

EXODUS Project

Interview of Valery Levitanus

November 3, 2016

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EXODUS

Valery Levitanus.ext

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Lynnie Mirvis: Hello. This is Lynnie Mirvis, and I'm here at the home of Valery Levitanus. It is November 3, 2016 and this is for the Exodus project. I'm interviewing you tonight. Thank you so much. What's your full name?

Valery Levitanus: Full name is Valery Levitanus.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay, and your date of birth.

Valery Levitanus: Date of birth is January 22, 1946.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay and what is your place of birth?

Valery Levitanus: Leningrad, Soviet Union Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay, whoa. So what was the Republic? Was it?

Valery Levitanus: It was Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: That was part of Russia's Republic.

Valery Levitanus: No it's part of Soviet Union.

Lynnie Mirvis: The Soviet Union.

Valery Levitanus: Russia is one of the Republics...

Lynnie Mirvis: The Russia...

Valery Levitanus: Of the Soviet Union.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right so it was Leningrad.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, so what I'd like to talk about with you is could you tell me what was it like for you in the Soviet Union when you were growing up? Can you tell me about your family and what...?

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Valery Levitanus: My family - my parents married in Leningrad, and I think they married in 1927. They came from Ukraine. My father was a student in Saint Petersburg at the technical institute. It's like, uh, to become an engineer. He became an engineer when he graduated and he worked at the factory making tractors...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Valery Levitanus: In Leningrad, but during the War they were making tanks.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh, ah.

Valery Levitanus: Same factory and he worked there for a long time. Actually he worked there until he passed away in 1967. My mother she was, um, really she didn't have any special skills or professions because she took care of my sister. I had a older sister who was born in 1929, and my mother was a homemaker. She was taking care of my sister and, um, but then she went to work and she learned the profession of typewriter. She was a typist.

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay.

Valery Levitanus: She was typing. Yeah. And in '41 my brother was born while my father went to the front. He fought against Germans....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: In Leningrad's front. But my mother evacuated to Sverdlovsk Ribernia. It's a...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: It's like a region of Svetlovsky, Sverdlovsk County and my brother, older brother. He's 4 years older than me. He was born while my mama was in evacuation in Svetlovsky.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Valery Levitanus: So, and I was born already as soon as the war was over.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: The war over in '45 in May. So I was born in January of '46. So I was born after war.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, ah...

Valery Levitanus: After World War II.

Lynnie Mirvis: How did your parents reunite after that?

Valery Levitanus: My father was wounded...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And he wounded in his leg, and he had to go to the hospital, and he spent 7 months in the hospital...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Recovering, and then he was demobilized and he was sent it was 1944 so he came back.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm. **Oh I see that...**

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: What do you remember about the house that you lived in?

Valery Levitanus: Oh, we....

Lynnie Mirvis: The smells, the sounds...

Valery Levitanus: You know we lived in communal apartment, which is, there was neighbors...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: There was several neighbors and we had common kitchen...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And we shared the gas stove.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: There was two gas stoves in the kitchen and everybody, every family has their own burner...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: To cook, communal but you have to stand in line to get to the bathroom...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, oh.

Valery Levitanus: In the morning, especially if you go to school or you got to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: People that would go to work and there's no, somebody in a hurry, and the bathroom is taken. So that was tough cause there was like 20 people in a apartment...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Valery Levitanus: And but somehow we survived. In Russia it's different life. The life was people work and then after work they have to stand in lines to buy products to go to the you know, in Russia it's not, there was no supermarkets like in America.

Lynnie Mirvis: _____

Valery Levitanus: In one supermarket you can buy meat and you can buy vegetables and fruit and everything. I mean in one supermarket. Over there bread store was separate, meat store was separate you know for each...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and dry goods separate store and so on and so forth. So you have to stand in line in one, and you have to stand in line. So you finish work 5 p.m. then you go to the store and you come home at 7 or 7:30, then you have to cook, eat, and next morning you have to go back to work. So life was just...

Lynnie Mirvis: It was hard.

Valery Levitanus: Tough, tough.

Lynnie Mirvis: Tough.

Valery Levitanus: And for the parents if they have especially more than two children it was difficult.

Lynnie Mirvis: So how many were in your family ___?

Valery Levitanus: In my family I had a sister, but she was a lot older than me. She was 16, over 16 years old, but then my brother...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Valery Levitanus: He was 4 years older than me.

Lynnie Mirvis: I see.

Valery Levitanus: So he was 12 years younger than my sister. So we had older sister and then us two brothers. There was one more who was born before my older brother, but he died at the age of 2.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow. I'm sorry.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, so what....

Valery Levitanus: But actually my mother and father you know raised 3 children.

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Lynnie Mirvis: ____

Valery Levitanus: My sister, my brother, and me.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm. So what was it like for you going to school and...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah and I, first I went to kindergarten...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then I wasn't even 6, I went to school, you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: School started when you 7, but I went earlier.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So is my brother and I finished elementary school and I went to middle school and went to high school.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I graduated high school. I actually finished 11 grades. There was 11 grades in Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then I went to the university and I studied to become a track and field coach.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: I went to, like sport academy. It was sport you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Institute.

Lynnie Mirvis: So what about being Jewish in a Soviet Union? What was that like for you personally?

Valery Levitanus: You know just, not always, but once in a while you have heard people...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Who might could tell you "Jew," or "dirty Jew."

Lynnie Mirvis: You had that....

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Valery Levitanus: Yeah and when I was a little kid I was kind of embarrassed...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And but when I grew up I could stand for myself so I was able to you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Hum...

Valery Levitanus: Some of those guys who did it, so...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Um...

Lynnie Mirvis: Is there anything that stands out for you in particular that you...

Valery Levitanus: Uh...

Lynnie Mirvis: Want to share?

Valery Levitanus: Not really. I never was confronted by anybody...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: To the extent, but you know to beat the person up or...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Valery Levitanus: You know react negatively and, but you know, I didn't feel much of you know hate...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Or discrimination as a Jewish person...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: But lost of people, especially, see we lived in Leningrad.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: In Leningrad it was a cultural city, and that's not as much...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: It's in...

Lynnie Mirvis: ____

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Valery Levitanus: It's in Ukraine in the small towns and provinces where a lot more hate, there was Jewish people and, uh...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: They have you know defend themselves more in the cultural cities like Moscow or Leningrad. Maybe people don't express their negative feelings...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: If there was Jews as much in the cities like you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Saint Petersburg and Leningrad you know.

Lynnie Mirvis: What about Jewish, were, did you celebrate any holidays when you want to express yourself?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah as a matter fact, we used to celebrate Rosh Hashanah...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Uh, Yom Kippur, and we also celebrated Simchat Torah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, did you.

Marina: Wow, _____.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, but mostly people in Russia...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: See because the socialism of communism took away from....

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And we were, we grew up not religious.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right you didn't...

Valery Levitanus: No, cause at school...

Lynnie Mirvis: They wouldn't allow...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. It's not that you were not allowed. If you allowed you can do it, but you grew up with the consciousness that there's no God, there's no religion, there's no...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: You know you don't recognize...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: That you are really religious or Jewish and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: It's not pursuing that....

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Traditions.

Lynnie Mirvis: Where did you get those Jewish traditions, from your grandparents? Did you have grandparents that were...?

Valery Levitanus: No my grandparents died long before...

Lynnie Mirvis: Long before that...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: So your parents...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah my grandmother died in, uh....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Blockade at Leningrad in 1942. There was explosion and she got killed; my grandmother.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, I see.

Valery Levitanus: It was 1942, yeah before I was born.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: But my grandfather died long before. He died...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: In the 20's.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: In 1920's.

Lynnie Mirvis: So when you celebrated the holidays...

Valery Levitanus: But I, my mom, my mother told me about when she was growing up...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And they lived in a little stell in Ukraine...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh--huh.

Valery Levitanus: She lived near Kiev in the city, a town called Staraduk, and she says that time they, there was a lot of Pogroms when she was a little girl.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Because my mama was born in 1904...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And there was a period before the revolution. It was, so she was a little girl, and she was in her you know, maybe...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: 10, 12 years old and she told me that when some Russian soldiers would come and they would beat up and beat the adults and throw them into jail.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then, she told me a lot about...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, sure. _____

Valery Levitanus: Pogroms and hate to those Jews before the Revolution in 19-...

Lynnie Mirvis: Did she experience a Pogrom, was that...?

Valery Levitanus: Yes, she has.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did she say what?

Valery Levitanus: As a matter of fact my mother's parents were pretty you know, wealthy. They had...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: He was a, what do you call it? He was selling and buying, but he was a, in Russia we call it [*Russian word*].

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: He was a, Marina! I don't know how do you say [*Russian word*]? He was a guy who would buy stuff, sell it...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Right. Like in wholesale, like wholesale.

Valery Levitanus: It's not wholesale, but...

Marina: *[speaking native language]*

Valery Levitanus: *[speaking native language]*

Marina: *[speaking native language]*

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, so he was...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: So he had money and when Revolution came they took everything away.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, ah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Her family, they took it away.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah they took everything away.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Then my mama moved to Leningrad and met my father in Leningrad.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: My father was from Kremenchuk.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: That's also a city in Ukraine.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: It's a, yeah. And he also had same...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Pogroms in the family and when he was growing up.

Lynnie Mirvis: I see.

Valery Levitanus: But then when the new power came, when Revolution happened everything settled a little bit and it was much easier to live and...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Physically.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Physically it was easier, yet you still had to....

Valery Levitanus: Morally and physically, both.

Lynnie Mirvis: Morally right.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: It was better to live, uh...

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, it was better in certain ways.

Valery Levitanus: Yes, and then as I told you my father went to the university to study....

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: And became an engineer.

Lynnie Mirvis: What, did anti-Semitism affect his getting into the university or....

Valery Levitanus: At that time it wasn't as bad.

Lynnie Mirvis: He didn't experience it.

Valery Levitanus: No.

Lynnie Mirvis: And what about for you? What was that like?

Valery Levitanus: For me it wasn't either. I only felt it in 1998...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: When me and Marina applied for immigration from then Soviet Union.

Lynnie Mirvis: You mean '78?

Valery Levitanus: 19 - 1978.

Lynnie Mirvis: 1978.

Valery Levitanus: We immigrated, we moved to...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Then of '78, but we applied in August in '78.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Applied you know, and as soon as we - I applied like in 2 weeks my boss, the lady was a director of education department; physical education department where I work at the University of Saint Petersburg...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: She called me and says, "You applied for Visa. You applied for Visa to you know go to Israel."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: "You cannot work at the university."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So I was fired.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: See you cannot apply for Visa to Israel and work at the university so...

Lynnie Mirvis: So they fired you.

Valery Levitanus: So they fired me. Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: That must have been hard. What was that like? How did you feel?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: How did you feel about it? Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Just what can I do?

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Valery Levitanus: I couldn't do anything then. And Marina was pregnant at that time...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, ah.

Valery Levitanus: With our son Pavel...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Who was born in Italy.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, he was born in Italy.

Valery Levitanus: No, no, no. He - actually our daughter was born in Italy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Our son was born right - no. I'm sorry.

Marina: In '77.

Valery Levitanus: 1977 yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: The year before.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah it was...

Lynnie Mirvis: He, so he was a baby.

Valery Levitanus: Before, it was before. She was pregnant with Miriam who's our daughter.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, well you, ah...

Valery Levitanus: She was Miria - when I got fired she was pregnant with Miriam.

Lynnie Mirvis: So that's right. She was pregnant with Miriam.

Valery Levitanus: And Miriam was born at - in Italy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, when you were coming to, uh...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, before we come...

Lynnie Mirvis: America.

Valery Levitanus: To America we spent 3 months in Italy...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And when we left Marina was pregnant...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And she gave birth in Italy be - right 3 weeks before we came to America.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow. That's a story.

Valery Levitanus: It was a second child; Miriam.

Lynnie Mirvis: Before - let's go back a little bit. Can you tell me about how you met Marina?

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Valery Levitanus: Oh, we had, we - I worked at the University of Saint Petersburg...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And there was a lady, she used to teach - she used to be Accompanist, a piano player...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: For a rhythmic gymnastics.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: There was a class as a rhythmic gymnast and she was Accompanist, and we met. She was Jewish lady and so she introduced me one time. Invited me to her house, and introduced me to Marina.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: That's the way we met and, uh...

Marina: That was my sister-in-law.

Valery Levitanus: Our sister-in-law.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh, I see.

Valery Levitanus: Cause her brother was married to _____

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right. So you met....

Valery Levitanus: Yeah we met at their apartment.

Lynnie Mirvis: And, ah, and the rest.....

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Is history.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and we met and, you know that's...

Lynnie Mirvis: What was your wedding like?

Valery Levitanus: We had wedding at _____ at sister-in-law's, at her brother's apartment.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, that's...

Valery Levitanus: We had wedding, we didn't have a big wedding. We had - how many people we had?

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Marina: It was a few.

Valery Levitanus: No maybe 30, 40 people.

Lynnie Mirvis: Small - in an apartment, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: What kind of wedding was it, was it, uh...?

Valery Levitanus: I don't know.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did you was there anything Jewish about the wedding or you don't know?

Valery Levitanus: Mm, uh-uh, no...

Lynnie Mirvis: No, not really.

Valery Levitanus: No, not really, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: But most of our friends were Jewish.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did you say "Mazel Tov"?

Valery Levitanus: Some not Jewish. No we didn't have Matzah, we didn't have...

Lynnie Mirvis: Matzah, no I meant did you say "Mazel Tov", or no?

Valery Levitanus: Oh, "Mazel Tov", yeah, no.

Lynnie Mirvis: No, you already know that?

Valery Levitanus: It was not Jewish wedding, no.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, no. Huppah, did you have a Huppah?

Valery Levitanus: No Huppah, no, no Huppah.

Lynnie Mirvis: You didn't know about that?

Valery Levitanus: I didn't know anything about it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah we didn't know about it. Ya'll didn't have it. There was no...

Valery Levitanus: As a matter of fact, we just found out about the Huppah and Jewish traditions when we came to United States.

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Lynnie Mirvis: When you came in the United States, ah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, but our daughter, when she got married in Israel in 19 - uh...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: Wait a second, 2002...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Miriam....

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: In Jerusalem we had - they had Huppah, and they had celebration at the...

Lynnie Mirvis: _____

Valery Levitanus: Hotel Shalom in Jerusalem with the view of Jerusalem; beautiful.

Lynnie Mirvis: That must be beautiful.

Valery Levitanus: Wedding, but that was already 2002.

Lynnie Mirvis: That was much later. But let's go back; I would like to hear you talk about your decision to come to America. What has made you decide...?

Valery Levitanus: In - life in Russia was not great. Let's say that.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And it was getting worse and worse, but we - we didn't have enough money to live on. We didn't have enough. And we - as a matter of fact when we applied for immigration we've heard some bad words. "You Jews, you get out of this country..."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And so on and so forth, so...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: That was a...

Lynnie Mirvis: Who were the words from, from people...?

Valery Levitanus: Well you know, if you ride the train and then the subway...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And you sit and then they say [*speaking native language*]. You says, "You Jews you sitting and we are standing."

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Lynnie Mirvis: No.

Valery Levitanus: "Get out of here..."

Lynnie Mirvis: Jealousy.

Valery Levitanus: "Go to Israel," you know that's the way they did.

Lynnie Mirvis: Awe, so awful.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. That's the way people could speak to you in transport in the subway or the on the bus, or you know, any transportation.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's a - experience that is. It must be - doesn't feel good.

Valery Levitanus: No.

Lynnie Mirvis: That did not feel good. Yeah, so...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: So you decided to go...

Valery Levitanus: It's - but you better keep quiet...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Cause you don't want to you know, confront these people.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right. When did you find out about Israel and what was going on in Israel? How did you find out about that?

Valery Levitanus: Uh, Israel?

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, I really followed....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: The news and I knew situation, I remember you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm--hm.

Valery Levitanus: About advance in Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I read about Israel history, how it was formed, and going on and, uh...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Golda Meir, and when the _____...

Lynnie Mirvis: _____

Valery Levitanus: And then, and I read a lot about traditions. I read a lot about history...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: How it started and how it developed, and so and so forth while in Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: Were you able to get the material afterwards...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: I've heard that it was hard to get the kind of materials...

Valery Levitanus: No, no, no, no.

Lynnie Mirvis: Sometimes, you were able...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, yeah; yeah. So I read about this in Russia.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I knew about Israel, and always if conversation would come with friends of mine...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Who were not Jewish...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And I would say you know something to protect Israel, I would be confronted.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh, right.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah they would say "Israel is aggressor. They try to take over Middle East..."

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: "They try to take over other countries" and so forth, and I was always protecting....

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Lynnie Mirvis: Trying to defend Israel.

Valery Levitanus: Israel and I was yeah, defend the...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Public state of Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: You always felt sympathetic to Israel.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: So you decided to come and it was challenging to...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: You lost your job and....

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. I got fired....

Lynnie Mirvis: And you...

Valery Levitanus: From job and I was with no job for 3 months or so. I don't remember how long. It was kind of...

Lynnie Mirvis: That was the...

Valery Levitanus: Difficult for a while, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Then finally we left.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was it like to actually leave? Can you remember the emotions, the feelings...?

Valery Levitanus: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, that was really tough. Marina's - my parent's already died prior to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: My father died in '67. My mama died in 1977.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So they died prior to our departure. But her parents were still alive; Marina's. So her mother was very heavy, and she was an invalid and she was, it was so difficult for her to move around. So she spent all day in the house.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: But her father was very active and...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So when we were leaving he went to the airport, and we already had Pavel at the time.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And Pavel was, when we were living he was 14 months old.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: He was a little baby and a little child, and he was holding Pavel in his hands and he said, [*speaking native language*]. "Why are you taking him away from me?" You know, he started to cry, and it was heartbreaking situation.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: I mean, it just, "Why do you take him away from us?"

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, very hard.

Valery Levitanus: It was - it was really...

Lynnie Mirvis: That's hard...

Valery Levitanus: Emotional and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: It was difficult, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah. It was a hard thing to do.

Valery Levitanus: But what...

Lynnie Mirvis: What could you do?

Valery Levitanus: What could we do? And her mama died - after we came, we came in April of '79...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: To Memphis and she died in March of 1980.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, sorry about that.

Valery Levitanus: In less than a year she passed away, yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: She was 69. She wasn't even 70 at that...

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Lynnie Mirvis: She wasn't that old.

Valery Levitanus: But her father came here...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: And Marina told you that...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: He lived with us for 3 years.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: We used to live near Hebrew Academy on Conwell.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And he lived with us 3 years.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

Valery Levitanus: He came on Thanksgiving Day and passed away on Thanksgiving.

Lynnie Mirvis: Awe.

Valery Levitanus: He lived exactly 3 years from Thanksgiving to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Thanksgiving to Thanksgiving...

Valery Levitanus: Thanksgiving yeah, yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: So he came later.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, so...

Lynnie Mirvis: When you were leaving you know, how did you decide what to take with you? What did you take with you and what did you leave behind?

Valery Levitanus: You can't take much with you.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: We took some stuff that people told us that we can sell, so we took...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: Couple cameras...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: It was a, you know, that you can sell in Italy and...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: You know some matryoshkas. It's a Russian wooden toys and so on.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So we sold some, saved a little money, but it was pennies.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. You didn't have much.

Valery Levitanus: No we didn't have anything. As a matter of fact, when we were in what's the - Austria...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: We had to spend...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Like two and a half weeks in Austria. First our first stop was in Austria in Vienna...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And we were at hotel...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And I hung up my jacket, and my wallet was in the jacket, and somebody stole my wallet.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

Valery Levitanus: Stole money that we exchanged.

Lynnie Mirvis: That's awful. Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: See in Russia you could exchange certain amount of money and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: All this money was stolen and we were back with no money...

Lynnie Mirvis: So everything was stolen.

Valery Levitanus: And we...

Lynnie Mirvis: How upsetting was that?

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Valery Levitanus: It was terrible because it was right, the time right after Christmas, before New Year....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And all the institutions, everything was closed.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

Valery Levitanus: And we couldn't get money, and thank goodness we have friend who lended us some money and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah, ah...

Valery Levitanus: Otherwise we would have, I don't know how we would survive.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. So you had to go to Israel and Austria in order to get...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah we went to...

Lynnie Mirvis: How did...

Valery Levitanus: Austria.

Lynnie Mirvis: What was the reason for that? Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: No that's the way of immigration.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: It was - first we went to Austria and we - why? Because when you come to Austria you apply for the country you want to go to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: If you decide that you want to go straight to Israel...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Then 2, 3 days and they send you to Israel. But if you decided that you want to go to United States, Australia, or Canada then they take your documents and they send to Jewish community centers to all those countries.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: To Australia to United States...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And whichever will take your...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

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Valery Levitanus: You know according to your professions, according to your you know....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Achievements and so on and so forth. So but that's the way we ended up in Memphis...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Because Jewish community of Memphis accepted our family.

Lynnie Mirvis: I see. They...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, they knew that I was a track and field coach...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: But Marina I don't know, she didn't actually, but Jewish community center, I mean...

Lynnie Mirvis: Accepted you.

Valery Levitanus: Jewish family service they used to call it...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Valery Levitanus: Jewish Family Service, Jewish agency, they took us.

Lynnie Mirvis: They took you. Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah they accepted our family.

Lynnie Mirvis: So when you arrived...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah we...

Lynnie Mirvis: What was it like to actually come? Do you remember the moment you came what it was like?

Valery Levitanus: Oh, so it was beautiful. I remember we had Senior **Sadetsky**...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And her daughter came to the airport. Judy Silver, she was the wife of Bob Silver you know the...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: He used to be a director of a Jewish...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Sure.

Valery Levitanus: Family service.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: He passed away, but they both were at this airport and Cindy Saliway came to the airport....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: You know new people we met at the airport. They were very nice to us and very you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Accepting our family and they took us to apartment they rented for us....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: On **Butler Rd.** and that was so nice. There was a refrigerator full of food. We had beds with sheets and then the blankets. We had furniture. We had everything. Everything prepared by Jewish...

Lynnie Mirvis: Family Service, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Family Service and Jewish people, they donated money to the people and donated their...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Furniture, their stuff. That's the way we ended up in Memphis and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: We were very placed, and then we started to acculturation program.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And which included classes. They taught us how to use checking book. They used to teach our, you know traditions of the people living in the United States and learning you know not only language, but everything you know. And while we had acculturation programs, we also, we had English classes, we - and they were looking for employment for us.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, that's...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah they had people...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: They would go to - according to your profession and they would go to different places and look for a job for us. So that's the way I ended up working at the Jewish Community Center. They applied for a job to the University of Memphis for me, but they didn't take me...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: To uni - of Mem - yeah they, and then I started to work on the what do you call it? Temporary base...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: They didn't hire me full-time.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I worked as - like part - time, and I worked in the summer camp. We came in April and I started to work right at the beginning of the summer camp in June...

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow. Wow, that's pretty fast.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and then June and July, August I worked part-time, and then in I believe, in October...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I think the 1st of October they gave me full-time position...

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: At the Jewish Community Center in HMP, Health and Physical Education Department. What I was doing at the beginning, I was working with kids, teaching them basketball and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, had you done that much? You were very...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, I used to be...

Lynnie Mirvis: You were an athlete.

Valery Levitanus: In sports and fitness. I used to be an athlete and I had education...

Lynnie Mirvis: Were you in the Olympics?

Valery Levitanus: I was Olympic trials and didn't never make Olympics, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, in basketball?

Valery Levitanus: I used to throw...

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Lynnie Mirvis: What was it?

Valery Levitanus: Throw hammer.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

Valery Levitanus: I used to be in track and field and I had a...

Lynnie Mirvis: I see, yes.

Valery Levitanus: _____ of track and field. I was...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Hammer Thrower, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: So...

Valery Levitanus: And then I was coach. I was track and field coach at the University of - in Leningrad, and I was a, also worked part-time in sports school. So I was teaching...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And so when I came here the Jewish Community Center gave me a job at the Jewish Community Center working with kids in a summer camp, and then I started to work. And I used to work with seniors.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: I used to give exercise counsel next to the senior adults.

Lynnie Mirvis: I'm going to have a look at that, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: And I used to also run leagues...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: They gave me a chance to run softball.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I run softball, basketball league, and it used to be flag football.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: I used to run those leagues.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yes, yes.

Valery Levitanus: And so I was very involved in it - working at the...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And then after a year they gave me a job as a health center manager, health club manager.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: I managed the health club and continued to work with seniors and so on. So I worked for the Jewish Community Center for 13 years until I...

Lynnie Mirvis: Thirteen years.

Valery Levitanus: Had to, yeah. And then...

Lynnie Mirvis: What was, yeah go on, finish.

Valery Levitanus: And then I went to work to learn insurance business...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I went to - took classes at...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: **University of Memphis**, got my license, and I started to sell insurance. I sold insurance for 7 years.

Lynnie Mirvis: Really? So you had a career change.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and then after that I went to work at the senior center. It was a MIFA, MIFA is organization in Memphis that...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Provides help. I used to work for MIFA as a assistant director for senior center.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: I worked with seniors for 6 years...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh.

Valery Levitanus: Until 2005 when they closed those centers they couldn't - they...

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, they closed.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah and I was looking for a job for a while, and then I worked at the tennis center for about 2 years, and then I got full-time - not full, part-time job. I worked at the FedEx in ____.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

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Valery Levitanus: I was in a _____ and I worked there for almost 5 years.

Lynnie Mirvis: Really?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, before retiring in 19-...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: I mean 2013.

Lynnie Mirvis: **So you probably know**, and I understand you're working part-time now or...

Valery Levitanus: Right now I work at the law firm Harris Shelton Hanover Walsh, as a career. I deliver mail, I...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh, uh-huh. That's fine.

Valery Levitanus: I deposit checks, you know.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Just keeps me busy.

Lynnie Mirvis: Keeps you busy. That's wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Well, let me ask you something. What do you - when you think about coming here and your life here, what was the biggest challenge for you here would you say? One of the hardest things to you know, issues that you had to solve or....?

Valery Levitanus: You know, I didn't have much problem with English cause when I came I already had...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Some English and I **knew it pretty good**.

Lynnie Mirvis: You did. Yeah, right. That's great.

Valery Levitanus: There was a challenge to learn American traditions that were way of life....

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Learning how to you know, go around things. In America it's different than Russia you know. You have your own place. First we rented and then we bought first our house after we were here for wait a second it was, in 19 - we came in '79, 1981...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: We bought our first house.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, so in Russia you couldn't do that?

Valery Levitanus: No, see...

Lynnie Mirvis: Every - you were gives in Ru -...

Valery Levitanus: We were lucky at the time they had...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: FH...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: It was called a loan, special...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, here in Memphis you're talking about.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: FH 235 loan...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, ah.

Valery Levitanus: Which it was at President Carter's time...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: And but what - the interest rates were very high. It was like 13.5%...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Interest rate, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: That program allows us to pay just 4% and the rest 9.5% the government paid for us.

Lynnie Mirvis: So cause it...

Valery Levitanus: So our monthly notes were just a little higher than they were paying for rent.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And we were able to, I worked at the center...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: And then Marina went to beauty school, and then she started to work. So we were able to survive and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Of course we had two children, we have to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Raise children and they...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yes.

Valery Levitanus: Went to kindergartens and then they went to Hebrew Academy...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Both, but we were lucky cause we didn't have much income and Hebrew Academy you know paid...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Big portion of our, you know....

Lynnie Mirvis: **What with** education?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, it helped us a lot.

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: But then when kids grew up and they went to college we had to pay for it...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, yes.

Valery Levitanus: But we were making more money and Marina already started to work and as hairdresser it was...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: A lot easier for us to afford to pay because our daughter went to very expensive school.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

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Valery Levitanus: Washington University in St. Louis and that school, even that time she went to school in...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: 1997. It was already like 30,000...

Lynnie Mirvis: Expensive.

Valery Levitanus: A year.

Lynnie Mirvis: Expensive, right.

Valery Levitanus: Ah, oh.

Lynnie Mirvis: And what about Pavel your son?

Valery Levitanus: No Pavel, we were lucky with Pavel because he played tennis...

Lynnie Mirvis: Uh-huh.

Valery Levitanus: And he got scholarship to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh, wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: Austin Peay University in Clarksville Tennessee.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: He had the full scholarship, but we had to pay for his accommodations. He didn't want to spend in the dorm. He didn't want to live in the dorms...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: He wanted to live in a apartment.

Lynnie Mirvis: Apar - right. Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and the rent - was a friend of his, so we paid for his apartment.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, so that was...

Valery Levitanus: But that was our...

Lynnie Mirvis: Challenging.

Valery Levitanus: Expense for Pavel. Otherwise, he really saved us a lot of money cause he had scholarship.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Right, well that, you know something I didn't ask you before when you work here. How did the work that you did in the former Soviet Union compare with the work here for you, what was....?

Valery Levitanus: Oh, it's completely different. In Russia I was a coach.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And I used to work with the students who were athletes.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And they competed and the different championships and I taught them Shot Put, Discus, and Hammer Thrower. So I was a coach. Here I was more like a teacher.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm, the difference...

Valery Levitanus: You know I teach Phys Ed. Physical Education and the _____

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Was working with seniors, with kids...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: It's more like a teacher at school.

Lynnie Mirvis: More teacher.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, like a teacher. I worked...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And teaches physical education in high school or...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: Teaches in University.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: But it's nothing like I was doing in Russia, cause over here University didn't take me, didn't give me a job.

Lynnie Mirvis: Was that - was disappointing?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, it was disappointing. I thought I'm going to coach...

Lynnie Mirvis: Like you did in Russia, yeah.

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Valery Levitanus: Yeah, but they didn't - they were not interested in the Hammer Throw, Shot Put, cause they didn't have any good athletes and they didn't...

Lynnie Mirvis: That wasn't what they did.

Valery Levitanus: And that's why they didn't hire me. That's why I didn't get a job at the university.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm. So that was a disappointment.

Valery Levitanus: At Memphis, yeah and there was no other colleges in Memphis actually that had...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right. So you went to the...

Valery Levitanus: That program.

Lynnie Mirvis: To the Jewish Community.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, the Jewish Community Center, and I worked as a, mostly like a teacher...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: For Physical Education.

Lynnie Mirvis: So it really helped out there.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Were there any big surprises for you about life here? Was it any surprises that you've experienced that you didn't expect?

Valery Levitanus: No, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Not many surprises, but the life here was actually you know getting better and better, and better...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: As we you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Grew in our jobs and you know...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Learned more English and like you know Marina went to school and she...

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Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: You know became a hairdresser, and I was growing up in my job at the Jewish Community Center. So everything went better and better, and better, and the kids...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, with your children.

Valery Levitanus: Were able to go to colleges, universities...

Lynnie Mirvis: College.

Valery Levitanus: And received a profession.

Lynnie Mirvis: What professions are they in?

Valery Levitanus: And their very successful.

Lynnie Mirvis: What do they do?

Valery Levitanus: Mm, Pavel first after he graduated here, went to New York, and he went to Wall Street.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: He became a stockbroker.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And this is where he met his future wife.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And she helped him a lot, and she was pretty good in stockbroking business, but then they moved to California and that business was not as good in California.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So he decided to change his profession, and he became an insurance salesman.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then like in 2006 I think, and he is very, very successful in that business. He's doing real well in...

Lynnie Mirvis: Wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: In this business.

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Lynnie Mirvis: Wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. And they do - they live very comfortably and live in Southern California in Orange County.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: My daughter, she went to, as I told you, to Washington University St. Louis, and she received degree. And then she met her future husband Baruch Berzon who is a right now, is a medical doctor, but at the time when they met and they fell in love, and he was from very Orthodox religious family. His father is a rabbi...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm, mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: His - a lot of his relative's rabbis...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And very Orthodox you know, **creative**.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And for Miriam to, even though she finished 9 grades at the Hebrew Academy then she went to White Station's High School. For her to reach his level of Jewishness she had to go to Israel and study it for like 7 months, special classes that...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: To - and after that his parents agreed that Baruch would marry her.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then after that she went - when after she finished that she went to University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem University...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And she received master's degree in Psychology.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah, wonderful.

Valery Levitanus: So she, yeah, so she's, she didn't pursue a Psychology job, but she...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Did different kind of work before, and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

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Valery Levitanus: They lived 3 years in Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: And then he went to medical school in America.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right.

Valery Levitanus: They - and in 2000 - I think they moved in 2005...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then in 2006 I think, he went to medical school and it was 4 years of medical school. And then after 5 years of - after that, so he was studying like for 9 years.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wow.

Valery Levitanus: And then he became a medical doctor in last year. In August of last year they moved...

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah.

Valery Levitanus: To live permanently in Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: So, you...

Valery Levitanus: And he works as a medical doctor in the Emergency - he's...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: Specialty is Emergency Medicine...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And Internal Medicine cause he had 5 years of medical...

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: Not medical school, but...

Lynnie Mirvis: So your children...

Valery Levitanus: Post graduate school.

Lynnie Mirvis: Children in California, and children in Israel. You get to travel.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah son - our son lives in California, and Miriam lives in...

Lynnie Mirvis: So you're traveling?

Valery Levitanus: Malden in...

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Lynnie Mirvis: You travel to Israel, you travel up that way?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah we went last year when our granddaughter was born...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: In October, and we spent 2 weeks in Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Miriam's - Marina is going in February...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Cause she's missing kids, and in July next year we're planning to go cause our grandson is going to have Bar Mitzvah...

Lynnie Mirvis: Ah.

Valery Levitanus: And he will turn 13, then we're planning to go to Israel again.

Lynnie Mirvis: Wonderful...

Valery Levitanus: While Miriam lived in Israel I went there 6 times.

Lynnie Mirvis: Six times, sure.

Valery Levitanus: Miriam - Marina went 5 times. One time I went with my son...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Without Marina cause she had to work.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: So....

Lynnie Mirvis: That's great.

Valery Levitanus: I love Israel. I would love to move to Israel, but she doesn't want to move to Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right.

Valery Levitanus: She feels life is more comfortable in America than in Israel.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, it's more comfortable.

Valery Levitanus: Israel is a beautiful country. It's wonderful, but you know...

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Lynnie Mirvis: It's a little harder.

Valery Levitanus: A little harder. It's not as....

Lynnie Mirvis: The language, use more Hebrew.

Valery Levitanus: And then also you have to learn Hebrew and as...

Lynnie Mirvis: **You'd like to learn Hebrew?**

Valery Levitanus: You grow older it's difficult to...

Lynnie Mirvis: Absolutely. So it sounds like, yes your family has traveled and moved, and...

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Ends up in Memphis, is there anything else that we didn't cover that you want to say before we stop for now?

Valery Levitanus: That's about it.

Lynnie Mirvis: Yeah. What was your - one of the happiest times when you came here, what was that - anything special?

Valery Levitanus: The happiest time was when kids went to school...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And we were so happy they went to Hebrew Academy...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And they started to learn the Hebrew and the Jewish traditions and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Learning a lot of things. It was a wonderful time and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: And then they liked it a lot. They loved it and you know, ended up my daughter got married to the Orthodox man.

Lynnie Mirvis: Right, right. Yes.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. It didn't happen to Pavel...

Lynnie Mirvis: Pavel...

Valery Levitanus: Even though when Pavel was growing up...

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Lynnie Mirvis: She's, yeah.

Valery Levitanus: He wanted to be a Rabbi.

Lynnie Mirvis: Did he really?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, there was a Rabbi, what's his name? He just recently passed away.

Lynnie Mirvis: **Naywoods.** Rabbi Nay-...

Valery Levitanus: No, no, no. Rabbi Greenblatt.

Lynnie Mirvis: Rabbi, Greenblatt, right.

Valery Levitanus: **Youform Greenblatt.** And he loved Pavel and...

Lynnie Mirvis: Really?

Valery Levitanus: Yeah, and Pavel was listening to him and he was wearing Tzitzits and he was very, wanted to be religious, but then...

Lynnie Mirvis: Mm-hm.

Valery Levitanus: Went to White Station, everything changed. He started to play tennis and play sports; decided he's not going to be a Rabbi.

Lynnie Mirvis: You never know with the children.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah.

Lynnie Mirvis: Oh so, and, so this is quite a story. I thank you so much.

Valery Levitanus: Yeah. Moms!

Lynnie Mirvis: And I think we'll stop here if...

Valery Levitanus: Marina!

Marina: Yeah?

Valery Levitanus: Look for some pictures please can you?

Lynnie Mirvis: Okay.