

TR-3819 Transcription

Friedman, Hebert A. Interview with Leah Machinson and Daniel

Bludz. [Petah Tikva, Israel]. 13 July 1972.

Herbert A. Friedman: [0:00:03] Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We're sitting here in a very, very lovely new apartment house in the city of Petah Tikva outside of Tel Aviv in the fore room apartment of Mr. Daniel Bludz and his family. Mr. Bludz came from the Soviet Union six months ago from the city of Vilna -- or seven months ago. I'm not sure. We can get the exact time from him. He is here with his father and a very lovely family. And around him is all the furniture, which has just arrived. And sitting across the table from him is another friend by the name of Mrs. Leah Machinson, who comes from Riga. And she is also in Israel only six or seven months.

So we have here two new immigrants, wonderful people. I've been talking to them before we started taping this program [0:01:00], and you will enjoy them very much. Mr. Bludz is a lawyer, a young man just over forty. And Mrs. Machinson has a whole intellectual career behind her in Russia dealing with music and many other things. And I would like now to turn to them and ask them some questions about their experiences, how they came here, what their thoughts and their hopes were. And so, I'll begin with the lady first.

Mrs. Machinson, why is it that you wanted to leave Russia at all, where you had a very good life as I understand it? Why did you want to come to Israel?

**Leah Machinson**: I wanted to come to Israel because I wanted to live in a Jewish country. I am educated in a Jewish culture.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: What do you mean you were educated in a Jewish culture? What happened to you? When you were a young person, you mean?

**Leah Machinson**: Yes, my whole family loved the Jewish people [0:02:00] and knew the Jewish history. And I know all about the Jews.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Who taught you? Where did you learn this?

**Leah Machinson**: My parents, and I wrote very much about it, and I was interesting in it.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Well, now if you had a Jewish background and a Jewish upbringing, couldn't you continue to have that in Russia? Why did you have to leave Russia?

**Leah Machinson**: In Russia, we have no schools, no theaters, no library, anything in Jewish. Nothing is in Jewish.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: And so what you came for was to look for a Jewish life here in Israel?

**Leah Machinson**: I want to be here in our country. We have a non-Jewish country. I want to help to build the country. And what is important, I wanted my children will grown and to live here in the country and know that they are in their [0:03:01] own country.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Well, that's a very natural, understandable statement of a mother, emotional toward her children. Mr. Bludz, you are a lawyer, a trained man with an analytical mind. What was your reason for wanting to come here?

**Daniel Bludz**: My reason is similar one. I also think that it's one way for a Soviet Jew who wants to be a really Jew and to live a Jewish life, and to educate the children of him also in the Jewish spirit, it's the only way to went to Israel. And it was the reason I try my best to go to Israel, and the result, I

am here and I am very happy that I and my family and my two children, we are here and will build together with all Israeli people the new, nice Israeli state.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Were you persecuted in Russia? Did you have any problems [0:04:00]? I'm really trying to get to the bottom of why it was that you left a country where you were apparently a free citizen, an equal citizen. What motivated you to leave? If there was a pogrom, if you were being attacked by the police, well, I could understand it. But they tell me that there was no physical persecution in Russia, so it must be something not physical. It must be something spiritual, or it must be something inside of you that wanted you to leave Russia and come here.

**Daniel Bludz**: I answer just that the reason is that in Russia, we have no any opportunity really to be Jews. We have all negative sides of being Jew, and we have no positive. We have no Jewish culture. We have no Jewish newspapers, Jewish schools, Jewish theater, and so on, and so on [0:05:00]. The Jewish people is in the way of assimilation, and the Soviet government is interested to assimilate the Jews. And those Jews, they don't want to be assimilate, those Jews they want to be really Jews,

they have only one way, it's my opinion, to go to their own state, to the state of Israel.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Well, that's very clear, okay. Now, we get all kinds of stories here in Israel, and I'm sure also in America, about the difficulties that are put in your way to get out. Mrs. Machinson, I would like to get from you your story of how you get out. What did you do to get out? When you applied for exit visa, what happened to you? Let's go slowly, to see if we can make it clear.

**Leah Machinson**: I worked for a manager in a concert hall.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: In a concert hall?

**Leah Machinson**: Yes, and I [**inaudible**] classic music [0:05:59], and it was interesting work. And I was material good settled. But when I wanted to leave to Israel, they threw me from the work.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: In other words, when you applied to leave Russia, they threw you out of the job.

Leah Machinson: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: Okay, so you were not working. What did you do then?

Leah Machinson: Then I began to protest. I began to write letters and to visit all the chairmen of the government and of the KBG.

Herbert A. Friedman: KGB, the Russian secret police.

Leah Machinson: Russian secret police. And in October of last year, I took part in a demonstration.

Herbert A. Friedman: A demonstration [0:07:00]?

Leah Machinson: Yes, in Moscow.

Herbert A. Friedman: I understand demonstrations in Moscow are not really allowed.

Leah Machinson: They are not allowed, no.

Herbert A. Friedman: So where was this demonstration?

Leah Machinson: What?

Herbert A. Friedman: Where was it?

Leah Machinson: The demonstration was in front of the house of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, where Brezhnev is sitting, living.

Herbert A. Friedman: The house of Brezhnev himself. Was he there when you were protesting?

Leah Machinson: No, Brezhnev at the same time, at the same hour when we were standing in front of the house, were in Paris.

Herbert A. Friedman: He was in Paris?

Leah Machinson: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: I don't suppose that you stood in the front of the house very long.

Leah Machinson: No, we stood for half an hour. We wanted to -- we had a letter, and we wanted to give it to the secretary.

Herbert A. Friedman: Did they take the letter?

Leah Machinson: No. They [0:08:00] -- there was very many high police, and so the center of this, and they brought all buses and wanted to bring us away from the place. But we protested, didn't want to go with the bus. Then they took us and threw us in the buses.

Herbert A. Friedman: When you say they threw you, you mean they took you physically?

Leah Machinson: With power, yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: With power?

Leah Machinson: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: And they pushed you into the bus?



Leah Machinson: Pushed in the buses. There were five buses for the ninety-two people there.

Herbert A. Friedman: Ninety-two Jews.

Leah Machinson: Jews from many towns.

Herbert A. Friedman: Riga?

Leah Machinson: Riga, Vilna, Moscow, Leningrad.

Herbert A. Friedman: So it was a group from -

Leah Machinson: Caucasus.

Herbert A. Friedman: -- all over the country. Uh-huh. And they pushed ninety-two of you into the buses, and where did they take you?

Leah Machinson: They took us to the police in a room where they are bringing [0:09:00] drinkers and bandits.

Herbert A. Friedman: Drunkards and bandits.

Leah Machinson: Drunkards and bandits, yes. And there we were, sitting for twenty hours.

Herbert A. Friedman: Ooh, twenty hours.

Leah Machinson: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: And they were asking you questions?

Leah Machinson: Yes, they came great police from the center, and they took us questions, but we didn't answer.

Herbert A. Friedman: Did they make you sign a confession?

Leah Machinson: Yes, but we didn't sign it.

Herbert A. Friedman: You didn't sign it?

Leah Machinson: No, not one.

Herbert A. Friedman: Did they do anything to hurt you physically?

Leah Machinson: No.

Herbert A. Friedman: Nobody was beaten?

Leah Machinson: No, beaten no. But we didn't get to eat.

Herbert A. Friedman: No food for twenty-four hours?

Leah Machinson: Only water.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well then, what did they do? You were from all over the country. Did they send you back to your cities?

Leah Machinson: They took us in buses and sent you away [0:09:59] with the railway.

Herbert A. Friedman: To the railway station?

Leah Machinson: To the railway station in the center of Moscow. And there, we had high police and high soldiers, and they put us in the railway. And we opened the windows and sang a song, "Let My People Go" in Russian.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: What an act of protest. This took a lot of courage. With the police all around you and soldiers all around you, you were singing "Let My People Go" in Russian, so that the other people could hear.

**Leah Machinson**: And could understand us.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay, well when you got back to your hometown, then did the police leave you alone, or they were still bothering you?

**Leah Machinson**: They leave us alone, but we protested. We sent a telegram to the [0:11:00] chief procurer of -

**Herbert A. Friedman**: The prosecutor, the chief prosecutor, yes.

**Leah Machinson**: -- yeah, of the Soviet Union against what they did with us.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: How long after that did it take before they finally gave you exit visa for you to get out?

**Leah Machinson**: It took three months after.

Herbert A. Friedman: Three more months.

Leah Machinson: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: In the three months, did they hurt you? Did they threaten you? What did -

Leah Machinson: Yes. They frightened me, and they wanted to arrest me. But lastly, I took -- I got the --

Herbert A. Friedman: The permission.

Leah Machinson: The permission, yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well, you know, if you people in the radio audience could be looking at this lady now, who is talking in such a simple, modest way about what she went through, you would realize [0:12:00] that you're talking about a real heroine.

Because here she came up against the whole power of the Russian state, police, army. Made a protest in front of the house of Brezhnev, wrote letters to the Russian government, to the United Nations. And you know, she sort of ends the story in a very

simple way that finally, she got out, and she is here. I think we should realize that it takes an extraordinary amount of heroism on the part of the Jews of Russia to come here.

Well, I would like to turn the question now, for a minute, back to Mr. Bludz, and ask him a different one. He's a lawyer. I'd like to ask him, since he's been in Israel for seven months, what he's been doing, what he's been through, and what his hopes are for the future.

**Daniel Bludz**: Well, during five months, I was in the absorption center. I started Hebrew, and I am very happy that during this time, I learned the Hebrew in a good level [0:13:00]. In a good level, it means I can speak with Israelis and they understand me, and I understand them.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: I think that's pretty good after a few months.

**Daniel Bludz**: Well, and I hope that during short relatively time, I will know Hebrew in a good level, I hope. Well, now after the absorption center, I am thinking about the general direction of my life, about my profession, and I hope to be a lawyer, and I want and I try my best to be a lawyer in Israel,

too. It must be a long process during maybe two years. I'll learn, and I'll work. I have a lot of offers of a job, and I hope in the near time to begin to work maybe in the system of the Jewish agency to help in the very interesting and very important work of the absorption of the new *Aliyahim* in Russia.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Mrs. Machinson, let me ask you a question [0:14:00]. We have only a few minutes. What is one word that you would like to say to the people of America?

**Leah Machinson**: I want to say to the Jews in America, to the youth of America, come to us. If not come to us, as help us. Help us to do our country strong. Then Israel will have a opportunity to help us, Russian Jews.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: You're asking the Jews of America to help Israel, then Israel can help absorb the Russian Jews better, okay.

**Leah Machinson**: Yes, and to all people who hear, as not the Jews, I want to ask do much protest, and it helps the Jews in Russia to leave Russia.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Protests against the Russian government help Jews to leave Russia.

**Leah Machinson**: Yes.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: And so you are urging people to continue the protests, let my people go.

**Leah Machinson**: Yes.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Okay, Mr. Bludz, the last word is yours. What have you got to say [0:15:01] to the Jews of America and the non-Jews of America? By the way, have you ever met any non-Jews?

**Daniel Bludz**: Yes, of course. When I was in absorption center near Haifa, I have spoken with a lot of American groups, and I've spoken especially with the governor of the state Virginia. If I'm not mistaken, he isn't a Jew. And it was a very nice meeting. And during this meeting, during the meetings with the American, I told them, and I want to use the possibility, the opportunity now, to say the same words. First of all, we are very thankful for the Jews of USA and non-Jews of USA for they



struggle to help us to go from Russia. It was a very important struggle, and I think that in the result of this struggle, we are now here.

I also want to tell not only as immigrant from Russia, but also as a citizen [0:16:01] of Israel, a new citizen of Israel, that we are very thankful for this help, help in the absorption, very important work. What Israel receives from the USA, from the administration of USA, from the American people, Jews and non-Jews, Israel needs the help. It's a very difficult task to absorb a lot of Soviet Jews they came. And in the future, I ask the American people, the American administration to continue that two very important things: The struggle for the right of go from Russia, and the help in the very important absorption work. Thank you.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Thank you, Mr. Bludz, and thank you Mrs. Machinson. I think that, in a very few minutes, in a very few words, you've given a very clear picture of why you were motivated to come out, what struggles [0:17:00] you had to get out, what hopes you have in this new country of Israel to which you are obviously adjusting very well and very happy here, and what you want people in the free world of America to do for you and for Israel. I am very grateful to you for the very clear way

in which you expressed this, and I hope that, for both of your families, everything goes well in the future and that you have a good, happy, successful life here. Thank you very much.

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