

C-7398 Transcription

United Jewish Appeal. Operation Israel.

Julia Weiner answers questions. Spring 1972.

Mitchell Rosanski:

Uh, Mitchell Rosanski from Dallas, Texas. I'd like to know, first of all, when you were a child, undoubtedly, uh you've only been in Israel three years more or less, is this right?

Julia Weiner:

In Israel?

Mitchell Rosanski:

Yes.

Julia Weiner:

Half a year.

Mitchell Rosanski:

Okay. Um...why, first of all, um, shh!...Did your family, um, I don't want to say the word practice, but did the observe the, Jewish...

**Julia Weiner:**

No, nothing.

**Mitchel Rosanski:**

And, second of all, I'd like you to explain, personally yourself, how you went about getting out of Israel...I mean getting out Russia! Excuse me, getting out of Russia, moving to Israel.

**Julia Weiner:**

You mean that whole procedure?

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

Yes, I'd like just to know how you arranged it, and why. Of course it's pretty obvious why...

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, I, [01:00] I think I just got tired of...feeling humiliated all the time, I think was...the main reason. I didn't want to be humiliated anymore. I just want to be...a human being, like anybody else. A Jew.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

How long did it take you from when you first had to the idea and started doing something about it, 'til you finally left, got your visa?

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, if you mean when I finally...made my mind up, and uh...took a decision, it was spring last year. It means, I decided [02:00] that whatever will happen, I must go to Israel. I can't stay there anymore. I wasn't sure that...that it was so easy. Of course, I was sure that it is very difficult. But I knew that somehow I'll get out...

Then, my first step was...to find some people who feel the same way. It means, to find some Jews...and maybe to get some information from them, and of course [03:00]...to receive the support from them because, um, to be alone in this...enterprise, well...In this, it's very hard...to have everybody around you against you. It's very hard. So I needed friends, I needed people...like me. Where...to find them? My first thought was to go to synagogue. Not to pray, but to meet Jewish people, and it was the first time I [04:00] went to synagogue. I asked

some...old...man, "When is the next Jewish holiday?" And he told me that the next Jewish holiday is the first Seder. It was, uh, I think, 21<sup>st</sup> of April, last year. I went to synagogue and there was a crowd, mostly young people, singing and dancing and screaming, "We are Jews!" It was their prayer. Most of them weren't [05:00] religious, and I think they're only prayer was...the words, "We are Jews!" So, I joined one group, and uh, I asked them, do they want to leave Russia and go to Israel? And some of them said yes, and I learned that some of them are trying to do that for years, some of them for months, and I learned that some of them left Russia already. They have some friends who left for Israel, and so [06:00]...it was possible. It was...difficult but possible.

Then...my next step was to find some relatives in Israel, because you know, in order to apply for a visa you have to have an invitation from your relatives in Israel. Finally I found some very distant relatives, and I wrote a letter asking them for invitation. It took a long time to get an invitation from them. They were ready to send it straight away, but their first invitation [07:00]...didn't get to, to me. I could- I didn't receive it. I just got a letter saying that they sent it, but it never arrived.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

Do you feel that, uh, your mail at that time was being...

**Julia Weiner:**

I didn't feel, I knew

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

You knew there was...?

**Julia Weiner:**

Yes.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

Both your outgoing and incoming mail?

**Julia Weiner:**

Yes, for foreigner countries, not inside Russia. So, I asked them again, and they sent it again, and finally I got it.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

Does it occur that, um, invitations come to people from...uh, people who are not relatives but uh...

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, you can guess. [08:00] Because not everybody has relatives in Israel.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

If you write to someone can you, can you arrange...

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, they have ways...to let people know that they want to get an invitation, and uh, in a way we feel that everybody in Israel are-

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

Brothers!

**Julia Weiner:**

...our real relatives.

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

[indistinct] bloodline

**M1:**

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Julia Weiner:**

Yes, I do

**Mitchell Rosanski:**

[indistinct]

**M2:**

Do you, uh...so I wanted to ask you two questions. One is, was your feeling, or not just yours but other Jews in Russia, feeling towards Israel stimulated during the Six-Day War...

**Julia Weiner:**

Of course it was!

**M2:**

...was there any feeling prior to the Six-Day War, um...?

**Julia Weiner:**

I think that [09:00], long before Six-Day War, there were very strong feelings for Israel, but...any information about Israel is very scarce...in Soviet Union. What we learned...from Six-Day War, one very important thing, that Jewish people...are not always weak people, not always humiliated people, that they can fight, and win! So, why can't we fight and win, too?

**M3:**

[10:00] Let me ask you this: is there, is the strong feeling to go to Israel, or the stronger feeling to leave Russia? In other words, if the United States were to open its immigration laws and Russian Jews could come to the United States as freely as they can go to Israel...would there be a greater immigration to the United States, or would the draw to Israel be stronger?

**Julia Weiner:**

Speaking about Russian Jews, not all Soviet citizens but Jews, I think that for them...the most important thing is to go out of Russia to Israel, not just to go out of Russia. Because [11:00]...to leave Russia for any other...I'm not talking about



every Jew in Soviet Union, I can't speak for everybody, but for most, most of them, I think, to leave Russia and to go just to any other foreigner country, it wouldn't be a solution of their problem, because their problem is to become Jews, to find a place where they belong to, and they have a very strong feeling that they belong to their people in Israel.

**M3:**

You mentioned an interesting problem, which is...a growing one, I think, in Israel, and that is [12:00] uh the feeling on the part of Israelis, if there is that feeling, of fear of too many Russian immigrants, or too many Jewish, too many Jewish people into, uh, from Russia. Is this, uh, is this a feeling that you have, or is this something that you have experienced in Israel since you've been there?

**Julia Weiner:**

Well I think that...American Jews created an image of Soviet Jew as a fighter, a hero, a...leader. Don't forget that Soviet Jews, like everybody else, are just people [13:00], and they may fight...inside Russia, for their visas, but when they come to Israel...they are again just human beings, with all

their weakness, with all their...needs for help, they are not fighters anymore, they are not heroes anymore, and they need what everybody else needs. But people in Israel as also [laughs] just people. They are very glad...[14:00] that Soviet immigrants come to Israel. They understand, generally, that it is good for Israel and it is good for Jewish people. I emphasize, they understand the problem generally, but when they are concerned personally, when their jobs are concerned, it's very natural that they may be afraid of invasion of uh, highly skilled Soviet professionals, who may be, sometimes, even better in their professions than Israelis are...[15:00] so they, sometimes, they are afraid that these people will take their jobs. It's quite natural, I, I think. And, uh, I personally am so certain that my place in Israel, that nothing can give me a feeling I'm not wanted there, and moreover I feel that even if somebody says, "Oh, you come and you want to take my job," for me it's nothing. I know that all I can do for Israel is to be there, to live, to live there. This is the only [16:00] support I can bring to my country, and for most Russians, Jews, ex-Russian Jews, this is obvious. But you know, life...is a life. And sometimes, you get lonely, you are homesick, and you write just this letter I mentioned before. There is nothing Soviet Jews are afraid of.

They fear they are not wanted in Israel. This is the only thing which can stop them. I tell you, the only thing.

**M3:**

Let me just ask you one last question. There, there was, I don't want to doubt, but there was a feeling in, uh, [17:00] there were groups of Soviet Jews that came to Israel recently, with a decision in advance, how they arrived at that I don't know, of certain places that they would, they wanted to be located, and very definite opinions as to where they wanted to be located. And there was some difficulty in regard to locating them in places other than they had, uh...

**Julia Weiner:**

All this is true. You are completely right, and some people coming from Russia are sometimes too demanding.

**M3:**

Where did...the question I really was going to ask is, how do they, how do they, or what makes them decide, when they're in the Soviet Union...

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, some rumors, or they have relatives there, or they think that they'll find easily a job there, or they think [18:00] that the climate is eas- uh, more...

**M3:**

There aren't any religious elements to that...?

**Julia Weiner:**

There are...some of them, for some of them, it's very important for religious people, they want to live in religious villages there, farms. For religious people...[unclear] very important reason, just find a place to, to be housed where they have a religion, religious community. They have many, many reasons to...to choose some place or another. And they are not always right. They...[19:00] not always do they understand all difficulties which faces Israel in absorbing them. That's right, but there is nothing to do with it. [unclear]

**M3:**

Let me ask you...

**M4:**

I'd love to [unclear; noise of microphone moving]...but everyone should have first, first go around question, before we take a second...

**M6:**

I just wanted to comment on, on this thing, and I don't think that the problem of people wanted to live in one particular place in Israel as opposed to another particular place in Israel is unique with the Jews that are coming in now. I can re- recall in '68, uh, you had people coming in from uh central Europe [background comment] and those, professional people [20:00], could not see going to kibbutzim [Julia Weiner: Right.] There were only two places in the world that they wanted, that Jerusalem and uh, Tel Aviv, and uh they had all sorts of reasons as to why the doctor should uh, be one of four that are in her block in Tel Aviv, and you've got kibbutzim that are on the borders that people have got to go uh 25 miles to find the nearest doctor. [background voices]. This is not a unique problem with the people coming in from Russia.

**Julia Weiner:**

No, but what is unique...

**M4:**

I want to make reference to Bernstein's statement, on his tape, and that is that, you know, this is a problem that has to be solved with the Russians, uh, a hell of a lot quicker than it was with the, the people from all the Moroccan, Morocco.

**Julia Weiner:**

And it is connected. You know, why all this problem of uh Black Panthers. Where from...I think the disconnect [unclear; microphone noise]...[21:00] from Russia too!

**M4:**

Certainly, any time, any time that a person sees that uh somebody who's coming in receives things that they don't receive, there's uh, uh, an area where they uh want to demand it, and uh being vocal, and uh bringing your cause and pleading it uh...[Julia Weiner: So, I think that...] is the way that action is gonna be gotten. They work for three years, that I know of, without getting any action other than a stall. Uh, it

was in budgets and budgets never got to that point because there wasn't enough money.

**M7:**

...what is the comparative living standard that the average...coming out of Russia, his experience in Russia is, compared to what you find...[Julia Weiner: In Israel]...in Israel?

**Julia Weiner:**

It depends on what part of Russia they came. If they came [22:00] from Moscow or from Leningrad or from other big cities, their level of living was more or less the same as in Israel. If they came from small towns or villages in Russia, it was much lower. But they expect more, and you can't just change people in a few weeks, or a few months. It's not a question of education. It's a question of help. Just now, the problem is not to stop immigration from Russia...[223:00] to, not to do anything which may stop this immigration. And then we can solve other problems.

[indistinct from moderator?]

**M8:**

Is it possible that you might be afraid of reprisals, or have you sent any invitations to any friends of yours and invited them to Russia- I mean, to Israel?

**Julia Weiner:**

Well...not m- I personally, can't do it yet. Well, because I can't write that I would give them all support they need, and officially you need, in your invitation, must be written that you are able to...to help them. But...[24:00]

**M8:**

Financially?

**Julia Weiner:**

Financially. Well, but, I think I help some of them to get out of Russia.

**M9:**

What are you going to be doing in Israel?

**Julia Weiner:**



Working!

**M9:**

[laughter] What kind of work?

**Julia Weiner:**

Now I'm working in Hebrew University in Jerusalem...In...society of history, they are concerned with history of Soviet Jews. This kind of work I can do now without a good knowledge of Hebrew, [25:00] but with a good knowledge of Russian.

**Moderator:**

Uh, uh, we're planning to uh, break, and our guest is going to take a, uh...she has a one o'clock plane but there's, there's one at 1:20 and 1:25 and what have you. But if there are any other questions, uh, you know, I wanna...It's very important that this whole very small group of fellas across the country understand what's cooking, because we're going to be talking about this for the next four or five months, and it's very important that you feel very comfortable, uh, with this particular subject matter, because this is really the guts of

the conversation this year...Uh, so please, hone in on your questions...[microphone noise]

[several voices]

**M10:**

Uh, I don't feel that we've gone beyond the point...[26:00] in Russia, where you made your decision at the synagogue to go. You may not want the remainder on tape, ah I didn't know whether you wanted to go beyond that...[microphone noise]...don't want [unclear] tape, surely we can shut the machine off, uh...[Julia Weiner: No, I didn't] but what? What are...once the group was, uh, you had discussed this with the group, then what?

**Julia Weiner:**

Then I asked for an invitation, then I...I got it. And then, was a most painful...thing I had to do. And this most painful thing is to ask for a reference from your work...because to make an application you need a recommendation [27:00] from your job. It's obviously nonsense, because who needs a reference from your job? But they do it in purpose, and their purpose is quite obvious. When you ask your boss for a recommendation, and

you say, "I need this recommendation for Department of Visas, in order to make an application, just to go to Israel." When you say so...everybody around you in your work knows [28:00] that you are a Zionist, that you are...persona non grata in Soviet Union. And, uh...it is a crucial point. From that, that moment on, you know that you can't stop your efforts. You must continue because there is no life for you in Soviet Union. There is no professional career; there is nothing left for you in Soviet Union. You must continue. But it's not so easy to get a recommendation. Your boss can say, "I just never heard about this kind of things [29:00], and, and uh I won't give you anything like that." And uh, there is not, no official way of getting this recommendation from him. You just insist, and you complain, and you write letters, and finally you get it. Then...you have to get a permi- a permission, an agreement from your parents, if your parents are not going with you.

**M10:**

Are you immediately fired from your job?

**Julia Weiner:**

Not immediately. Not always immediately. But what they do immediately, they call a meeting, and uh, they say that you are not a Soviet citizen, that you are a bad Soviet citizen [30:00], that you are an enemy. They always emphasize that you are an enemy of Soviet people. And you know what is, what it is to be an enemy of Soviet people. Under Stalin, it was straight away to the concentration camps. Now it's not a straight way, but it can be a way. Not always go to the concentration camp. It may be the way to...mental hospital. And it is the worst thing which may happen to you, because from [31:00]...this hospital there is no way out. You have no sentence, you have no, you don't know for how long you are there, and they use all kind of treatment to make you mad and for them you are mad, you are insane, because somebody wanting to leave Russia for Israel is insane.

**M10:**

Catch 22.

**Julia Weiner:**

And, uh...ah they make terrible things with people in these mental hospitals. And they can finally make them really sick, and nobody will know. [32:00] But, there are other things that

they can do. They can arrange something on the street, and you are arrested for hooliganism. This is their favorite word for Jewish activists, 'hooligan.' You are watched, you are followed, your conversations are taped, and they make it quite obvious. They even don't hide it. We used to, when we were talking about important matters, [33:00] we used to write notes, not to speak lou- aloud.

Well, when you ask your parents for permission, and they are ready to give it to you, they have to stamp it, to get it stamped in their house committee, there are house committees in every house. So...when they go there, your parents go there, and ask for their permission to be stamped, all their house knows that their children are going to Israel, and it is very, very hard for them... [34:00] So, Soviet authorities do everything they can to stop you, to discourage you, but...they don't succeed.

Then, you apply. You gather all your papers, and you make an application. Of course you, you have to fill all kind of forms for this, then you make an application, and you wait. You wait for two months, three, four, five. Some people wait for years. I was lucky enough. I waited for three months [35:00], and then, like everybody else, I got a card saying 'Call this

number.' That's all. And I knew straight away what was this number. I called this number, and a voice told me your application for an exit Visa to Israel is rejected. I said, "Why?" She said, "We don't answer this kind of questions." I said, "Why...uh, why don't you answer this kind of questions?" She said, "This kind of questions we don't answer either." And [36:00] she said, "Don't complain. Don't write letters to United Nations and so on...Don't take part in any demonstrations. Don't do anything. You will never leave Russia, you will never go to Israel. You will stay here forever." That was all. Then, I have done exactly...

**M10:**

Had you been fired, at that time, yet?

**Julia Weiner:**

Yes. I was, I wasn't fired, but I just lost all sources of uh...work. I was a freelancer then. So, I wasn't employed.

[37:00] But I just, they just...didn't need me, anymore.

**M10:**

It's interesting, all these things the person on the other end of the line told you not to do. I get the feeling that they're like telling you what to do if you wanna get out!

**Julia Weiner:**

Yes, I have done exactly the opposite they told me.

**M10:**

Well, it's like she's given you the list of things to do...

**Julia Weiner:**

Yeah, because she knew what people are doing usually.

**M10:**

But most people do what you did, don't they?

**Julia Weiner:**

Well, not everywhere, because...people used to do nothing, just to wait. But, this last year, and especially in Moscow...people started to do things. So, she knew what I am going to do, and she told me not to do it, but [38:00]...I did everything she told me not to do.

END OF AUDIO FILE [38:07]



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