a line with this Italian doctor and the little nurse who is Russian translator. So I thought, "By the time my turn comes, I will have a baby." So I kind of like escaped...I go back and I ask her...I tell her, "I'm having baby." She said, "No. You having baby? Like, you're supposed to have baby in couple months." And I said, "I lied." She said, "Oh, my God." So she grabbed me by hand and pulled me in the office and this doctor...well, she explained to him what was happening, he screamed and yelled at me in Italian of course. I didn't know what he was saying. I know he was angry. So immediately he looked at our first available train and the first available train leaves in, like, two hours. And the way how my contraction goes, he didn't think I could make it. So he said to me...he call ambulance, nobody answer. He call four times _____ nobody answer. So he said to Valery, "You go. Here's address. You walk to the ambulance." And he said to me, "And you walk very slowly home and wait for your husband to come with ambulance." So I walk very slow and by the time I get home, Pavel was so hungry. He pulling my legs, "Mommy, mommy, I'm hungry. Mommy." You know, and I was like, "Oh, my gosh." I'm having contractions so often now and I'm in pain and my husband is not here and nobody is here. All these Italian women gather, they speak to each other, you know? But I don't know what they're talking about and there's nobody around me. So, like, hour passing by, my husband is still not there. Finally, somebody take Pavel and...just to take care of him while I'm just miserable and scared to death. And all of a sudden I see Valery running. Oh, my gosh, covered with sweat, completely wet. He's just running, running. I said, "Where have you been?" He said...listen to this. [Laughing] He said, "I found the emergency guy in the bar playing chess." That's...that's...that's...you know.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah. Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: How crazy it is, right?

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: So he said to my husband, he said, "You go attend to your wife. I'm going to be there in a few minutes." So ambulance come, they throw me in the car, and they take me to Rome.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my God.

Marina Levitanus: And my husband could not stay with me because it's a big, huge hospital like a warehouse. The room where the...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

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Marina Levitanus: And so I give birth around...very late that night to Mariam with no anesthesia, with nothing, not even be able to communicate with the nurse because I was having hard time to breathe and she just totally ignored me. And finally Mariam came in this world and Valery had turned around and go to home to attend to Pavel. And the next thing I know they bring me to this huge big room with all the babies there. There's probably 30 women with 30 babies and I am there and the bed next to me has a blue ribbon. Like, "Oh, no, I know I had a girl. **Can it be a pink ribbon?**" And, well, then they brought Mariam. She was so scary looking, this poor baby. She was so blue and in all the pregnancy I only went to doctor twice.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow. Wow.

Marina Levitanus: That's all. So I was not...didn't have any supervision, nothing. It was like I'm on my own.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Marina Levitanus: The only time I did see doctor because, you know, to have this ultrasound which he didn't care. So anyway, so she was born, she was so blue, her nose was so crooked, and when I looked at her I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. What happened?" Pavel was so beautiful. He was so orange. Orange hair, blue...you know. So anyway, next day my husband came and I said to him, "Are you ready to look at this baby?" He said, "What's wrong?" I said, "She's kind of..."

Lynnie Mirvis: [Laughing]

Marina Levitanus: He said, "Oh, my gosh, what happened?" I said, "I don't know." [Laughing] But she's straightened out.

Lynnie Mirvis: She turned out to be beautiful.

Marina Levitanus: Yes, she straightened out, thank God. And so I was there for I think maybe three days and then Valery came from...to pick her up and he brought this beautiful really like a basket for baby. It was so beautiful. I never seen anything like that, and what amazed me, he took a taxi and he spoke in Italian...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, wow.

Marina Levitanus: ...to the chauffeur the whole hour we drove. And I'm like, "When did you learn Italian?" He said, "Oh, it's easy language." He had a good ear for it, plus he did all the shopping.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: Everything. See, I was mainly home to tend the children.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Marina Levitanus: And I remember when we came to the United States and to Memphis everybody was fascinated by that basket.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, the basket.

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Marina Levitanus: I don't know if you remember, it went from family to family. I gave it whenever Mariam grew up out of it. It was of the red checkerboard and it had a little hood and you could just carry that in your hand.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, do you still have it?

Marina Levitanus: Oh, like I said, I gave it to someone and then they gave it to someone.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay.

Marina Levitanus: I gave it to American but then a Russian family. It's probably just used...

Lynnie Mirvis: It's somewhere.

Marina Levitanus: All used up. No, it's a basket. It's...

Lynnie Mirvis: So how did you get to Memphis with that basket and the baby? How did you...you know...what made you decide to go to Memphis?

Marina Levitanus: I didn't decide it.

Lynnie Mirvis: How...what happened?

Marina Levitanus: The Federation,...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: ...uh, decided for us. When we were in Italy we had to go to consulate...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: ...and then they were trying to convince us to go to Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And we just want to go to United States.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: So we had to be very strong, like, mentally because they such a good, you know, conversational so...and they said, "Okay, we're going to let you go to... where would you go?"

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: I said, "New York." Well, for me it's normal. I'm from big city, that's all I could think of, New York. And they said, "No, New York is closed now for the big

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immigration. We're going to...what about Memphis?" At that time, Memphis, I knew about Elvis Presley.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Marina Levitanus: I knew...what did we know about Memphis? That's about...Elvis Presley. Not much knowledge about America.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mmm.

Marina Levitanus: And so basically they strongly suggested.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: They said, "It's a great Jewish community there. It's a smaller city, it's easier to raise your family. It's good for, you know,...just go."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And, okay, so we don't have much choice. So we were third family in Memphis from Russia. We arrived here on Passover on April 10th of 1979.

Lynnie Mirvis: Whoa.

Marina Levitanus: And **Mark Solovy**, do you remember?

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: The...**Dr. Solovy**? He came for us to pick us up for I think it was for a seder. (41:00)

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm. The day he came?

Marina Levitanus: Yes. Can you believe it?

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh my gosh.

Marina Levitanus: Oh, and I was like, "Are you serious?" I am totally overwhelmed with a brand new baby. It's just...it's a new country, everything is new. We did spend the one night in New York and the next day we flew to Memphis.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hmm.

Marina Levitanus: And so he came to pick us up. I didn't even know what he was doing there. Nobody explained to us. Well, maybe they explained and I didn't know English. I would say, "Thank you." That's far as my English went. And he pick us up and I never forget I went to bathroom and I think I was there for 15 minutes. I never seen a bathroom so beautiful. All the soap and lotion and potion and the towels and the separate...I was just like, "Seriously?" That was my room when I lived with my husband, was the size of my... [phone ringing]

EXODUS/pti:ec