

# EXODUS Project

## Interview of Yuri & Svetlana Yanishevski

January 8, 2017

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**EXODUS**

**Yuri&SvetlanaYanishevski.mp4**

**Date: 01-08-2017**

**Lynnie Mirvis:** This is Lynnie Mirvis, and I am here with Yuri and Lana, and it is January 8, 2017. This is an interview for the EXODUS project. [It's not working]. I'd like to start off...will you each tell me your name. Oh great. Okay. You can start.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Do you have a book we can just hold?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** No, it's good. Now I've got it. Okay.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** I'm Lana Yanishevski.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I'm Yuri Yanishevski.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh great. So, each of you tell us what is your date of birth.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Mine is, um, mine is August 30, 1968.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Mine is December 14, 1963.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay, great, and um, tell me where were you born, and which republic city did you come from.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We were both born in Kiev, Ukraine.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay, and that's where you live the first part of your life.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah. Uh, so I'd like to ask you first and you can take turns answering—what was it like to be a child growing up in the Soviet Union in Kiev? Is there any stories, anything that stands out?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** You start.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** When we were growing up, um, we were raised in what you may call a middle class. Um, our parents were professionals, uh, both or all of them were college educated, so there were engineers. Um, we really had all basic necessities that we needed to be happy and the one thing we had was the love of our parents. Um, so,

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been raised over there, it was great, you know. Education was very good. Um, school education was great. Um, college was free, so in fact, we were paid a stipend in college. So, it was a really happy period of our life.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Thank you. Do you want to add anything to that?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Well, I think the childhood part of growing up was fantastic because, you know, as a child, all you need is love of your parents, and we had plenty of it. Um, I have fantastic big brother and mom and dad and my grandma. We all lived together, and it was great. We always played outside a lot. We had a lot of friends, um, it was fantastic. Then once we grew up and became, you know, in high school and medical school, we realized that we didn't have the freedoms of anything, and that became harder. That's a different period.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, a different period. You realize about the freedoms. Can you talk about that? The freedoms, what that meant?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Well, we realized that, uh, the system was essentially all set up so it can benefit, uh, go from the top. Uh, in election that we had, we just have one candidate that everyone was expected to vote for.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, there was only one party. It was the governess party, so everyone who didn't agree with that, um, was just out of luck, and would have to suffer or spend life in prison. That's how it was said, so essentially you either get on board or you are out of the ship and sink in the sea. That's how things worked there, and as Jews, we also realized that we were second grade citizens there because, um, that's what Jews were. Um, so, I think even talking about adhering to Jewish religious traditions because all religion was essentially forbidden in the Soviet Union. The way they looked at the religion and the people who were religious, is that they would say that the person is uneducated because there is no God.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah. Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So if you believe in God, then you're really a savage. You're not educated.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was how good, you know, this great science that has proven that God doesn't exist, so that was their view, and so if you wanted to maintain any position, any professional position in society, then being religious was really not an option.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was, you were just lose your job. You'll never find another job.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** What if you would get kicked out of school?

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Like if your parents took you to the synagogue or church.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** In churches, there were, um, patrols that would check in to see if there are any children there, and they would report to school.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And their child could have been kicked out.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** The patrols reported?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah. There was one synagogue in Kiev where student population that were a lot of Jews, and I remember for Passover, when they would give our Matzo, they would have to...somebody would have to and stay in line, like from one in the morning.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. Stand in line?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** To get Matzo.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So we had Matzo once a year, and that was it.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was it. That was the...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** That was...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And it was a little bit of it.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What about your parents and grandparents...what did they know about their Judaism?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Of course.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Can you tell me something about that?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** My grandpa was an Orthodox Jew who prayed every day. He would...he actually...he didn't live with us in Kiev, but when he got older, he would come over months at a time, so one time, it was spring and it was Passover...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So that was the first time we celebrated Passover, and I learned about the tradition of Passover, and I remember eating the Maror and salt water, and Matzo...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

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**Svetlana Yanishevski:** and we were supposed...me and my brother, we had two pints of Matzo...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. So, you remember that? Huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah, that was the one and only.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was the one and only. What about for you Yuri?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I didn't have a one and only, although my father was Bar Mitzvah, but he was born in 1921...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** so, but then essentially after that, my generation was from a religious point of it, was a lost generation because there were no conversations about religion or anything of that nature.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. So, you didn't have the...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Your grandfather was a Cantor or Rabbi?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** He was a Cantor.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Your grandfather was a Cantor?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What did you...did you know him?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** On dad's side. No.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** He got killed in World War 2.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** All my dead relatives except for his brother were killed by Germans when they came to Uman. My father was from Uman.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Your father was from Uman?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes, and you know the result of also the Jews that are now going to Uman.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** My son does, yes, yes.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** That's where my father is from.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Was he killed because he was Jewish?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes.

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**Svetlana Yanishevski:** In front of synagogue.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** In front?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, so they \_\_\_\_\_ during World War 2 because they also, the Germans were nice and they were nice to Germans during World War 1.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And so no one wanted to go during World War 2 and it's a little bit different. So, everyone stayed in place, and when Germans came...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Which was in 1942, and the world knew.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** 1941 Germans came and whacked our all Jews.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Uman, they came to Uman, where your grandparents were.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, and his youngest brother was at the time four years old, so he was killed with his parents.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. They were killed in front of the synagogue you said?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow. Did you hear that story?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** From my father.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Tell that interesting story where your brothers met at the train station.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, so my father was already in a university when the war started, and then he was in the process of evacuating and so he was in the train...he stepped out of the train...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** To go to Siberia.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, they were on the train going to Siberia, and he stepped out of the train in Poltava, it was a small town and on the platform, he saw his younger brother.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And so he got him there, and they both went to Siberia, and there, my father worked building factories. Then we moved to **Butence...**

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** for the Soviet Army.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** So why was he evacuated?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Because, um...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** He work at the factory.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** He work at the factory, so some people who didn't have education were sent to the Army, but those who were in college, so the decision was made to send them to Siberia.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Because he was an engineer.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And built plants so that war could be won.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Because you know, the government wasn't going to win the war with what they have right now, they need to build capabilities to be able to, um, equip the troops and train the troops. That's what happened.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. That's what he did.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes, so he was working in Siberia, um, in horrible conditions where in winter temperatures would be, I would say, minus forty Fahrenheit, and they have to work outside all day.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow. I imagine.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** There were no days off. You know, there were no weekends.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was, uh, nonstop work because it was life and death situation for the country.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. Wow. So, it was very challenging. The stories.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And your great-grandparents, your grandparents, you were telling me about what they did.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So, in thirties, I think in 1935, my great-grandparents...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** on my mom's side, they immigrated, um, to Palestine, to Israel.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It's actually the special permission. They were seeking special permission, and my mom's sister at that time was dating one of the top...son of one of

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the top, uh, people in political quality, so they got that special permission and they immigrated. He was a city rabbi that lived in Israel.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So they were able to avoid the war.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** What was sad was just, you know, that in 1941, the concentration camps were already built and everyone knew about them, but no one knew in Russia, so people believed that Germans would be nice to Jews and it continued.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** People didn't evacuate.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So they didn't know.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It all changed in twenty-five years. World War 1 was in 1914.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So looking at about a span of twenty-five years when things changed one hundred and eighty degrees.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. They changed drastically. So, you were talking also about your, after Israel became a state, what happened with...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** My grandpa, um, his name was **Yakov** \_\_\_\_\_, and he—it's my mom's dad--

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Um, because he was very religious Orthodox, he had friends who were Orthodox Jews also, and four of them got together secretly in one of their apartments to celebrate the creation of Israel, and the next day, he was arrested. Um, three people came in dark coats in the middle of the night. Mom was just telling us this story recently actually.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** They arrested him, so they arrested three people out of four, so obviously, they knew who was the snitch, and he spend four years in Stalin's prison, um, was able to get out only when Stalin died. He was sleep deprived. That's how they tortured him. He was not allowed basic needs.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** He had actually sword in the wall to wake him up constantly. That was poking his side.

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**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Hmm, so your mom told you that story?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** My grandmother was so distraught. My mother was seventeen at the time, and my grandma was so distraught that she was thinking about suicide. She actually went to river, and then she just couldn't do it.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Hmm.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Because of my mom, she was still little and she was still living at home.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** She was able to pull back.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** And then he came home.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** After four years.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yep, but then we'd go stand in line and try to send him food there to prison, but they wouldn't take it because he was political prisoner.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Uh huh. They wouldn't let you send food or anything?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** No, because they were considered enemies of the state.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** They couldn't see him. Right, so they couldn't have visits? Nothing.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, they were treated worse than murderers or thieves...

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Yeah, because of that.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** because it was the worst possible offense is to be the enemy of the state.

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Because 20 millions of Russians died in World War 2, not just Russians, Ukrainians...

**Lynn timer Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Jews...



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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Wow.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** that were Russians. 20 million was killed in World War 2.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** 40 million was killed by Stalin on top of him.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** 40 million. Hmm. It's hard to believe.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, going back to your lives, you said you were both in college...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** University in Kiev.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Well, I was not at that...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, where did you get your education?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Well, I went to medical school. I would not have been able to get into medical school in Kiev because they would not have taken Jews, so I had to go to **Smulin (16:28)**, which is, uh, small town in the middle of nowhere in Russia.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Then I was able to get into medical school and then I was transferred to Kiev after three years...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** and that's when we met.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You met.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And the only reason that I got accepted to go, um, my engineering school was called 'Kiev Technical Institute'--It's the best engineering in the whole Ukraine--was that my uncle knew somebody, you know, high in the administration...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** of this particular university, but as a Jew, I would never be able to get that...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

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**Yuri Yanishevski:** even though at school, I was a straight A student, and then at the university also straight A student, but they would never, you know, they would never accept me.

**Lynn timervis:** Anti-Semitism pervaded...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes.

**Lynn timervis:** at the university.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** They told my mom there was a quota...

**Lynn timervis:** A quota.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** at the school for any kind of high education.

**Lynn timervis:** What about Anti-Semitism in your younger years, in childhood. Did you experience that? Is there anything you remember?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** We did experience that. Yeah. We were called, you know a special word like, you know like there is an 'N' word here...

**Lynn timervis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** like people, you know, the same kind of word existed for Jewish people and so, that's how on a number of occasions openly cold to other people.

**Lynn timervis:** Uh huh. What about in school as far as in your classroom...did you experience Anti-Semitism?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** The classroom, we were telling you that it was very unified educational across the country, so everyone, all the schools started September 1<sup>st</sup>. On September 1<sup>st</sup> each year, everyone was called kind of to get to know the teachers, you know, the teacher wanted to get to know her pupils, so in her journal, the name would be listed and what they call nationality, but basically are you Russian, Ukrainian, or Jewish. So, in front of the whole class, you were supposed to say "My name is...my maiden name is **Kosnachi**..., so I'm Svetlana **Kosnachi**, Jewish." Well, the whole class would laugh because it was later that they would call you derogatory names and things like that.

**Lynn timervis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** But in my case, no one does because like one third of the class were Jews.

**Lynn timervis:** Oh, how did that happen?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Well, apparently, at the school where I went to, it was one of the better schools, and so...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Who's talking? My school was good too.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** [Laugh].

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Well, maybe because it's like you, but you know, I know that the school was not in my district, so to speak, so my mom had to go and had to beg someone to get me accepted into that school.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. So, you got in.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah, my brother suffered a lot because one of the kids, um, in his third grade, I believe, left for the United States from Ukraine and the teacher announced it that he was the traitor, and he immigrated and after that announcement, the whole class gathered and beat my brother up.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So this third grader was Jewish, who immigrated...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh. Yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, they took it out...Right, only the Jews. This was during the Soviet joint movement I guess when people were...a few people beginning to immigrate.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And just think about what does a third grader have to do to be a traitor or not be a traitor...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** when all the decisions are made by the parents anyways.

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

**Yuri Yanishevski:** But nevertheless, the teacher said that...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** The teacher said that.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** That he was a traitor, and who would do anything like that.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh. So, your brother had to bear the burden.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, and so in third grade, he was ten years old, you know...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** for a teacher to do something like that, it is unconscionable.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah, but that was normal.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was the norm.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** That was fit to be a party line.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was a party line.

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**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was a party line.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah, so let me ask you how you met. We were talking about that.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, uh, we met thanks for my mother knowing a lady who was, um, Svetlana's physics teacher.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Student.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Physics student.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And so, we were introduced.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** High school right. To be able to get into medical school, I was tutored in physics.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** But she lived in like apartment next door.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And then she went on vacation and met Yuri's mom.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Then we were talking and Yuri's mom said, "Oh, I have a son who needs to get married."

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** My mom was also asking other people, "Do you have a good Jewish girl for my son?"

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, luckily you know that's what happened in that case.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** They introduced us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Aww.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That was the number fours...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** 1987.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** 1987.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We were matched for the first time

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Aww.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And then he proposed to me March and we got married in July.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Very nice.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, 1988. Yes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And so how long were you in Kiev married before you were granted...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** 3 years.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And we lived with Lana's parents in a small 2-bedroom apartment because it was impossible to get your own apartment, but...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Is that how you both grew up? I didn't ask you about your, what kind of apartments you had.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Small ones. You know, we lived in a one bedroom apartment, and they lived in a two apartment.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Where did everybody sleep?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So, my brother was out of the house by that time. He actually \_\_\_\_, which was \_\_\_\_ because that's where he went to college.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And so when we got married, since I had my own room so to speak...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** that's where we lived.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay. You stayed back.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah. We had bedroom and mom and dad had bedroom.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah, so you talked a little bit before about what made you decide to immigrate. Can you think about that time and think about what the feelings were like for you and what that was like to make that decision?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was easy decision. Life in the Soviet Union was hopeless.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** It was hopeless?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was not where we wanted to raise our children. It's not where we had any future because we would live with our parents forever.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Um...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** You live with your parents until they die.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Really?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And then you get your own apartment and by the time you have kids, and then kids live with you until you die and that's how it works.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That's how it works.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Close quarters. Yeah.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, it was an easy decision. Yeah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was an easy decision, and Lana was 8 months pregnant when we got here, when we came to this country, so it was very fortunate

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We wanted to get out as fast as we possibly could.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. So, when did you actually come to the United States?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So, we landed October 16, 1991 in New York...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** and then spent...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** October 15<sup>th</sup> we landed in New York.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** 16<sup>th</sup> honey. October 17<sup>th</sup>, we \_\_\_\_.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Okay.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Then November 17<sup>th</sup>, David was born.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** A month after you got here.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Exactly.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** In New York or Memphis?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Memphis. We got to Memphis October 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Next day.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, so you were...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And we got our separate apartment on Shay Road.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Right away.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right away.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was 2 bedroom.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** 2 bedroom.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** 2 bedroom apartment. We thought it was the best thing ever.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We felt so rich. The refrigerator was full of produce and food.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Food.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was fully furnished.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Everything was furnished? And volunteers helped you?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes, volunteers helped us. People donated furniture, so it was all set for us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** All set.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** \_\_\_\_\_ met us at the airport. Remember Scott always talks about carrying our suitcases. We had \$200 in two big suitcases.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was everything? So how did you decide like what do I take with me and what do I leave behind? What was that like?

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**Yuri Yanishevski:** We didn't really...so that wasn't really our choice because we didn't have much.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You didn't have much?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We didn't have anything. It was a very easy decision.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, we had to buy more stuff to fill the suitcases because with what we had, we wouldn't be able to fill the suitcases. It was duffel bags.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was duffel bags.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Were you working at jobs? You had already graduated.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** I just graduated and I decided that since I was already pregnant...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** I decided not to start a job.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. You were trying to leave.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And I was already working as an engineer.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** When we got married, so.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Three years.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, so you had been working, and...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** The hardest thing was parents.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** For Yuri's mom and dad, it was very hard to leave.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** To leave your parents?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Especially for mom. Yeah, they came with us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, who came with you then?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** My parents came with us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What are their names?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Nisa and Anna



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**Lynn timervis:** Okay.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, it was hard for them to leave because they accumulated some stuff, some possessions over the course of their life, and essentially, they had to just sell it or just give it away. It was very difficult to get stuff there. It wasn't like here, you go to a store and you buy things. It was impossible to buy anything. You had to stand in lines to buy a shirt, you know, a man's shirt. You couldn't just go and buy it.

**Lynn timervis:** You couldn't?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** You had to spend like three hours standing in line...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And may not get it.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And may still not get it because merchandise would be gone by the time, you know, you get there.

**Lynn timervis:** Really?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** To the contour.

**Lynn timervis:** Was the merchandise all laid out?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** No.

**Lynn timervis:** You said, 'I want a shirt?'

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Somebody would say...no, you never said that, 'I want a shirt.' That just didn't exist.

**Lynn timervis:** What did you do?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** You stood in line. You just got and somebody says, 'Oh, we here that in that store, or they're selling out men's shirts', so everyone would go there. Of course, there was no phones, so neighbors would say or they would all go.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And sometimes, people would go, you know, from work, and they see a line standing, so they get off the bus, you know, come to the landing, and ask, 'What are they selling here?' People would say, 'Nothing yet, but looks like they may be selling, for example, I don't know coats.' So, then you go and stand in line.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Just in case.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Not knowing what would be sold.

**Lynn timervis:** Because that's the only way you could get something.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That's clothes. We're talking about toilet paper and sugar.

**Lynn timervis:** And you couldn't even get that?

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**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That's line. You have to stay in line and you may not get it by the time you get there to the counter, it may be gone. Milk. You have to stay in line.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was getting progressively worse.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Bread was there. We always had bread. That's about it.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Meat was very difficult to get.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Did this get worse after, uh, the fall of the Soviet Union? Or was it always like this?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was before the fall because...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We left before.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** We left one month before Soviet Union fell, but it started getting worse after like 1987 and since has been getting progressively worse.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Right. So, basic things just disappeared like sugar or...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** um...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Toilet paper.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Toilet paper or toothpaste. Toothpaste would be just gone one day, and then what happens is that when they start selling the toothpaste, then everyone would buy a lot.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Then they all disappear.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Then they disappear again.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** They hoard it.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** People start hoarding it because, you know, people think that, oh this may be the last time I see it for the next six months.

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

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**Yuri Yanishevski:** Because I won't be able to get anymore toothpaste.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Woah.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, yeah.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Well, how did your life change after you made the decision to come to... here to the United States? Did you notice anything differently?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was hard. It was horrible. Immigration is horrible. We, all of sudden lose all the culture.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We don't understand jokes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It took us years to get the jokes.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** The jokes.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, Lana still doesn't understand the jokes.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Shut up! I know, I hate it.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** She's better at understanding my jokes.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That's true. Movies...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Movies.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Some movies don't exist. \_\_\_\_ don't exist for you. Friends don't exist.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You mean you've left that behind? Your friends. The culture. The language.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** The family. The people that you grew together with. It was horrible.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, coming was really a challenge.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Then I'm really grateful to Jewish Family Service because they found the first job for me.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Henry Marcus.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Henry?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Henry and Sue Anne, you know, they are working with us.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Henry would take me to all the doctors when I was pregnant.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** All the doctors' appointments.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, we were taken care of like family members which was completely unexpected also because, you know, Soviet Union, no one does volunteer work. You know, this volunteer work doesn't exist.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** People can barely take care of themselves.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Right.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So, the culture of volunteering doesn't exist.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, so they were helping you.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Everyone is poor.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** They were helping us. Pretty much, we were, I would say helpless. So, um, my English was better than most other people, and so, I was able to be accepted to a job as an engineer. Again, found by Jewish Family Service for me, so I set up my job. Uh, the next day, after our first son, David, was born...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** He couldn't pick me up from the hospital.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh he couldn't?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** No. Barbara did.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Uh huh. Barbara \_\_\_\_.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Your volunteer person.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah. Well, my brother and them were there when David was born.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, wow.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Barbara was there every day. She would come to the apartment every day after David was born, and would help me out. I was breastfeeding, and just chores around the house.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I didn't know how to change a diaper.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You didn't know how to do that.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I didn't know what a diaper was.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** There were no diapers in Russia.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** There weren't diapers?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** No.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What did they use? The disposable ones?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Cloths and then we would just wash.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh, you had the cloth diapers in Russia?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Not diapers.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** No.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** They were just cloths.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Like a cloth.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Not like a diaper.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Just cloth and then we had to wash it and reuse again.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We had disposable diapers here too by the way now. Some people use it.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Non-disposable. Reusable.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Reusable.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Reusable.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Disposable was...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That's what I'm saying.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right, so you didn't know that and your family wasn't here yet. Well, you said that your parents...

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Lana's parents...Lana's brother was here.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Her brother was here. Whose parents came...tell us again...who came? Your parents came with you?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** His, but they were older, so...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** They couldn't really help, and your parents came a few months later?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Well, what was the journey like? Did you have to stop at different countries at that point to come here?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** No, we flew Moscow to New York.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Moscow to New York.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Then a flight to Memphis?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, \_\_\_\_\_ **Northwest, yeah** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** We couldn't understand what flight attendants wanted from us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You didn't know what was going on.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That's right. We call that water whirling, what?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Woah.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And food, food was so different. We missed food so much.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You missed the food?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Russian food.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What kind of food did you miss?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Steak and potatoes and you know, you aren't able to buy steak here. You are eating chicken for like two years, you know, first years you've been here because, you know, you're poor. Steak was expensive, so you just eat chicken...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Which, you know, interestingly chicken happens to be the healthy meat...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** but at the time, you know, we wanted to eat steak.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** You wanted meat. That steak.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Right.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It wasn't possibility and I took Lana out for first date hear to McDonalds, so that was...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Because I was studying already by that time.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, she was studying all day...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Cabin fever. I was cooped up in the apartment all day.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** With the baby. Yeah. So, what was the hardest problems to solve would you say?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Work. Finding work.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Finding the work.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** For me, that was the most stressful to be able to pass exam. It was a huge sacrifice from Yuri's part. He had to work and provide for us, so I could study.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So, you were studying.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And we hired a babysitter, so she would not have to all the time to take care of David because she...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** But I was breastfeeding until nine months, so...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Woah.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** it was, you know, nurse...go study...nurse...go study.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So you're studying and breastfeeding and juggling everything.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And you said the first time you didn't pass?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So I started studying in January. I took my first test in September, and I didn't pass.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** What was that like?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Not to pass?

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That was normal.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was normal.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** I was prepared to go on.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So you were prepared. That's what people said. So, you kept at it again?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh. And I passed.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And you passed, and did you have to do other training? Did you have to...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Residency.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Residency in Pediatrics.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** She had to pass three exams...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** and then in '95, she went residency. 1995.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Where were you a resident?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Le Bonheur.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Le Bonheur. And after that?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** After that, I found work.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You had your...opened up a practice?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** A private practice. Pediatrics.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** She joined an existing practice.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Wonderful. And are you in the job you were in when you first came here?



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**Yuri Yanishevski:** So, first job, the one that was found to me by Jewish Family Service was, um, 3 months' contract, and so, I did that.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What was that again?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was a 3 months' contract for the company...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Okay.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** and um, so after that, I...it was easy for me to find a job because I already had experience in this country...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** and so I found a job for St. Jude Hospital, and I worked there for 8 years after that.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** At St. Jude?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** At St. Jude.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And what was your job there?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** At St. Jude, my job was called Scientific Data Analyst.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So I was working in one of the research departments helping them with data analysis and software development. It was good. It was great experience.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** He made a lot of friends there.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** A lot of friends. So, how did the work compare with what you did in the former Soviet Union?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Work here, I would say it was more interesting.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It was more interesting, more broad, you know, the exposure was broader.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh, and so, what about the people in Memphis? What was it like meeting the people here?

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**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Well, the **Glassmeres** became our family. They just made it here for us as a home.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Now, you know, we came from the capital of Ukraine that had a lot of culture, and then Memphis at that time in 1991, didn't have a lot of culture or a lot of things to do really.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Um, so it was a big adjustment, but now, we really grew to love Memphis and made it home here.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Southern people, we love them because they smile. They are very friendly.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Looking back, I would never choose to live in New York if it was my choice at that time.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** I'm very happy that we were relocated to Memphis.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** We travel a lot and we see a lot of places and big cities and small cities and from all of them, we love Memphis the most.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** You've found your home here.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah. It's great.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Jewishly, tell me what that was like to explore your Jewish background once you came here when you didn't know much, uh, in the former Soviet Union.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Yeah, but we were bigamous Jews, either we were always Jews as people, maybe not as religion.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right. Okay.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** So, it was very enriching to get to know the religion. We may not be very actively active participants, but we certainly very proud to be Jewish. It was amazing to just when people ask you to just say, 'Yeah, I'm Jewish', and be proud of it...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Right.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** and not to be afraid that people will beat you up for it or laugh at you. Um, but we always wanted our kids to grow up being proud to be Jewish.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** That was amazing that we were able to raise them Jewishly...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** and to expose them to a lot more and for them to have Bar Mitzvah was amazing, and when it was our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Rabbi Greenstein did, we re-did our vows at Temple and he did the Jewish wedding for us.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ah. Beautiful.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, because we didn't have a Jewish wedding, so...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** So you did that.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** And Rabbi Greenstein put our first Mishnah on our first house.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** He met us at the airport when we came, so he was a really young rabbi, but then I think he just started Temple probably like a month or two before he came, and he put Mishnah on our door, on the chair in apartment.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Ahh, so he put the Mishnah's on, he met you at the airport.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yes. It was very special.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** That was special. Then I noticed that you have candlesticks. Is that from one of your trips to Israel that you were telling me about?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh. Some were and some were given to us during the kids Bar Mitzvah.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** For our wedding, anniversaries.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** And the children went to Schechter Jewish School?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Uh huh. Both kids. Yep.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** What was that like?

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was great. I mean we were happy that they were able to get a Jewish education. Again, there were challenges.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Sure.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** It was very challenging to, um, to be accepted by other peers because everyone knows everyone in Memphis. It's such a close community.

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**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** Sometimes people are slow to embrace you, but once they do, we have a lot of good friends from when kids were growing up. Now, David is back in Memphis. He has all the same kids that he was growing up with. They are still his friends and they hang out together.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** It's fun to see they all went out to colleges, you know, all over the country, and then most of them came back to Memphis.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Really?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** And so, they are still friends, and they meet with each other pretty much...

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Are they mostly single?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah, and you know...

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** David's roommate is his kid from Schechter.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Oh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Yeah.

**Svetlana Yanishevski:** From, I don't know, first grade.

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

**Yuri Yanishevski:** So that really helps build a Jewish community here because you know, all those people, they've taken to surround their life.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Yeah. That's beautiful. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you want to say? That you'd like to talk about?

**Yuri Yanishevski:** I'm just very lucky and very grateful to the Jewish community here in Memphis who helped us get here, you know, help us really feel at home, get acclimated through a difficult transition. Without that, um, I don't think we would be able to be happy here. It would be a still difficult struggle without their help.

**Lynnie Mirvis:** Uh huh.

**Yuri Yanishevski:** We are very grateful.

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

**Yuri Yanishevski:** Thank you.

EXODUS/pti:fl