

# EXODUS Project

## Interview of Marina Levitanus - 3

March ?, 2016

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#### EXODUS

Marina Levitanus March 2016

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Go on, Marina. You were talking about the Seder.

**Marina Levitanus:** So eventually...and of course when you don't speak or understand English, so you don't really understand the meaning of anything. And my husband, even though he spoke English fluently, he couldn't possibly translate and interrupt the whole, you know, dinner situation. So that was my experience with the Seder and I believe I told you about our trip to synagogue during...\_\_\_\_\_? What was the holiday in the summer?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** When you first came here, how did you become part of the Jewish community? You're saying you were invited to the synagogue. Is that what you want to talk about?

**Marina Levitanus:** Oh, yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** I believe I might talk about it, I don't remember.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Not on here. No.

**Marina Levitanus:** Okay. So we're invited for Jewish holiday and Rabbi **Levine** invited us to his house.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And his parents came from South Africa, his father and his mother, and so we...we were in the synagogue and I remember I was having Mariam on my lap and we had to...I had to get up and everything because women were getting up and praying and I look at everybody and everybody up so I figure I have to get up. I didn't know what I was doing this for. So I pick her up, you know...you know, I look, they turned around so I turned around and I said, "I wonder what it's for." And then we sit down and I get so comfortable with, you know, put her on my lap. And then again we have to get up. And then I was just like, "What is going on? Somebody tell me why." So finally I just gave up.

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So in the end we were going home for the dinner to Rabbi **Levine's** house and I had mistake. I was talking to my Russian friend and Rabbi **Levine's** father was close to us. I didn't realize he spoke Russian. Mm-hmm. And I said to my friend, I said, "I don't understand why they doing this to us. We don't really understand religion. We...we're not related to that. Why it's such a, like, wrong approach. They should introduce us prior to that instead of just throw us there and we, instead of start to understanding and have some more meaning, we just totally reject it because we don't understand what it's all for." So I expressed myself. I said maybe something else, I don't remember, and all of a sudden he speaks in Russian and he said, "This is...this is Rabbi **Levine**, my son's house," in Russian. And I feel so bad. I said to him, "You speak Russian?" He said, "Yes. You know, I came from, you know, Russia and live in South Africa." I was so embarrassed. For the rest of the evening I totally couldn't speak which I couldn't anyway. But I just feel like they were so welcoming.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I remember his wife, Rabbi **Levine's** mom, she was so sweet and she probably understood what I was feeling, and she was telling me...I remember I wanted to give her Mariam to hold.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** No. I was...asked her to hold my purse because I needed to prop up Mariam and she wouldn't take my purse.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, right, because they're not allowed to.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I said...you know, because I didn't speak English so she wouldn't say no and then she wanted to take Mariam.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I'm like, "Why? What's...what's..." And she show me on the sky, like, apparently, "I have two stars." She said. "Star."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, right. Oh...oh, the stars. Because the Sabbath wasn't over.

**Marina Levitanus:** Mm-hmm.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Or the Jewish holiday and she couldn't handle money or touch a purse.

**Marina Levitanus:** And there was no...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** She wasn't allowed to touch the purse.

**Marina Levitanus:** Right, right. There was no...what it is called? During Shabbat?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, an eruv you mean?

**Marina Levitanus:** Eruv. There's no eruv at that time.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

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**Marina Levitanus:** So...and I found this very strange but of course I had no explanation. I didn't know why. And then she would...took me in the kitchen and showed me every item and she told me, like, this is kosher, this is milk. And, like, I'm like, "Why is she telling me all this stuff?" Well, anyway, it was...it was not a good experience for us. And later I did talk to some officials, you know, people from the Federation, the Jewish Community Center, and I said...I guess they didn't expect...they didn't know what we like.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** That we come from totally different society where we've never been introduced to God, to religion, unless you're from small town. There's some Russians that are more, you know, knowledgeable. Me, coming from Saint Petersburg, you know, this really wasn't much of the education, that apartment. So...but people nevertheless were wonderful.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** There was a volunteer everywhere, people would take us to the doctor. They were so sweet. They were trying to give us clothes which was another thing because in Russia people kind of proud and we not used to people giving you things.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Because nobody really have much to give.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** So I remember my volunteer, Peggy Goodman, she was so sweet. They took us to the zoo, her and **Lenny**, and they were just so wonderful and one time she said, "I'm going to take you to shopping." Well, I didn't have any money. So I think I brought me like a t-shirt for \$1.00.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** Because we didn't have much clothes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** And we kept wearing same clothes over and over and they told us, "No, in America we don't wear same clothes." You know, I didn't have much. So she took me to shopping and I just couldn't really buy anything so I bought me that t-shirt and the next day, Sunday, I remember, morning, knock on the door, and here comes Peggy and she has, like, whole bunch of clothes for me. And she said, "This is for you." Like, she said, "Marina, I cannot wear that. You know, maybe some of that will work for you." And I was so embarrassed and I wouldn't take it. I said, "No, no, I don't need anything." And she said, "Please take it." And I didn't take it so she left it by the door.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

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**Marina Levitanus:** And...well, later on I said, "Well, I'll take it." [Laughing]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** Actually that helped me a lot.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Really?

**Marina Levitanus:** Some of her clothes I wore for, like, years.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, wow.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. So let's see. So we lived in French Village...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** ...and a lot of Russian people were there and we tried to, you know, communicate and befriend each other.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I missed home tremendously, missed my family. We were so close and all of a sudden I just feel like, "I have nobody."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh. Very hard.

**Marina Levitanus:** Nobody to help, I couldn't go anywhere. Valery was lucky. He started working at the Jewish Community Center right away because he spoke English. He's one of the few people who spoke English.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh-huh.

**Marina Levitanus:** And we took a class. Most of the Russians, we would have...they would take us to the bus, come from village, and take a load of all these people and drive us to Jewish Community Center. Well, I remember it was one of the hottest summer and the...it was a school bus. It didn't have air conditioner. The window, you know, there on the top. And I remember we were sweating profusely. We were so miserable because me coming from north of the country.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** And there was...like, "I'm going to die." And then another thing which shocked us is at the...where we'd take a lesson it was all in the base of Jewish Community Center, all those rooms, and there was never windows.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** And the air conditioner and then we would be just so cold. [Laughing] And with no windows and we were, like, so shocked.

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**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** “Where is the windows? Why...” And it went so cold. So it would go from this cold, icy cold, to heat because we have to wait outside and people having headaches and just really...but I kept my daughter, Mariam, on my lap. Pavel, they had the little group for boys, for children Pavel’s age, like, 2, 3.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Uh-huh.

**Marina Levitanus:** Our...like, grandmothers, you know, take care of them. And we would take a lesson in English. Nancy was our first teacher and I remember I said, “Mariam is probably going to learn English first because she’s with me on my lap every single day.” [Laughing]

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** She learned. [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** Sure enough, you know, they...

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Oh, Nancy Hyman, right?

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes. Yes.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Nancy Hyman.

**Marina Levitanus:** Oh, she was so lovely and so passionate and so patient with us because we were just a bunch of crazy people.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** Totally.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** What was it like to learn English? How was that?

**Marina Levitanus:** Oh, so hard. I tried so hard. I tried to memorize at least, like, five, ten words a day and...oh, one time it was the craziest thing. So Mariam...we lived in French Village as I told you. We...I’m trying to think. Oh, Mariam was really sick. She got very sick, so on prescription it was says, “Rush.” And I thought it was Russian.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Oh.

**Marina Levitanus:** I didn’t know “rush” meaning “hurry up.”

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** Like, why do they just, like, determine who to give medicine because we’re Russian? That’s my interpretation. [Laughing]

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Aww.

**Marina Levitanus:** So apparently there was a little...it was a...I’m trying to think. The little thing, the medicine that’s supposed to go to the...anally.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I didn't know that because...suppository? Is that what it's called?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I remember I was giving it to Mariam by mouth because I didn't know what it meant and she would spit it every time.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Aww.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I would put in banana, she would eat banana, spit it. I put it in my bread, I put...and Peggy came and I said, "Peggy, I don't know what to do. What kind of medicine?" I said, "My daughter would not take it and she really needs it because look at the temperature she's running."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right. Sure.

**Marina Levitanus:** She said, "Let me see prescription." She said, "Marina, what are you doing with it?" I said, "I'm giving her by the mouth." She said, "No, it's supposed to go to..." [Laughing] Oh, my gosh, I almost cried. I feel so bad for Mariam.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, no.

**Marina Levitanus:** Torture my child.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that was hard. So getting to used life here was a challenge.

**Marina Levitanus:** Challenge. Yeah, the English.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Reading, the language.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was really challenging. Trying to speak and understand really overwhelming truly. And then I went to beauty school and the beauty school, we were sitting...it was probably four of us Russians and we didn't understand anything. We just sat day and day and the first word I learned was "hair."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I had to do the homework and translate and every night I would have to translate every single word and to relate to that and take care of two little babies, it was really hard.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** I really...we struggled, you know. Valery made very little money.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was really a struggle. I remember as I was...was at beauty school, you know, people give you a little bit of tips so I saved that and I got \$20. And

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then we were invited to somebody's wedding and I remember that I wanted to go to Kmart, it was Kmart on Summer across from village, and I thought, "I'm going to buy me a dress," and I couldn't find this \$20 because I remember I put it in some skirt, hid it from myself.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I never...I did find that money later, like, the next year which, you know, it was...that's how hard it was.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Really. It was a hard time.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. You know, I remember, we were joking because we would buy chicken and we will make everything, like a soup, we make a \_\_\_\_\_, we make a **compote**, you know? We just really struggle but we were still so appreciative for what people done for us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** That was pretty impressive.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** How did you get to the beauty school? What made you decide to do that?

**Marina Levitanus:** Well, in Russia, you know, I went to college so it was very technical and I realize me going back to school, college, here, it would be not really **visible** because no English, Valery was making very little money, I really have to get on my feet very quickly to provide to our children. Just even getting car. The first, like...I went we went through 20 cars because Valery would buy a car for \$1,000 and it would break the next day.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I mean, we went through many, many cars. So...but I always wanted to be a hairdresser. I...by...you know, I feel like I'm artist inside because I always liked to draw, I loved art. And that was all this...you know, really called to me. I used to like watching people doing hair though the window.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Just kind of interesting. To me, it was very interesting. And so they offer me...they...the first...**Cindy** and **Marsha** was taking me to the different factory, whatever, has to do with my profession.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** It was chemical...your profession was chemistry.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was \_\_\_\_\_ control measurements.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** It's very complex.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Technical. Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** Very technical so...and then they said, "Maybe would you like to go to beauty school?"

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I said, "Beauty school? That sounds good. I would love to be hairdresser." And that's how it started, and at that point there was more Russian people who was either hairdresser in Russia or had some kind of knowledge or wanted to be. I had no clue.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** So that's how we started.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm. Oh, that's interesting.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes, it was pretty challenging but I'm proud to say I took my test and I passed from the first time and become a hairdresser.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** How long have you been...

**Marina Levitanus:** Doing hair?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh-huh.

**Marina Levitanus:** Well, 36...probably 35 years.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, so...

**Marina Levitanus:** Or 34.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. And so I went through, after work, after finish school, I work in a salon and I realized I cannot do old people's hair. I want to something new, color, interesting. And the salon where I ended were lovely women, they were all Christian and all wanted me to become Christian.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, they tried to convert you?

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes, I remember one time I was...this lady...because I didn't have a car. I maybe talk about this before. I had to walk on...because I work on Barclay, Hair Fashion. It's by Market Basket.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Summer Avenue. So...and we live in French Village. Sometimes I had to walk from there to French Village because we didn't have a car.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** A few miles. Right.



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**Marina Levitanus:** Well, Valery...I think it's more than two miles.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Several. Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And so once in a while the girls would drive me there and one time this lady just totally burst into tears and I said, "Why are you crying?" And she said, "Because I'm afraid you're going to go to hell and I love you so much."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, my gosh.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I didn't understand what it meant.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I remember Peggy was in my house.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** She came a lot. And I said, "Peggy, what's going on?" I mean, with Valery translating. Well, I spoke a little bit of English because that was after school so I was working. I knew a little bit of English.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And so she explained me to the Baptist, the Southern Baptist, they, you know, they...it's a different religion so...because they want you to be like you are. Otherwise you're going to go to hell. And I said, "Really?" [Laughing] Well, she's really sincere. She really cried.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Aww.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was really...you know, I start crying, too, because I didn't know why she was crying so... There was one cute episode. I have to tell you because everybody loves it. So at that salon we were having party. I always bring my own food because I couldn't afford to buy anything and they always was fascinated by what I was eating so we were having party at the salon and they said, "Marina, would you bring a dish?" And I said, "Okay, what do you want me to bring?" And they said, "Anything you want." Well, keep in mind my English is very limited. So I come home and I really don't know what to do so I put a paper bag and I start to pile plates and forks and spoons and cups and everything and...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, a dish. [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** [Laughing] I didn't know dish means food. I thought it was dishes. And I said, "Why just one dish? There a lot of people in the salon." So I just brought everything. The next morning I walked in and they so excited. They like, "Oh, what did you bring, what did you bring?" They follow me in the kitchen and I'm like, "Why are they so excited?" [Laughing] And they start to take all the stuff. They said, "What's this?" I said, "Dishes." And, "Where is the food?" I said, "What food?" [Laughing] That's my first I learned what means dish.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Now you know dish. I love that.

**Marina Levitanus:** That was so... [Laughing] And then I remember I was learning driver license to drive the car and I was starting my driver license for driver license test and driving, driving and this woman said, "My husband drives me crazy." And I'm like, "Driving crazy." You know, I just couldn't put it together. It's like, "Driving..." So that was a lot of things where it was really confusing with the language.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm. That's funny.

**Marina Levitanus:** But so I...soon I left that place. It was not for me. So I start to work in another salon where I was learning more. It was more interesting and eventually I move from that salon to more modern salon and then probably 20 years after I opened my own salon.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** And then I had it almost...like 7 ½ years so things been good. I could not tell you how happy I am what I do. I love my job. I am so thrilled. I love people I meet. I love to be in the profession where I experience...you know, have a chance to do things that is so wonderful and experience my...you know, challenged and be with people. It's just been a blessing.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that's wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** Blessing. I go to work and I'm like, "Yeah."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yes. What was it like being a parent here in Memphis, with the children? How did that work? Where did they go?

**Marina Levitanus:** My children. Well, I would say my biggest accomplishment in life is my children.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I'll start crying. Oh, I wish I could have more but life was so hard and I had no help so it was really...there was nobody to depend on, you know? Being parent. I don't know. I just feel I did an okay job. I mean, they seem to be great people. But I was...people would tell me, "You need to read book about parenting." You know, the hardest thing was, you know, like a parent you usually read your children books.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I didn't have any Russian books. I couldn't bring it with me. I maybe have one book. And I couldn't read them English book because I was just learning English so I was in the stage where I have to learn so I really did not give my kids that love to books.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

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**Marina Levitanus:** Because I was not available to do it, you know? And that's probably my regret. I mean, not that they're illiterate. I mean, they really well read people. Probably could be a little better, but nevertheless... People would say to me, "Well, you need to read about parenting." But somehow I always had this strong feelings kind of this is right, this is wrong, and if I wasn't sure I still did what I feel is right.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** You know?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** And I said, "Okay." I was strict with my kids.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I never...I never allowed them to take advantage of situation and raised them with good morals and I was very strict but then I was very playful. I mean, they always come to me, they love to play with me more than with Daddy. Daddy was more like... You know? And we had such a great relationship. And I always feel like my kids not embarrassed of me.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Which a lot of children are. They say, "Don't talk. You know, you're embarrassing. Don't show up." You know? Kids been really good to me. I always relate to my children. They were respectful. And I always tell them, "Children, we don't have anybody here. It's us. It's four of us. That's all we have. You have each other, you have to love each other. You have to respect and this is most important to me. And if you fight and if you disrespectful, this is really bad." And so they quickly learned to get anything from me they have to get really loving.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** So I be in the kitchen doing something and they would come to the kitchen hugging. Like, really hugging each other. "Mommy, mommy, we're good. We love each other. Can we have ice cream?"

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** [Laughing]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That's wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** And my heart will melt. I said, "Anything."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Anything.

**Marina Levitanus:** Anything. And the kids really miss family, I have to say. When they went to Hebrew Academy so many kids were related. Cousins, whatever. And we would drive to, like, Jewish Community Center and they'd pretend like they have a family and Pavel would say, "Mariam, look, that's where our cousin **Ira** lives." Or, "Mariam, oh,

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this is my sister live there.” There’s all this work pretending of we have more family. And that was really sad, you know?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was hard. Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** Right. And...but I have to say even though they live so far away from each other they communicate and they’re very loving and they’re very...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Tell us where they are now.

**Marina Levitanus:** Well, Pavel, my son, lives in California, in South California and he is...he is 37. And my daughter just moved to Israel. She lives in Modi’in. She is 36. She is going to be 36 in March.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** \_\_\_\_\_. Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. And her husband Baruch become a doctor, a medical doctor and as soon as that happens they...that’s what the plan was all around, to go to live to Israel and my daughter has four children. They just had another baby girl in...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Marina Levitanus:** ...October. We went to Israel to greet and meet our little granddaughter and so it’s been incredible.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That’s wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** I miss her so much.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yes. And you have a granddaughter in California?

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes, I do. Her name is **Ava**. She’s precious. Sweet little girl. She’s only one child.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Yeah. So they went through the Hebrew Academy here.

**Marina Levitanus:** Mm-hmm.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So what was that like, to...anything else you want to say about that?

**Marina Levitanus:** Well, it was a good school. I mean, it was hard for us because all of a sudden all this religious aspect and we really didn’t know how to even feed children.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Because, you know, we would give them sandwiches with the cheese and bologna. I’m sorry.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You didn’t know.

**Marina Levitanus:** I had no clue.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** You had no idea.

**Marina Levitanus:** I had no idea.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** About kosher.

**Marina Levitanus:** And there would be a letter coming from the Hebrew Academy and I didn't understand what it meant.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And sometimes I wouldn't show Valery because, you know, I thought that was another just piece of paper, doesn't mean anything.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laughing] What was in the letter?

**Marina Levitanus:** They were little when they started. [Laughing]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Were they telling you about what foods you could...

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah, finally we figure out what can be done, what... [Laughing] I still think about that. It was like such a...can you imagine? It's just incredible. Anyway. Academy was a good...kids got good education. We live so close which was blessing. Our house was right behind the Hebrew Academy.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** I heard Mariam screaming on the, you know, lunch break or break. Her voice.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that's wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes, so...and the kids would just run to the house.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And yeah, it was really...it was great.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** I...I wasn't, like, involved in the Hebrew Academy. It was hard for me to relate to American people in the first years of my life. We stay with Russians naturally, you know? Because of different custom. American people, you know, they... they really sweet and smiley and they say a lot of things but sometimes doesn't mean it. The Russian more forward, more direct. And it was really hard for us to kind of understand the different culture, you know? But now...I used to be...like, hurt people's feeling not knowing because I would say something direct and, you know, you just don't say that, especially when you live in the South.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Now I'm all polished.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laughing] Polished. Lots of differences. Yeah. Well, is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you might want to add to this?

**Marina Levitanus:** Oh, I can talk about how Mariam met Baruch.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay.

**Marina Levitanus:** I think that was very romantic.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay. Your daughter.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. So my daughter went to Washington University and got good, good scholarship. She was always very good student and my son was not such a great student but great athlete. He was a tennis player so he got full scholarship in college for tennis. So Mariam finished semester early and she came back to Memphis and she started to work part-time at Hebrew Academy as I think a sub teacher for maybe economics, something her major was...psychology. Psychology, right. At that time, Baruch was on this \_\_\_\_\_ program.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Right? And he work in the Hebrew Academy with young kids, with young boys to introduce them life of Israel from what I understand.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm. Okay.

**Marina Levitanus:** And where they cross their paths...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, the Torah Mitzion program I think or was it...

**Marina Levitanus:** Okay.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** Okay, maybe so. Right. And they cross...their paths crossed.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And he saw her and really like her and was introduced and so they kind of start to seeing each other but then soon he has to go back to Israel and so he said to her that, "I really love you but I cannot...I have to go." And Mariam was kind of heartbroken. She wanted to be with him. And I said, "Oh, my gosh, what is happening?" Life repeats itself, you know? I left Russia, I left my mommy. The only difference, I didn't see my mom anymore. And so she actually had a job already, for interview for job but then, I don't know, she said, "Mama, I need to go to Israel. I want to be with Baruch."

So she went to Nishma school to learn more about religion because I didn't even realize what Baruch's background, his parents, you know, father is a rabbi, very Orthodox. And so she did. She left and she was in school for a year or two. We came to visit her and the first time we went to meet Baruch's parents, Baruch was nervous wreck. I never

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forget. We were invited to this restaurant and his parents came and Baruch was just pacing, pacing and was so nervous. I said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "I really want my parents to like you." I said, "Why wouldn't like they like you? Because we are not, you know, as religious?" He said, "I don't know but I love Mariam and I love you." He was so sweet and, I mean, I remember the first time I met him I just like, "Oh, my gosh, he's amazing." He has these beautiful eyes, kind man, and it was just something, such a good...you can see he's a good match. And so we met and it was so cute because his grandparents spoke Russian. They from Poland.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Marina Levitanus:** But during World War II they were taken to Russia.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** Well, his grandmother told me incredible story but that was...you know. And so they ended up in Russia in Siberia, Baruch's grandma and grandfather. I guess they met there but they were learning Russian because they went to Russian school there.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Mm-hmm.

**Marina Levitanus:** And so they still could speak Russian. Can you imagine? That's just...that that's how Russian teach you. They beat right into your brain.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. And so that was so adorable so grandpa, he was talking to me. I spoke with grandma in Russian. So anyway, everything was just fine and then my daughter...well, they decided to get married and so the wedding was in Jerusalem. It was beautiful wedding. My... [video cuts out]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So you said...so you...the wedding was in Jerusalem.

**Marina Levitanus:** **Charnie**, Baruch's mom, send me a videotape of the Orthodox wedding so I would be familiar...what to expect. I never been to Orthodox wedding but it didn't work out for some reason. We couldn't see it. So the day of the wedding, you know, Marilyn and Jack Belz came to the wedding.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that's nice.

**Marina Levitanus:** As well as **Andy and Jen Groveman**.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, how wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** I know. And **Aria** was one of the bridesmaids. We have maybe like 13 people from Memphis.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that's so great.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was huge wedding. There was probably like hundreds and hundreds of people. I didn't know anyone. And they all come to me and kept saying,

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"Mazel tov, mazel tov." [Laughing] So I didn't have a clue about the wedding. So the moment of the wedding, that room and the man signing ketubah, right?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** And all of this, you know...she sits up. I don't know. It seems like all the time I really didn't know what to expect and I was like, "What's happening now, what's happening?" Like Baruch said, "Mama," he said, "I saw picture of you. In most of this picture you're like this." [shocked expression]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laughing]

**Marina Levitanus:** "Or you're crying." [Laughing]

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh my gosh.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was so beautiful, I have to say. It was on the top of the hotel where **Charnie** got the special fabric, the cover. The chuppah?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah, the chuppah.

**Marina Levitanus:** It was beautiful and it was on sundown and you can see Jerusalem. It was...it was so beautiful.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Just beautiful.

**Marina Levitanus:** I know. I have pictures.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** We'll have to look at pictures.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah. And so it was...oh my gosh. And then Mariam went to mikveh. That was such a new thing for me and she said, "Mama, would you take me there?" And I said, "Sure." And Baruch went, too even though men don't have to, but he went.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Marina Levitanus:** And every time she immersed to the water and the lady said, \_\_\_\_\_, **(36:44)** I cried every single time. It was so amazing. It was such a incredible experience. When she came from it she like...I don't know. She was glowing. It was so powerful. It was so beautiful. The whole experience of the wedding and...it was pretty amazing. And so Mariam lived there and she went to a Hebrew university. She got master's degree in journalism and communication and she got pregnant there with **Gabie**. **Gabie** was born in Israel, same hospital where my granddaughter was born, **Lielle**. Yes. The rest of two children were born in United States in New York because that's...Baruch went to medical school...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, right.

**Marina Levitanus:** ...so they went back to United States for him to go to medical school so during that time they been in United States 11 years, two children were born and I was there every single time.



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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, that's wonderful.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yeah.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Awesome that you were able to be there.

**Marina Levitanus:** I know.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So your family has journeyed from one end of the world to the other and back again.

**Marina Levitanus:** Yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Marina Levitanus:** Pretty amazing.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** It's an amazing story. Is there anything else you want to add before I turn this off?

**Marina Levitanus:** I think that's good. I, you know, like I said everything just great. Every day I count my blessings. I feel like I am so fortunate. My son went to Russia when he was finishing high school. We sent him there to visit his family and when he came back he said to me this. "Mama, I have a great appreciation for America. Thank you so much to bring us...for bringing us to this country. I loved Russia but nothing would compare to where I live now." And it was so powerful.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Marina Levitanus:** I mean, for him to just really acknowledge and say that. Yes. And so I say that's the best thing I could done for my family, for us. We live in a wonderful city, we love Memphis, we love people around us. We have a great deal of friends and just kindness surrounding us and I couldn't ask for more. I'm a very happy person.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Thank you so much for...thank you.

**Marina Levitanus:** You're welcome.

EXODUS/pti:ec