

C-7393 Transcription

Forster, Arnold. Arrival of Soviet Jews in Israel.

June 1971.

M1:

What you are about to hear are the sounds of Russian immigrants arriving at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv. The reporter is Arnold Forster, who is general counsel of the Anti-Defamation League.

M2:

Arnold Forster reports, dateline Israel, 1971

Arnold Forster:

Arnold Forster here in Israel. Well it finally happened to me, an experience that tore me up so I hope never to have to go through the same thing again. At dawn this morning a plane-load of Soviet Jews from Moscow, Riga, Vilna, Kishinev, and Kharkov arrived in Israel. For each of the lucky few it was a lifetime dream of freedom come true at long last. Each time this happens, it's an exciting and touching experience and hard to keep back the tears. And so it was this morning, when I stood with Abe Foxman, my ADL associate, and a handful of journalists [01:00]

on the apron of a runway at the Lod Airport outside Tel Aviv, as the plane bringing in the Soviet Jewish refugees came to a halt before us. But hear for yourself what happened, and how it was.

[plane engines roaring] There come the passengers down the gangplank. A little boy with a leather cap typical of the Russian caps, wearing a sweater of red and blue, obviously in the company of his father, somewhat tired. Another little boy, held by the hand of his father, carrying an orange, looking around with a somewhat bewildered condition. Now coming down the steps is a rather elderly lady holding on the railing very carefully, followed by a woman easily in her 70s, with tears in her eyes. Three little children following behind her [02:00]. There isn't a smile on the face on any one of them. Strange that not a single one of the passengers is talking to any of the others. They're just looking and staring around. There's one man just went down, wearing a yarmulke, kissing the ground. His wife is standing above him. He's lying on the ground as if in prayer. Face buried in his hands, son now trying to raise him to his feet.

Now they've lined up and they're entering into an El Al Israel Airlines bus, blue and green. A busload of people and not a single word, they're all staring out the window.

We're now in the bus riding toward the buildings where they'll all alight, still very little conversation. Now the bus has drawn up in front [03:00] of the building, some of them apparently are seeing relatives, and they're shouting through the windows to faces they recognize...The bus is stopped, we are all alighting, now we're all entering together in the reception building. They're looking and greeting, [shouting in background] and I think you can hear in the distance shouting to relatives behind the gate. Many tears. I'll try to turn it up so you can hear the shouting of relatives here in Israel [indistinct shouting]

[Forster speaking loudly over shouting] There are about sixty or seventy men, many of them middle aged, leaning over with their arms outstretched to their relatives, screaming, crying, and their relatives walking into the private reception room [04:00], looking at them across a distance of perhaps a hundred feet, waving hello. Those new arrivals, now, are showing signs of recognition. They're much more contained than are the relatives here in Israel waiting to greet them.

We'll all standing around now in the lounge of the airport, at the desk of the Department of Immigration and Absorption. The new arrivals are now out of sight of their waiting relatives,

standing around and talking, obviously not pressing for any particular purpose, waiting to be led and instructed.

M3:

[speaking Russian]

F1:

[speaking Russian]

Arnold Forster:

[05:00] The reporter is asking one of the ladies from where she is and she said she's from Riga. He's asked her now how long she's been trying to come to Israel. She says between five and eight years. Has your whole family come? She says no. My son and my daughter...she's left a son and a daughter behind in the Soviet. Daughter is about 40 years old. She's kissing the reporter, hello! Has anybody come with her, or is she all alone?

M3:

She came with her husband, and she left her son and daughter. They are trying to come.

Forster:

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What is your name?

Kamala Grima:

My name is Kamala Grima. I have come from Soviet Russia.

Forster:

From where in the Soviet, what city?

Grima:

Chernovitz. Chernovitz, it's west in Ukraine. Bukovina.

Forster:

Did you come alone or with members of family?

Grima:

Yes, together with my father and mother.

Forster:

Did you leave any [06:00] immediate members of your family behind?

Grima:

Uh, the whole family of my broth-, my father's sister, and a lot of my friends was trying to come to Israel.

Forster:

Have they been trying for a long time?

Grima:

For a long time, for several years.

Forster:

Have long have you been trying to come to Israel?

Grima:

Six years.

Forster:

And your mother?

Grima:

Together with me, and my father, too.

Forster:

How did it finally come about that they let you leave?

Grima:

They let me leave. Strikes, strikes. We went together, all of us went together to Moscow. To strike in the Supreme Soviet.

Forster:

In a demonstration?

Grima:

Demonstration.

Forster:

How many of you?

Grima:

Uh, two hundred people, I mean, they were gathering.

Forster:

How long ago did you first begin to demonstrate publically?

Grima:

Demonstrate publically? This year. Only this year.

Forster:

Why hadn't you done it before?

Grima:

It was very...it was dangerous.

Forster:

Is this your mother [07:00] sitting with you?

Grima:

Yeah, it's my mother sitting with me.

Forster:

What's her name?

Grima:

Her name is Esther.

Forster:

How does...how old is she?

Grima:

She's forty-five years old.

Forster:

Will you ask her how she feels about having just landed minutes ago? Here in Israel. Ask her.

Grima:

Yeah! Mama [speaking Russian].

Mother:

[Speaking Russian][crying]

Forster:

What did she say?

Grima:

She's, she's crying. She simply can't explain. All her feelings. And me too [crying]. I can't explain. It's so hard. It's a concentration camp, there in Russia. A great concentration from West to East.

Forster:

How many Jews do you think want to come out?

Grima:

All of them. Almost all of them. They're lying, that only two hundred people are going to come. They're lying!

Forster:

Is this your father who has just come...

Grima:

That is my father...

Forster:

Does he speak English?

Grima:

No

Father:

[Speaking Yiddish] [0:800]

Forster:

You want to tell me what your daddy said?

Grima:

[crying] Yes, it is two thousand years that we haven't been here, but in a long period of time, already landing, and we are coming here...to be together with our...to be together with our people in Israel and building a new life here.

Forster:

And who is this lady, is she a relative?

Grima:

The lady is, no, just a friend.

Forster:

What is your name?

Dalia:

My name is Dalia [unclear]. I come from Riga. I was a teacher of English at the polytechnical institute. But that was two years ago, because when I applied to go to Israel I was immediately dismissed from work, and for two years I have been sitting at home doing nothing and hoping only for the brightest future, and now the day has come!

Forster:

Did you come alone?

Dalia:

No, with my family, with my two daughters and my husband.

Forster:

What was your reaction when you looked out the window and saw Israel for the first time?

Dalia:

Well, it's difficult to describe, you know, everybody started applauding and crying and shouting, shouts of joy and happiness.

Forster:

Just shrieks of joy and happiness?

Dalia:

Yes, yes, yes.

Forster:

Thank you very much. What is your name?

M4:

My name is uh [unclear].

Forster:

Were you listening to the conversation I was just having with your wife? I was asking her how she felt when she looked out the airplane window and first saw Israel. How did you feel about it?

M4:

Yes, my wife was crying 'cause the time, from such moment she sees [10:00] the erez [land] from the sky. Yes.

Forster:

How long have you been wanting to see Israel?

M4:

I? From the year '36 when I was member of Zionist organization in Latvia.

Forster:

How long have you been trying to get out of the Soviet Union?

M4:

No, I was trying all the time, and I was [unclear]

Forster:

Why did it take so long, do you think?

M4:

No I was in...in '47 I became in the prison, uh, in the prison, yes.

Forster:

Why did put you in prison in 1947?

M4:

Uh...[unclear] they says that I wish go to Palestine, in that time that was not Israel, it was Palestine. And I became, ten years, yes ten years I become, and I was in, in, in the high north. [unclear] no that is not [unclear], that is arctic, arctic area. [11:00]

Forster:

They put you in prison in the arctic area simply because you asked to leave the Soviet Union to go to Palestine?

M4:

Yes, and after nine years, when Stalin was dead, the highest supreme court of [unclear], say that I was not, eh, no rehabilitation, became the rehabilitation after nine years. And I returned to Riga after such time.

Forster:

How do you feel now that you're standing on the land of Israel?

M4:

How I'm feeling? [speaking Russian]

Dalia:

He says he has no words to express it, to put it. Well, and I'll add for him that is, that was the dream of his life, for a long, long period of time, for some thirty years, and now the dream has come true, and he has suffered a lot for it. He's been a political prisoner for nine years in Siberia, just for

Zionism, they accused him of it. [12:00] And now, now, everything I hope will be alright.

Forster:

How many Jews do you think would leave the Soviet Union today if they were permitted freely to go?

M4:

That's a very difficult question, but I think that, hundred thousand, more hundred thousand. Yes.

Forster:

You think at least a hundred thousand Jews would be ready immediately to leave the Soviet Union if they were permitted to come?

Dalia:

Yes, I think so, definitely.

Forster:

We'll cut in on Abe Foxman who's interviewing two Soviet Jews who apparently speak Yiddish.

Yehuda Rabashkin:

[speaking Yiddish]

Forster:

Mr. Foxman has asked the man Riga how long ago he made his application to leave the Soviet. Three years.

Yehuda Rabashkin:

[speaking Yiddish] [13:00]

Forster:

What did, what did he say, Abe?

Abe Foxman:

After various petitions to the minister of interior, he told him to forget about his brother, to forget about Israel, and he'll be able to sleep better. He insisted and persisted and after three years of activity found himself today in Lod, Israel. [speaking Yiddish]

Yehuda Rabashkin:

Leningrad, Leningrad.

Abe Foxman:

He comes from Leningrad. [speaking Yiddish]

Yehuda Rabashkin:

Yehuda Rabashkin.

Abe Foxman:

Yehuda Rabashkin is his name. And you came with your wife?

Yehuda Rabashkin:

Da.

Abe Foxman:

Did you leave [speaking Yiddish]

Yehuda Rabashkin:

A brother.

Abe Foxman:

He left a brother in the Soviet Union. [speaking Yiddish with Yehuda Rabashkin]. Did you hear anything about those that were arrested? [Yiddish] They just disappeared? [14:00] And you haven't heard anything about them?

Yehuda Rabashkin:

Da.

Abe Foxman:

[Yiddish] Did you hear anything about the families? No, they don't hear anything about them.

Forster:

Now things are beginning to happen. Several desks have been set up with immigration inspectors and the normal, usual, blue uniform with badges. Orange juice, grapefruit juice, is all over the place in trays. Cookies and cakes are available for all. They don't seem to be particularly hungry. Apparently they're too excited to eat. Representatives of the El Al airlines and the Jewish Agency, the immigrations officer, are walking around, seeing whether or not anybody needs anything, wants anything. They seem to be patting immigrants on the shoulders, smiling to them, giving them a word of cheer and comfort, trying...trying in the final analysis to give them a sense that they are welcome [15:00].

M5:

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What you have heard is only the beginning in what is hopefully a brave, new Exodus. UJA hopes to produce and distribute additional taped material on the plight of the Soviet Jews, including personal interviews with immigrants to Israel who can best tell the story of this latest ingathering of Jews.



END OF AUDIO FILE [15:26]