

TR-3817 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. Interview with Batya Untershatz and Dori Parola. [Jerusalem, Israel.]. 21 May 1972.

Herbert A. Friedman: [0:00:00] Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience, we have a very interesting interview for you tonight. I'm sure you'll find it quite fascinating. There are two people sitting here with me. We will talk ladies first. One is Mrs. Batya Untershatz, and the gentleman's name is Professor Dori Parola.

Mrs. Untershatz and Professor Parola have come to Israel within the past year from different parts of the Soviet Union. I would like to start with Mrs. Untershatz, and we will have a friendly, personal conversation, in the course of which I think her story will come out, and you will find it fascinating, as also will the story of Professor Parola.

Mrs. Untershatz, how long are you in Israel? When did you come?

Batya Untershatz: I came to Israel in 1971, and I am already more than a year [0:01:00] in Israel.

Herbert A. Friedman: And you speak Hebrew already?

Batya Untershatz: I speak Hebrew.

Herbert A. Friedman: Very good, where did you learn?

Batya Untershatz: I studied Hebrew in ulpan.

Herbert A. Friedman: What is ulpan?

Batya Untershatz: Ulpan is a certain school where we have also all the possible living conditions. And we have very nice teachers that, in the course of five months, are helping us to study Hebrew. Because without the basic knowledge of Hebrew, we can't start working here.

Herbert A. Friedman: Professor, did you also learn Hebrew so quickly?

Dori Parola: Yes, I studied Hebrew here over three months, it was, only. And then I started working here at the university.

Herbert A. Friedman: Which university?

Dori Parola: At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Herbert A. Friedman: What work?

Dori Parola: I work here as a professor in the department of physiology.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yes, Professor Parola is a very famous physiologist [0:02:00] with a long story back in the Soviet Union, and I want to come to him in a minute, because his daughter came to Israel before he did. Well, you tell the story, Professor. Tell how your family came, and then how you came.

Dori Parola: Well, it was a long dream for us to come to Israel. But in Russia, they do not let scientists out, and the only possibility for us was to send my wife and my two little children, a daughter of eight and a son of six years, to Israel. And then, it took over one-and-a-half year of pretty hard struggle to get the possibility to go to Israel.

Herbert A. Friedman: That took a certain amount of courage, to send the wife and the children first. Now, didn't you risk the fact that maybe you would not be able to get out because you

were an important scientist [0:03:00]? And then, if they went ahead of you and you couldn't get out, you would never see them again.

Dori Parola: Yes, there was a certain risk of such kind. But without risk, we would never have been here in Israel. It was the only possibility for us. We had to risk.

Herbert A. Friedman: Mrs. Untershatz, did you have any risks?

Batya Untershatz: I think every Jew in Russia that wants to come to Israel has a risk in his life. Because not everybody goes through such difficulties as Professor did, but everybody has it. Because sometimes, they make problems just when you come to your work, and you see Russian people that are speaking that you are a Jew, or something of this kind. Or just in the streets, and every minute, you feel that you are a Jew, and everybody is just [0:04:00] trying you to feel that you are a Jew, and you are not equal with all the people in Russia.

So we came from Lithuania, and we didn't have so large, strong difficulties as Professor. But we were waiting for the permission to come for 14 years.

Herbert A. Friedman: Fourteen years?

Batya Untershatz: Yes. And you see, so we needed no struggle, nothing but we needed patience. And I think it's just they wanted to play on nerves, as we call it in Russia.

Herbert A. Friedman: To play on nerves.

Batya Untershatz: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: Do you have good, strong nerves?

Batya Untershatz: Now we had to have.

Herbert A. Friedman: Listen, you need it in Israel. Here, you need strong nerves. [LAUGHTER] I'm sorry, go ahead.

Batya Untershatz: And I am very glad that I came here, because I came here with my family, with my son, with my husband, and with my husband's parents. But my parents are still in Russia, and I hope that they [0:05:00] will come sometime.

Herbert A. Friedman: Where are they still, your parents?

Batya Untershatz: My parents are still in Vilna.

Herbert A. Friedman: Vilna?

Batya Untershatz: Yeah, it's the capitol of Lithuania.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah, yeah, yeah, my father was born in Vilna in 1891. We're talking 80 years ago, so when you say Vilna, something rings in my head. I was born in America. I never saw Vilna. Well look, your father and mother are living back in Vilna.

Batya Untershatz: Yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: And are they in trouble or difficulty, or in danger or something, or not?

Batya Untershatz: Not, but you see, my father is simply afraid to give an application to come here, because he's not sure about his future work. Because if he starts to give the applications to come, he can be dismissed from his work, and it's the only source of living, his salary.

Herbert A. Friedman: So if he is dismissed from his job, he has nothing to live on.

Batya Untershatz: Yeah.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well, that would be a big risk for him to take.

Batya Untershatz: Yes, sure [0:06:00].

Herbert A. Friedman: Professor, you talked about your daughter. There's one thing I would like to ask. There were some newspaper stories some time ago about a letter, which your daughter wrote to the premier of the Soviet Union. I'm not sure of the details. Is that correct?

Dori Parola: Yes, it is. My daughter wrote a letter to Mr. Kosygin, and she asked him to let me out. This letter was published in the newspapers here in Israel. It was published also in the American newspapers.

Herbert A. Friedman: Did you say she was eight years old, and she wrote such a letter?

Dori Parola: And she wrote such a letter, yes. And it actually helped me. I am sure that without this newspaper, without this letter, they wouldn't have let me out from Russia.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well, you both went through some very hard experiences, and now you are here. Professor [0:07:00], you are here about one year?

Dori Parola: Yes, 11 months.

Herbert A. Friedman: Eleven months. And Mrs. Untershatz?

Batya Untershatz: A little bit more than a year.

Herbert A. Friedman: So, we say now you are here a year, and by the way, I am also here now just one year, living from America. Now, we have all had problems getting settled in Israel, yes?

Batya Untershatz: Small problems.

Herbert A. Friedman: Small problems. I would like you to give me some feeling how it is to live here. Do you like it here? First tell me the good side, then we will go into the bad side, the difficult side. Are you getting enjoyment out of life here?

Dori Parola: Well, the life here, I enjoy it very much. It's very nice. The country is beautiful. I was pretty good informed about the country and the situation here so that, well, when I came here, I didn't want wonder much [0:08:00].

Herbert A. Friedman: How were you informed?

Dori Parola: Well, I listened for over 10 years to Radio Israel, Kol Israel, and this gave me beautiful information about the life here.

Herbert A. Friedman: I see.

Dori Parola: Well, for me personally, it wasn't very hard to get adjusted to the life here. After the ulpan, I was offered good employment at the university, and there were no much problems for me.

Herbert A. Friedman: Have you traveled around the country? Have you seen some things?

Dori Parola: Yes, I have seen the north of the country. It's very nice. It's fascinating.

Herbert A. Friedman: And your children, how do they like it?

Dori Parola: They like it very much. They like it, I would say, because they have got a lot of freedom here, much more than in Russia.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah, my children [0:09:00] have more freedom here than they had in New York, also, I can tell you that. Same thing.

Dori Parola: Yeah, and they enjoy this freedom very much.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah. Mrs. Untershatz, how is it with you?

Batya Untershatz: My impressions are just the same as Professor's, because when I came here, we were in ulpan. Because ulpan is given to people with high education, so we were lucky

to get the ulpan. And just when we were staying there, we had a lot of trips, and we were traveling all over Israel. And when we were in Russia, we had a lot of post cards from Israel, and we didn't believe that Israel is so nice, just as in the post cards. But when I came here, I saw that it is just even more beautiful than in the post cards, and this very nice, you know. I thought it's just the propaganda to show the country from the nicest side. But I see that it's even better [0:09:59].

What is the most striking thing here is the democracy, because we can speak what we want to speak about, and we can go to whatever place we want to go. We are just free people. We can meet everybody and speak with everybody, and we are not afraid.

Herbert A. Friedman: That must be a wonderful feeling.

Batya Untershatz: Yeah, it's so wonderful you can't imagine it. Because for example, I was working in Russia for a small time with Intourist, we call it, with American people. And I was afraid to speak a word that is not suitable for the Russian government, you know. And all the time, I was afraid of this. So I wanted to tell them the life of the Jews in Russia, and the life of the common people in Russia, and I was afraid to speak

about it. And now here, I have the nicest possibility to speak to American people [0:11:00] and to tell them my impressions.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah, when I said before that your children, Professor, have more freedom here, and I said my children have more freedom here, I was talking of course of a different kind of freedom. You were talking about freedom of the spirit and the soul and the mind. I was using the word freedom in a physical sense. New York is a hard place to bring up children. Here, they can run around free outside. Your freedom is more important, because you were speaking of a man's freedom of a soul.

Dori Parola: Yes, it's just so. Look here, I didn't -- she is so much oppressed in Russia. I contacted with a lot of scientists, which have come to the Academy of Sciences, which I worked over 15 years. When I had a possibility to contact and not to look for every word, which I am talking [0:12:00] rhythm. But nevertheless, this feeling which Mrs. Untershatz has just told, it never left me. And here -

Herbert A. Friedman: Even you. Even a famous scientist where you could meet other scientists, other parts of the world, still you had a feeling.

Dori Parola: It's just still I had it. And here, I have lost it.

Herbert A. Friedman: It's all gone.

Dori Parola: It's gone.

Herbert A. Friedman: All right, now listen, I would like to go to another side for a moment. We all love Israel, and we are happy you are here, and the Jews of America. And also many non-Jews in America, who are watching the movement, they are also happy you are coming from the Soviet Union and coming to live here. But let's face it: We are all grown up people. There are difficulties here, too. I would like to ask each one of you one question. We have a few minutes left. Give me one difficulty which is here, and one way it could be corrected [0:13:00]. Because always, it's important how to improve a situation.

Batya Untershatz: Yeah. I think the main problem for me, for example, and I know a lot of people that have the same problem,

it is the problem to get a job here, for a philologist, I mean. Because we come here with a knowledge of Russian language, of English. Our English is, I think, it's not so good.

Herbert A. Friedman: No, it's not so bad, though.

Batya Untershatz: Because we are not American, not English people, and so it is very difficult for us to get a job here, to be adjust to Israeli conditions and no end. I was looking for a job for a long time, and afterwards, I learned that there are different courses, some subjects to study and to change the profession. And so, I decided to go to take a course to study the country [0:13:59] and just to work with the tourists to show them the country. I think this is the problem, just to give to the newcomers the proper information about all the possible ways to study and to change the profession.

Herbert A. Friedman: Ah-hah, so you think newcomers are not given enough information?

Batya Untershatz: No, not.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well, this should certainly be improved. The Jewish Agency and the government, I think, must take better steps to inform the newcomers, more accurately, what life is like here.

Batya Untershatz: Yeah.

Herbert A. Friedman: Professor, do you have one thing that you would like to comment?

Dori Parola: Yes, it is unfortunately not to be improved. It's the rather high temperature here. Look here, I come from Leningrad. The temperature here is just a problem which I have to get adjusted to.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah.

Dori Parola: There are some things, surely. I would say maybe the children [0:15:00], they have got too much freedom. Something which can be improved here in matters of education. We have to discuss these things.

Herbert A. Friedman: More discipline.

Dori Parola: More discipline, just, it's -- yes.

Herbert A. Friedman: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I feel the same way.

Dori Parola: Maybe there is something here, which is to be improved. But, well look here, for me it was no many problems which made my absorption here difficult. It was really so, and I do not complain.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well one thing which neither one of you has mentioned, but which I have noticed, is the difficulty with housing. We are not building enough housing here fast enough. We are not building it in the places where you folks would like to have it. And I want to say, although this may sound like a commercial, but this is really [0:16:00] something to do with money.

We could improve the housing if we had more money. We must have more money. We must build more houses. We hope more people will come from Soviet Union. The houses should be disbursed more. There should be more in the Tel Aviv area, which is where everybody wants to go, and does not have to go farther out in different parts of the country.

But you know, I think when we are finished with it all, we are looking at something very good here. Because with all the difficulties, with all the difficulties, you will have a better life here personally, as people, I think.

Dori Parola: Surely. I hope so. I am sure that -

Herbert A. Friedman: As Jews, also, I think.

Dori Parola: As Jews. As people which like freedom. And people which like to live in their country, in their home country.

Herbert A. Friedman: Well, that's it. And to build a home country, we need the Jews [0:17:00] of United States working together with the Jews of Israel, and the newcomers coming from Soviet Union. After all, here you have the three strongest Jewish communities in the world: Israel, Russia, America. And if the three of us will work together, I think we can build something here very good.

Dori Parola: Surely.

Herbert A. Friedman: The first word to the lady; the last word to the lady. You give us the last word, Mrs. Untershatz.

Batya Untershatz: I told already that I am very happy that I am in Israel. And here, I am a Jew. I am a real Jew, and my family is a Jewish family, and I never feel myself degraded here. And I just feel myself a real person here.

Herbert A. Friedman: Okay, let me thank you for coming, and I hope that life continues to be very good. And I hope we meet again outside of this radio interview and continue to develop our lives here together [0:18:00]. Thank you very much.

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