
FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is not about the facts and events in the lives of the inhabitants of the United States of America. The author has no knowledge about such things. Rather, this book is about a refugee family from the Soviet Union, about this family's feelings and experiences, their exploration of a new social environment, their discovery of the rules of life in their new country, and their gradual adaptation. This book is about the differences between the reality of, and this family's ideas about, the American way of life. It is about professionals who, for a long period of time, could not use their skills and knowledge, and their struggles to find work that suited their qualifications.

The reader should note that, in the United States, all people arriving from the former Soviet Union are typically called "Russians" regardless of their true nationality. Therefore, this word is in quotation marks to identify a person who is not actually Russian. Also, note that although the facts presented in this book are real, the names of the people (including the author's) have been changed.

The reader may need help identifying the family members mentioned in this book. Those who immigrated early in 1991 included Jacob (nicknames Yasha and Yashenka), his wife Mary Vera (May), and their adult son Alexey (nicknames Lesha and Leshenka), who came with his wife Catherina (Kathy) and their daughter, Diana (Yasenka). Alexey and Catherina's son, Israel (Nasya, Nasenka) was born after their arrival in the United States; he was sometimes called The Citizen because, for a long time, he was the only member of this large family who was a full citizen of the United States. Kathy's mother Rachel, stepfather Joseph, and grandparents Sofia (Grandma) and Yuriy (Grandpa) came to the United States about two years later. Moysey (Monya) is Jacob's beloved brother, who was living with his wife Margaret (Rita) in Israel.

After the author and her family left for the United States, the parents and grandmother of a family friend underwent a grueling, pre-immigration interview at the American Embassy in Moscow. To inform and aid them in the immigration process, May promised to write a detailed, sincere letter about her family's experiences, once she was acquainted with her new life. That letter was the first of May's to her friends and relatives.

The letters mention four families who were close friends of the refugees: Helen and Tim Ivanov, and the Moldavskys in the U.S.; Sarah and Theodore Ilyushin in Israel; the Andreevs in Moscow. The Ivanovs came to America long before the author's family.

This book would never have come into existence without the beloved friends and relatives with whom the author had long-term and sincere correspondence. The author is deeply grateful for her friends and relatives and their heartfelt, warm support. Without these dear people, not one letter would have been written and almost nothing would be left in the family memory about the beginnings of their new life, this unique trial that tested their qualities as human beings.

Friends Rose, her daughter Natalie, and son-in-law Andrew arrived in the U.S. before the author and her family. Natalie and Andrew assisted the family before their arrival and enlisted the support of the Jewish community during the family's first months here. As with all members of her family, the author is boundlessly thankful to these big-hearted, generous souls, as well as to the Jewish community, for all they did.

After their arrival in the U.S., the Ivanovs provided the author's family with invaluable psychological support. They were role models, providing moral and spiritual guidance through their weekly phone calls and personal sympathy. The gratitude of the author's family to the Ivanovs is without limits.

This book does not mention many more friends, including those to whom most of the letters were sent. The author does not wish to disturb the privacy of her beloved friends and relatives still living in Russia and in other countries all over the world.

The author is deeply grateful to her former colleague and dearest American friend, Kara Bennett, for her extraordinary help with

the English version of this book. When not called by the demands of her happy marriage, her beautiful daughter and wonderful son, or her work as a Harvard University senior biostatistician, Kara very kindly helped to make the first half of this English version of the book possible. She is not only a wonderful person, but also a really great friend.

My gratitude to my wonderful editor Anne R. Boy is enormous, as it is to my so very friendly and helpful publisher Michael Minayev.

With hope that this book may touch your feelings,

Mary Vera Dietter
Massachusetts, USA

**OUR FIRST YEAR IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*END OF APRIL 1991—A LITTLE LESS THAN ONE MONTH
SINCE OUR ARRIVAL*

(From May to Andrew's parents and grandmother in the Soviet Union)

Our dears!

This letter keeps my promise to you to write in detail about customs control, our flight over the ocean, meetings on American soil, our apartment, and our opinion of what to pack when coming here.

We are very glad to know that you successfully passed the interview at the American Embassy in Moscow. We can almost picture you with us and hugging each other—hopefully by the middle of September. Then you will at last see your cheerful, smiling grandson, with his mouth full of beautiful teeth and by whose wonderful face you will see that he spends most of his time outdoors in the fresh air. This is to his grandma Rosy's credit. She worships him and tries to spend all of her spare time with him. And this is almost all day long, except for the hours during which she cares for the doctor's children.

It is a pleasure to look at your children. You would think they were Americans, if they did not speak Russian. Their behavior (free and easy, yet dignified), their excellent English, their clothing, and total adjustment to the local way of life very much distinguishes Andrew and Natalie from all other members of the pretty sizeable Russian colony. Jacob had a chance to convince himself of Andrew's business knowledge and professionalism when Jacob came to him to get some advice concerning a subject that totally confused our friends. Jacob came home very happy with the discussion of the subject and said that a brilliant future must await Andrew in this country. Let it be so!

The not-so-big city where we live is lovely: green, clean, cozy. It is a huge pleasure to walk along its streets, to admire the colo-

nial-era buildings among which there are numerous buildings dedicated to different religions and their many trends. In the daytime and especially in the evening, you can walk without meeting another human being. Only cars rush by, either with a quiet rustling of tires, or playing very loud rock-pop-jazz music and driven by a young man jumping in time with the music and who, from overwhelming feelings and for additional space, has taken the roof off of his car. All intersections are marked clearly and have appropriate signal devices. Drivers strictly adhere to the traffic rules and enter the intersection only if it is free of pedestrians. But we have the impression from their behavior that these drivers are unusually polite to us. The basis of this politeness is their dread of very severe punishment for the violation of traffic rules. Aside from those penalties (\$300 for throwing a cigarette out of the car and onto the highway, plus several months of being in jail), the drivers are most of all afraid of the loss of their driver's license for a half-year or longer—without a car you really could not live here. All parts of life—from getting to the supermarkets, which are located at the border or outside of the city, to looking for a job, and getting to the workplace after you find one—require private transportation. In addition, a driver's license is the most important document used to identify a person. As in the Soviet Union, this is our passport and more (here we do not have to show many documents certifying our identity; a driver's license is sufficient). You use a driver's license at banks and at the post office, at supermarkets and other stores, at government offices, and at a potential workplace.

The city is located on several hills, and the city center (named Midtown, where we live) is located in a low place. The farther you go from the city center, the cleaner the air becomes (on the hills). However, because of the large amount of greenery in the center, the air is as it is in the Moscow suburbs, and maybe it is cleaner here. Very rich people who have houses in the city spend the majority of their lives in their suburban mansions. Such mansions compose small towns. It is almost impossible to get to such mansions without directions—where to leave the highway and where to turn to the left or to the right—because it is hard to distinguish such towns from the forest tracts that cover almost all of our state. This state consists of numerous hills mostly covered by forests. There are many such green towns. Excellent, near-mountain roads lead to these towns. The roads are rural highways, with speed limits of 50-55 miles/hour, which in the Russian metric system is more than 80 km/hour. In Russia, with the quality of the roads and the domestically manufactured cars, I

think it is hard to drive at such speeds even on straight roads, not to mention mountain roads. It is hard to imagine the Soviet Union producing cars for the public that could go from stock-still to surmounting sharp, upward slopes and then so confidently braking on the very sharp, downward slopes. Not far from our city is a mountain ski resort and I think, because of our city's terrain, mountain skiers here have a fun place to live, too.

In the daytime, the squirrels run and jump on the lawns, bushes, and trees. There are many songbirds here. While Leningrad is experiencing their white nights, the birds here sing almost twenty-four hours through. In the evenings, the sky is meant for astronomers. It is very beautiful.

You stroll along the streets and suddenly you see a rare pedestrian who has miraculously avoided the driver's seat of his car. Regardless of his age, sex, or skin color, he will almost always be the first to affably smile and say: "Haya!" (How are you) or "Haydont?" (How do you do?). At lunchtime (dinner break in Russia), many employees pour out onto the central streets. (You can recognize the employees in no time: The women, regardless of their age, are properly but beautifully dressed, wearing stockings, their hair nicely styled, and with their faces made-up. The men are dressed in clean, ironed clothes, all sparkling clean.) All are affable and will kindly smile at you, even though they do not need anything from you. In the Soviet Union, only pedestrians who are beautiful young women or very high bosses receive such attention. But you would be more amazed if you could see these employees at the end of their workday. Certainly, they are tired and rush to cover the distance to their car, to get home quickly and throw off all this semi-official apparel as soon as possible. However, there I am, walking along the street, and a young female employee is leaving her workplace, passing me in the opposite direction. When she sees me, such a kind, inspiring smile appears on her slightly tired face that it wrings my heart. Why do I deserve such kind, human behavior from her? Nevertheless, for her, this behavior is natural. From her cradle, she has seen only such behavior. And again, my thoughts go back to life in the Soviet Union. It pains and horrifies me to think of the people living there, who are not a bit worse off than people here are, and many of them are probably culturally and intellectually even richer. However, from the cradle their lives are so arranged that communication with them does not bring any kindness or love to themselves or to others, with the rare exceptions of those who are dear to the heart—one's friends, buddies, and good acquaintances.

You probably already know much of what I will write from your children's letters. I hope you'll excuse me for these "repetitions." I just would like to write about what is new for me, what I have learned, or what I think is important for you to know. So, I'll begin from the beginning—from Moscow.

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE FROM MOSCOW

Our preparations for departure from Moscow were flawed. At the end of our preparations, we left our apartment with many unsold items still in it. Our relatives from Kishinev, who lived there for several days after our departure, said the apartment gave the impression that its owners would return shortly. We did not take with us what jobless people who arrive in America really need. Even Jacob agrees, although in Moscow he insisted that we throw out everything and take nothing with us. What we packed in our carryon luggage was lost on the last leg of our flight, after the airline official in the New York airport insisted that we check our carryons, too.

It seems to me now that it is only possible to prepare properly for departure to this country if, while in Moscow, you can imagine the type of apartment you may occupy, daily life in these apartments, and the cost of top-priority objects here in America. I'll describe our apartment type later. I think your future apartment would be most like Lyuba's (we are not yet familiar with the various types of private apartments).

As to the cost of high-priority objects: Our family members concluded that everything here costs in dollars what it would cost in rubles in the Soviet Union. This is certainly a very rough estimate but, with a few exceptions, it is close to reality. (Food prices are as-of after April 2, and prices for goods are as-of before April 2.)

Our income is as follows: For the first two to three weeks, \$30 per week per adult (\$20 per child); after three weeks, half of this in cash (\$15) plus food stamps worth approximately \$3 per adult per day.

The typical requirements of the American way of life are: Shower in the morning and in the evening; wash hair at least twice a week; change underwear, men's shirts and, in fact, all garments daily. The cost of one washing-machine cycle is 75 cents, the same for the dryer. For example, after being here for 2 weeks and loosely following these American requirements, our children filled 3 washing machines and then 3 dryers (their family consists of 3 members) and spent \$4.50 on laundering!

THE CUSTOMS OFFICERS

Jacob got the impression that the focus and emphasis of the customs control officers depends on the flight type—whether it is direct to New York City or with a transfer. An evening flight had been strictly examined (so eyewitnesses said). Our flight was on Tuesday with a transfer at Frankfurt-on-Main. Our luggage was not weighed but the officers scrutinized luggage size, especially the size of the carryons. During this inspection, we got the impression that the aircraft would be able to accommodate some small handheld bags in addition to the carryon luggage. However, this did not apply to us, as we had nothing in addition to the carryons.

I took out of my carryon and put into a double plastic bag those items that had to be listed on the declaration form. The officer requested that we include on the form the details of each jewelry set (for example, ring plus earrings) and its value. The officer asked if we had diamonds. After our answer (“no”), the officer did not examine the plastic bag to look over the details of its contents. The officer asked if the two portraits in our bags were the images of Jacob and me.

Our children forgot to declare one of the paintings that they had permission to export from the Soviet Union. The painting was in their luggage and was discovered when it was displayed on the custom's X-ray monitor. The painting had to be taken out of the luggage. Our children did this. All necessary official labels were on this painting, the painting was a trifle, and was brought by our children only because it was a souvenir of some family events. Permission was granted to return the painting to the luggage. However, the officer ordered that another painting of our children's—a Soviet, fine-art, lottery prize—had to be deleted from the declaration form. The custom officer said that it was not a fine-art painting (that is, it did not deserve to have such a name).

There was a problem with our carryon. The contents of this bag only filled part of the total volume, but the size of the bag itself exceeded what was permissible. Do you remember what a problem it was to buy a bag of the required size? That is why, at home, Jacob insisted that one of our two carryons be put inside the other bag, which we were lucky to find even though it was not exactly right, and why Jacob insisted that we should stop searching for a bag matching custom's requirements. Jacob considered that, after custom's examination of the contents of the carryon, he would make this bag the required size by using a cord. However, the size of

the bag was checked before customs examined the contents of the carryon. In a big hurry, without using the cord (because it was, in our opinion, stupid to tie up the luggage before customs examined the bag's contents), Jacob failed to put this modified hand luggage into the Procrustean box which determines the size of the carryons. To the people who came to see us off, Jacob threw some of the items from our bag and thereafter successfully put the bag into the measuring box. After arriving in America, Jacob and Kathy regretted that they had not put those discarded necessities back into our bag. Such would have been possible if all of these operations had been done without agitation on our part. By the way, in the New York airport, in this same carryon, we had put my winter coat and, before this, the food package that I could not eat on the airplane but thought that I would eat during our layover. This carryon was lost forever.

Each piece of luggage must have labels on which are written, in Latin font, the owner's last name and the destination city. We did not do this for our carryon and maybe because of this it could not be found. It is fortunate that I did not put the package with the declared jewelry into the carryon. All the way, this package was automatically in my hands because I was very afraid of losing your small box. In addition, it was fortunate that, before putting this carryon with the checked bags in New York, we removed those two portraits to preserve them from damage because the carryon was made only of thin, waterproof nylon.

Thus, the main concerns about customs—all of the delays and inconveniences—were all our own fault except for one very horrifying circumstance. Jacob and I, because we had been deprived of Soviet Union citizenship*, passed very quickly through the part of customs when they check for documents granting permission to leave the country and to be on an aircraft going outside Soviet Union borders. But, for a long time, we could not see our children and granddaughter although they had begun that same document check when we had, albeit with another frontier guard. When at last we saw them, Leshia and Kathy looked awful. It turned out that, because of Yasenka's age, the guard noted inconsistencies in her photo and did not want to let Yasenka out of the Soviet Union. The prob-

* Before the end of 1992, citizens could not live abroad and still retain USSR citizenship. The government required us to sign a form acknowledging we would give up our USSR citizenship upon leaving the country.

lem was that before a certain age, a child's official document photo must be taken with his/her mother; after reaching that age, the child must then be photographed alone. Years had passed between the date when the application to emigrate had been submitted and the date of the actual departure, and our children did not know about the different requirements regarding children of different ages. You can imagine what emotional tension this caused our children, and how determined the frontier guard was to prevent Yassenka from going with her parents. And how long it seemed before that frontier guard's supervisor finally decided to let Yassenka leave the Soviet Union together with her parents!

We are sure that all of your luggage will be packed according to the required sizes and you will forget nothing that must be declared. It is possible to take the declaration forms to Sheremetevo-2* before your actual departure date, fill them out, and then consult with a customs officer there to check that the form is filled out correctly. In addition, in our opinion, it would be a good thing to make a list of all of the items that were put into each bag in case the luggage gets lost. This may be done if your packing is not done in haste.

THE TRIP TO MOSCOW AIRPORT

We were warned that one should not order a taxi to transport the luggage to Sheremetevo-2: it has happen that, if a passenger refuses to pay \$100 for the one-way trip, the luggage is thrown out of the taxi on the way to the airport. Jacob arranged through his workplace for us to use their bus. This was wonderful because it allowed our friends and relatives to see us off.

Our flight was at 8:30 AM. We left our apartment with all our family and luggage on the previous evening, at 7 p.m., taking the camp bed for our granddaughter and the metal folding chair for me. We were to begin customs check at 2 a.m. (6 hours before the departure of the aircraft). In reality, customs check began at about 4 a.m. I am not sure, because you have an almost 24-hour trip ahead of you, that all of your family members need to leave your apartment so early. If you have friends who have a private car, I think your mother should get to the airport just when customs check begins. There is even more reason for doing this as it is as impossible to sleep that evening as it was the night before. (For example, dur-

* Sheremetevo-2 (or Sheremetyevo International Airport) is the arrival and departure point for international flights out of Moscow.

ing that previous night we had continued to prepare feverishly for departure, talked with some of our friends who came to see us off, and so on.)

In the plane, (in ours, anyhow), the distance between the seats is like that in Russian aircraft. You cannot swing about or stretch yourself. A difference between the Soviet and the Pan American aircraft is that you can smoke. However, passengers are prohibited from going to the rear of the plane to smoke; they have to smoke in their own seats.

For us, the flight from Moscow to the city of our American home took 23 hours, not including the time needed to get from that city's airport to our new apartment building. A person must be prepared psychologically and physically for a flight that, with three transfers, takes so much time. What is good: an American plane takes less time to reach cruising altitude and to make a landing than do Soviet aircraft, and take-offs and landings are pretty gentle.

Our flight to Frankfurt-on-Main took 3.5 hours (apparently, our speed was not very fast). The process of transferring to the other flight was very simple, without long walks. We did not meet our luggage there except, of course, our carryons. The flight over the ocean from Frankfurt took nine hours. This seemed a little bit long, especially because, in almost every row, several people were smoking almost continually. However, in the plane you could sometimes find unoccupied seats where fewer passengers were smoking. You could, after a little bit, sit in such free places and revive yourself, or you could walk a little along the very big aircraft.

What is certain: you could not die from starvation on the airplane. They feed passengers tasty food and not rarely, and offer different beverages to drink even more frequently.

An international airport services the two cities (that of our future home and its neighbor) and is a 15-minute taxi drive from our city. However, the flights from New York to this city leave from a different New York airport, not the one that received our plane from the Soviet Union. The distance from New York to our city is about 190 miles. Nevertheless, the authorities decided to transport the refugees from New York, not by a bus or a direct flight (after transporting us passengers from one New York airport to the other), but by two flights: 1) New York to Philadelphia, 2) Philadelphia to our city's airport. The price for one ticket for each of these flights is \$65. We had to wait for a long time in the New York and Philadelphia airports (especially in New York) for the next flight.

THE STAY IN THE NEW YORK AIRPORT

The “impressive” meeting with the immigration officials and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) representatives took place in the New York airport. We were especially dismayed by the repeated attempts of the HIAS representatives to form us in a line—they wanted each newcomer to look strictly at the back of the head of the person standing in front of him. They tried to organize the people of different ages, all the while shouting sharply at those who violated their strict imaginary line meant for those arriving in this country of big opportunities. It is best to use humor in such situations, to think of this as the HIAS representatives’ attempt to revive newcomers’ memories of Moscow’s commonplace events, which were yet too fresh to forget.

Here, we turned over our immigration packet. Some labels were put on our documents. Labels were put on each person’s jacket, too.* Then we endorsed some papers. After this, two to three families were led by a representative along some secret passages to some hall where our luggage was moving along a circular conveyor belt. They needed to be caught, loaded onto carts that our representative gave us (or for which we had to pay) and then wheeled to the specified counter (trying not to lose our guide) where (we think) customs or airline officials tore off the old luggage labels and put on new ones. It was at this point that the officer insisted that we check our carryon; he said that the two aircraft we were to take would be very small. (It appeared that they were for 20 people, no more.)

Although the planes were small, the flight was no less comfortable than that in the larger plane, and the duration of each flight was approximately 30 minutes. So we would not get hungry, they gave each passenger coffee or juice and salted nuts as a snack.

OUR MEETING IN THE DESTINATION AIRPORT

And, at last, here was the airport of our final destination. It was about 12 at night, local time (that is, we arrived in pitch darkness). Only two other people beside ourselves were on the plane but, when we disembarked, the airport building was brimming over with passengers from other planes. Knowing that our destination

* The strict lines and the labeling were not funny at the time; they reopened wounds in our hearts. Standing in line was a way of life we thought we had left behind, and labeling people was done by Nazis or in prisons. It was humiliating, not something done to ordinary people in the USSR. It wasn’t until a month later that I could see some humor in the situation.

city was small, it was hard to understand seeing so many people, and until that moment, we did not actually know that this is an international airport. In the terminal, we were met by the encouraging smiles of Andrew, Natalie, Lyuba, Devora, and Tom, known to you from your children's letters. At that same time, our luggage appeared. But two pieces of luggage were not there. At first, our men searched for them, and then Andrew helped us to report the two missing pieces to the aircraft company.

Meanwhile, Devora dragged one of our 32-kg trunks to the exit. Seeing this skinny, petite woman, not at all with the bloom of youth or health, dealing with our load, Kathy and I became ashamed of being absorbed up to now by the unexpectedness of the moment, by the new impressions, and our conversation with your children; we rushed to drag the rest of our un-liftable luggage to the exit. At the street, Devora and Tom loaded our luggage into their grand limousines. The wind chilled us to the marrow. In New York, we had put my winter coat in the checked bag that had been our carryon, and now it turned out that it was missing. I felt the fresh air reaching to my bones.

At last, as though in a fog, we got into the cars and in pitch darkness rushed to meet... we did not know what. Residential areas appeared. Then we stopped. We were told that we had come to our destination. We unloaded the luggage. They told us that your children live in the same building where our children will live. We climbed to the second floor. Kathy saw that her daughter would have a separate room, that the beds were ready and waiting for the new inhabitants. She saw that all was clean, the rooms had new furniture, the kitchen was loaded with all necessities. In the refrigerator, there were provisions for several days and... Kathy broke into tears, throwing herself onto Devora and Tom to embrace them. After this, we all crossed two lawns to a similar two-story building. All was repeated. Totally stunned by all that had been done for us by your children, Rose, and the community, we could not fall asleep for a long time, although we were beginning our third full day without sleep (if you discount dozing on the planes).

OUR FIRST DAY IN OUR AMERICAN CITY

In the morning, at 11:00 on the same day of our arrival (we arrived in our city on April 3rd by local calculation, although we arrived in New York, i.e., on the American continent, on April 2nd), we set off with Natalie to Devora's office for a meeting she had

scheduled. From our packet, she took our visas and other documents to make copies. Natalie defined for us more precisely the details of the conversation. Devora complimented Jacob for his understanding of Yiddish (Jacob deals with the Yiddish language as a smart dog deals with human speech: he understands all, but cannot speak). Lesha and I understood some of the Yiddish words, too, based on the German language we had learned in school. Devora promised that, after one week, our telephone would be on. She patiently lent an attentive ear to our babbling attempt at English, in which we tried to express our gratitude for all that the community had done for us. She understood the majority of our babblings because of Natalie's participation and translation of our babbles into real American English. Nevertheless, Lesha received a compliment for his British pronunciation.

Natalie energetically led us to a bank where the men took part in the sacrament of the transformation of checks into the "greens." Everything went well. We next followed Natalie into the other two most important social service agencies. At the first, we applied for a Social Security number—a card instead of the passport that is used in the Soviet Union. On the card will be the individual and unique number assigned to us in the United States of America. Because of this number, we will differ from other citizens of this country and from each other. At the second agency, we were given application forms that we have to bring back completed on the following morning. This was the welfare office (the agency for improving the living conditions of the inhabitants of this country). This office is trying to help us get the hang of things, and to help the community feed us and pay our medical bills, from the end of the first month or the beginning of the second month of our residency here.

Natalie's energetic gait kept reminding us: "Know that time is money!" We tried not to make her wait for us, walking hurriedly to dive quickly into our new world with the motto "TIME IS MONEY." Along the avenues and streets, sitting in their cars, the residents of the city are "tootling about." The only people who "tootle" on foot are those whose physical or mental disabilities prevent them from driving, or from working in order to buy a car, or those who are newcomer refugees. Because of this, it seems at first sight that there are many people with different kinds of disabilities. The healthy residents of our city are passing away their time by driving their cars or walking the few steps from the office or the store to their Cadillac, Chevrolet, ..., ..., ...!

**OUR FIRST INVITATION TO VISIT AN AMERICAN HOME
AS GUESTS**

We arrived on Wednesday and already Andrew, Natalie, and Rose had arranged for us to be invited for “Sabbath” with their doctor’s family on Friday of this Passover week. Lesha refused point-blank to wear the Middle Asian black and white skullcap that, ages ago, the Jew with the Middle Asian face (Jacob) got on a business trip to one of the Middle Asian Soviet Republics. Andrew provided Lesha with a real yarmulke.

At the doctor’s home, we were perplexed, at first, when the hosts (almost from the beginning of this “international” gathering) started a conversation on the following subject: What is the significance of the language used by the Bukhara Jews? After some time, everything became clear. The topic of conversation was prompted by the Middle Asian skullcap on Jacob’s head!

Poor Jacob. He understood utterly nothing of the continuous stream of speech from the home’s talkative master, although the doctor spoke primarily about the computers in his clinic. And why single out Jacob? I, who have read not less than a hundred books in the original English, sat as if in a long, dark tunnel where the lights of passing cars would occasionally illuminate some small thing. The words that I managed to identify were rare among the many that were spoken. In the speech of all Americans with whom we converse, the words rush to follow each other as though the goal is for each of the following words to pass the word preceding it. It is like a high-stakes horse race. The huge effort taken by our family’s four adults to understand anything, plus our lack of sleep, plus the just-begun process of acclimatization had the following result. Jacob, who sat at the place of honor (next to the host’s child, and the host, who conducted his responsibility according to all the rules of the Torah), put his skullcap-covered head on his hand, his elbow resting on the table and, with a blissful smile, began to close his eyes with increasing frequency and for longer intervals. At first Leshenka, who sat near his father Jacob, nudged him each time Jacob’s eyes closed, causing Jacob to glance kindly over all who sat nearby. Then Leshenka himself submitted to the natural forces that took over all of us. Kathy and I made a big effort not to let down your children at the end and tried to keep our eyes open. None of us felt comfortable there except, of course, for the hosts and Andrew with Natalie and Rose (who were almost additional members of the doctor’s family) and certainly your grandson, Danik. Yes, we disgraced ourselves totally with the

doctor's family. It could not be helped. It is a pity we let down your children. Much later, your children told us that they were puzzled why all of us were so mild and quiet on that evening.

THE APARTMENTS WHERE WE LIVE

Now it is time to describe the apartments in which we live. Our children's apartment is like your children's apartment, only it has one less bedroom.

In the kitchen, there are three suspended and two floor shelves, all with doors, one door-less suspended shelf; the four burners of the electric stove are huge, though the refrigerator has only one chamber. Kitchen cabinets are located under the sink and one of them has several drawers. All of this has been used for a long time and will be replaced next year (although, according to Soviet standards, they would serve for many years ahead).

For the kitchen, the community bought us: a toaster; one saucepan; two smaller-sized, scoop-shaped saucepans; two frying pans; three deep but small plates; three flat plates; three glasses; four cups with saucers; tablespoons; forks, knives, and teaspoons; provisions for a couple of days; a teapot with a whistle; a sponge for washing dishes; some stuff for washing dishes in the sink; a plastic rack for drying the dishes; a broom; a mop; a garbage can with a small dustpan. There is an exhaust fan above the stove that you may turn on when needed. There are no windows in the kitchen.

The first room has nothing to separate it from the apartment's entry door and from the kitchen.* The door into the "combined" bathroom and the door into the bedroom are also in this room. Opposite the entry door in the first room (the living room) is a closet. It has a shelf above the hanger bar. The back wall of this closet is one of the kitchen walls. In this room, one more closet is narrower (50 cm wide) and has four shelves. On one of them there is: a new iron with a controller that make it possible to use steam; a sheet set; a box with detergent; a stock of toilet paper. In the same room, a third closet with a wooden door conceals the apartment's heating system.

* I cannot remember a single kitchen in the USSR without windows. A kitchen might be very small, unusually small, but it always had a window. I saw a window-less kitchen for the first time here. Likewise, I had never seen an apartment without some sort of entrance hall—maybe very small, but a foyer with doors leading to the actual apartment. In the USSR, it was impossible to open an apartment's front door and just appear in the living room. There had to be some sort of vestibule with closets for coats and boots.

Near this closet is a sliding door with a width and height of 2m; you can go through this door directly to the green lawn. A screen door covers part of the sliding door on the outside. Similar screens are on the bedroom and bathroom windows. In the living room, bought by the community for us, there is an oak table (120cm x 80cm) with two chairs, a soft sofa with cushions, and a standard floor lamp.

In the bedroom, there are two beds with high mattresses and two pillows in new pillowcases bought by the community. Sheets cover the beds and on top of them, there are synthetic down comforters—all are new. The community bought the oak dresser with 6 drawers, and a table lamp with lampshade. There is a closet, 2m wide, with one hanger bar. The window in the bedroom is 1m x 1m.

The “combined” bathroom is a little bit bigger than the combined bath and toilet in a typical Soviet apartment. The bottom of the bathtub is at floor level and does not have high sides, which may be very convenient for senior citizens. There is a stationary showerhead above the bathtub and a plastic curtain. On the wall above the bathtub, there is a small shelf for soap and two sponges for washing ourselves. On the other wall, there is a towel bar. Above the sink, there is a small cabinet with a mirror on the door (this is the only mirror in the apartment). In this cabinet, we find two new toothbrushes and a bar of soap. Under this cabinet, there are two very small shelves; on one, you could put a bar of soap and on the other, a glass and four toothbrushes. On the wall opposite the sink, there is a metal hanger on which the community representative hung two bath towels and two hand towels. On the same wall, opposite the toilet (just near the sink), there is a hanger for the bath tissue with toilet paper on it.

The floor throughout the apartment is linoleum. This apartment has all of the things that are needed in the beginning. From the limousine waiting just steps from our plane, to the apartment prepared for our arrival—they rolled out the red carpet for us, as if we were some important Russian leaders. We just cannot say anything more of our enormous gratitude to your children, to Rose, to you (for raising such a son), and to this community for our fate.

WHAT WE THINK WOULD BE USEFUL TO BRING WHEN YOU COME TO LIVE HERE

The time comes to settle in, to open the trunks, to hang and to set up all that you have brought... to live in the apartment at night when the lights are on, and so on. And what happens? Even people like us, who were not spoiled by life, come across numerous

domestic problems, and we will have them for a long time because of financial difficulties.

One has to walk on the floor of the apartment—you need slippers. Jacob had flat out refused to pack his slippers. Lesha followed his father's example. The result: the floor is icy (we are on the first floor and the floor is covered by linoleum). Both men put on thick wool socks to walk inside their apartments. The cheapest men's slippers that you can buy in the mall outside the city (\$1.5 is the cost of a bus ticket) are more than \$6 each. By the way, because of the increasingly warm weather, the opposite problem has arisen quickly: the problem of buying open, lightweight men's (and certainly women's) shoes. This is especially a problem for men's shoes because their cost is much higher than are women's. My men argued sharply about taking their sandals with them to America (yes, it is true their sandals were not the best). Now it turns out that the cheapest, even outside the city, are more than \$20. As the young people say, "This is the end!" We (Jacob and I) have \$60 per week and if it were not for the provisional supplies that were in our apartment (bought by the community for our arrival), we would not be able to buy even provisions on this \$60 (though we are not the kind of people who like to eat large amounts of food). We were able to add to this \$60 the small amount of money the Soviet Union permitted us to change from rubles. We began to manage on the \$60/per week only after two weeks of being here. It is clear from this that to buy anything other than food is very difficult.

We get up from bed, put our feet on the floor... the floor is icy. All that is needed is one small rug. But we do not have one. We could have brought light mats with us (my mother embroidered such mats a lot). A mat is needed inside and outside of the apartment's front door, and in the bathroom—at least by the bathtub. It would be good to have one near the sofa, too. We brought with us one rug, which was the right decision, even though its arrival cost us half of the family money we had changed for dollars in the Soviet Union. It improves the room—you can sit on it, lie on it, and do physical exercises. Here, such a rug costs several thousand dollars and, during a sale, its price would be not less than \$1000. But this rug does not solve the problems listed above.

It is impossible to launder all clothes in the washing machines; in addition, this is very expensive. To do laundry by hand, you need some kind of basin. The bathtub is too low. The smallest plastic basins are more than \$4-6 each (I think this is what Rose said). If you wash laundry without a basin in which to put detergent, you

need bar soap. The price of a bar of bath soap is fairly high (the price of the very big bars is as it is in the Soviet Union). The laundry soap is good, too, in the basin for washing small things. A small plastic basin in the luggage would also serve well as protection for the contents of the luggage.

What is washed must be hung to dry. We have no nails or ropes. Some kind of screw may be bought for not very much money and we were told that supposedly they may be twisted into the walls by just using your hands because the walls (these are Jacob's words) are just from "dry plaster" (?)—and because of this, the audibility in horizontal and vertical directions in these buildings is excellent (from the English teacher, I know that the audibility is the same in private homes). There is not a single nail in the whole apartment. Rope has to be bought, too.

There are only four shelves in one closet, one shelf in each of the other two closets and 6 drawers in the dresser for arranging all things from the luggage. The books and composition books have to be put somewhere, too. There are no hangers on which to hang the clothes. (Later, we asked Devora for a favor and she gave us 15 wire hangers, combined with hangers of the same type that Kathy later saw at one of the charitable organizations, and we could at last hang our clothes.) Good hangers would come to us when Americans, at the end of a season, began to bring us presents of second-hand clothes because each piece was on such a hanger. Such a trifle (a hanger), but it makes it possible to unload the luggage and fill in the closets.

You must wash your hair (whether following American or our traditions)—there is no shampoo. We didn't bring any, even though in the bathroom of our Moscow apartment there was a lot of shampoo in different kinds of packages, located in the special, many-pocketed, German hanger. We did not take a single package of this! As we did not bring either item, we now understand how excellent the German hanger was, with its many pockets. Shampoo here is very expensive, the hair dye is more expensive, and we do not understand the instructions. Hairbrushes and hair dryers are needed. They are not cheap. The hair dryer has to be 110v, as do the other electrical devices.

In our missing carryon, in addition to my professional papers that I had prepared in Moscow for the United States job search, was a toiletries bag containing Jacob's shaving stuff, manicure set, my hairbrush, and everything for morning and evening washing (it is good

that toothbrushes were given to us here). Toothpaste, soap—all of this is barely affordable to us at this time.

In the evening, we have to put the lights on; we have no curtains on the windows and, in some windows, we have nothing that would hold curtains: no rods, no nails for holding rods, or ropes instead of rods. There was one rod in our apartment, the other Jacob found among things someone put outside their home for the garbage truck. In the bathroom, there are no nails, no rods. After some time we were given used, thick curtains for both rooms. Sheer ones we have to find for ourselves. (By the way, for some reason, used curtains are not given by Americans as presents.) The sheer curtains in our children's apartment were on their windows when they moved in and they make the room more beautiful even though they are very simple.

Good English-Russian and Russian-English dictionaries (you cannot find them here in the library), copybooks, pens, notebooks, paper, pencils with erasers are all good to bring in the luggage with you, but not in the shipped parcels as we did (and which take many months to arrive). It is advisable to bring: printed resumé composed in several versions and translated into English, each ready for the different kinds of potential jobs (for your different kinds of skills); your list of published papers and books (translated, too); your most important articles, translated; the translated content summaries of the major publications that you completed throughout your career. Then, once here, all you would need to do would be to photocopy, which is affordable for us here. It is very important to pack in your luggage (not in the shipped parcels*) written notes prepared by you for doctors' appointments here that will explain: your current health and your medical history; why you cannot take particular medicines in succession; the names of all your ailments and medicines; how you feel when your specific health problems inconvenience you; what medicines you take in such circumstances; and anything else relevant—all translated into English.

I don't think the cosmetics here are cheap and think that it is better to take a six-month supply of these with you from the Soviet Union.

* People who left the USSR from other republics (the Baltics, for example) could ship big boxes of furniture. When we left Moscow, however, we took only two 30-kg trunks and one carryon per person. We had permission to send only some books and some papers, pencils, and pens; each book had to be approved for shipment by a special government office. To have the chance to mail books was such a good thing. Those who left the USSR several years before us could not ship anything.

But there are some specifics that became known to me only here. For example, I thought that I had perfume (in Moscow, our children gave me "Climat" as a birthday present). Here, Kathy, who contributed to this present, said that in the USA only prostitutes use this kind of perfume, and that in New York City it is sold to this kind of women.

Here, shoe polish and a shoe brush, as well as a clothing brush, are badly needed. We have to look as neat as possible, but we cannot afford these for now, and all of this was left in abundance in the Moscow apartment.

When we first entered the apartment here, we felt the sharp smell of disinfectant. Three weeks went by, but numerous airings and open windows during warm days did not remove this smell. We have nothing to kill this odor, and the same for the smell in the bathroom. Air freshener is sold in the stores, but we cannot afford it.

Bedspreads are needed for the beds (let them be thin, from simple fabric). The bed sizes are 2m x 1m.

It is desirable to buy in large quantities in the Soviet Union cotton socks and underwear. Anything from natural fabric here is expensive.

It is desirable to have with you medicine, medicine, and more medicine for cold, flu, and so on!

It is clear that I did not count on all of these domestic problems that are easily solved by bringing something with you from your apartment in the Soviet Union.

It seems to me that if you could imagine yourselves here and take into account your habits and necessities, then you could prepare yourselves for the departure much better than we did. Concerning clothing, Americans try to donate light clothing and men's suits to the newly arrived refugees when the seasons change. So, I lengthened two such suits for Lesha and he wears them now. The other suits could not be lengthened and we returned them so they could be given to other families.

Kitchen essentials, especially saucepans, frying pans, grater, board, rolling pin, kitchen knives, containers for storing cooked food in the refrigerator (here everything is made from plastic and is expensive)—we can not now afford.

It would be good to have all 110v appliances (it is not realistic to hope to get transformers for increasing the voltage on Soviet appliances—these are either hard to find or they are very expensive).

It is a must to have a cassette player for learning the English language.

A video-player may help you learn some specialties using videotapes borrowed for free from the library. We learned that we only need to pay for the exams and not for the training course. All courses here are excellently prepared.

THE ANSWER TO YOUR MOTHER'S REQUEST

I did transfer to Rose your mother's request about the possibility of your close friends coming to this community. Rose knew about this issue before. She explained to me that this community could not sponsor or support more people for free, that this community is reaching its capacity. The community refused to support some families for which the HIAS asked (allegedly on the basis that some of the Russian family members were not Jewish). Rose is now afraid to ask for somebody else because it may result in her relatives not being able to come here. That is what I understood about the situation, but it may be that I did not understand correctly.

DRIVER'S LICENSE

Somebody from your family, or all of you, must learn how to drive if you haven't already. (In my opinion, it is totally senseless to pass the Soviet driver's exam; it would cause nervous strain for no practical outcome.) It would be very good to learn the <US> driving rules using the special instructions sold in Moscow so that, after coming here, you might buy a car, perhaps for \$300, to drive about when job searching. In addition, all of the inexpensive stores are located on the city border or the outskirts. Andrew is so busy now, and expects to continue to be so in future, that he would not be able to take you on all of your necessary trips, especially during work hours. If you could learn to drive along Moscow's streets with a driving teacher and by studying driving theory, then passing the driver's exam here should not be a problem.

I'm not excluding your mother from those who could learn to drive a car because I always see very old people driving their cars. And that Soviet saying, "Like a woman driver" you cannot say here, even as a joke—the Americans would not understand it because even high-school girls drive to school in their own cars. Your mother, having a lucid mind, would be one of the better drivers among the many here.

THE PROBLEM OF JOB SEARCHING

All of us have unsolved problems finding jobs. In addition to the language, the existing economic crisis is an obstacle. But Jacob's and my age are also obstacles. All over the country, many Americans who

have worked at the same place for 10 and more years are being fired. It seems the economists cannot explain the reason for this recession, but they are predicting its end in autumn, the time of your arrival. The firings are due to the recession in industry and the downsizing of the army and government departments, and have led to huge competition among skilled, professional US citizens who all hope to win the rare vacancies. We have not yet begun our job search: language is our biggest obstacle, especially for Jacob.

Kathy has big problems finding a job, too. Her cosmetician certificate is not valid here. She had to enter a special school and pay \$3000-5,500 for a 4-8 month course. But the bad thing is that there are no clients. The beauty salons are empty. Even worse is the situation with facial massage clients. Kathy has gotten the impression that Americans have no need of facial massage—not in our city, anyway.

COMMUNITY HELP AND WELFARE

As we understand it, the situation with the community and welfare is as follows: financial aid from the community lasts no more than four months and, two weeks after a refugee's arrival, the community begins to insist that the refugee find a job as soon as possible. The community group strongly proposes jobs such as nursing home attendant or private attendant to a handicapped person, lavatory cleaner for some company, and so on. Because of this, the weekly meetings with the community leaders, which are mandatory for receiving the next week's financial support check, are not fun for most of the refugees, although the community is really doing a lot for the refugees, from the moment of their arrival and after, by organizing language lessons and some other things that are not unimportant. Because of this, many newcomers have conflicting communications with the community representatives, especially with Devora. After four months, those who are students in some courses receive welfare support for a couple of months. However, in our state all courses require payment. The laws of this state, as we found out, require us to have our green cards before we can arrange favorable payment terms for such courses, or to acquire loans to pay for this education. This creates a vicious circle. The sword of Damocles hanging over our heads is that soon we may be on the streets because we could not possibly pay rent or for the mediocre medical services with which, according to what we heard from one of the newcomers, the refugees are not at all happy. (We have not experienced this, because we do not yet have access to those kinds of medical services.) All of this is getting on the nerves

of people our age (this does not concern the senior citizens; all agree that the government does everything possible for such people). Over several days, the newcomers hear a little from those who have been here a little bit longer and, in addition to getting several life lessons on their own, very quickly forget from what a catastrophic country they escaped. They have no time to be happy with their new life.

Arriving on American soil, I threw off my burden of fears that if something should happen to any of my family in the Soviet Union, only I would be guilty because, for many years, I hindered Jacob's departure from the Soviet Union. Such horror during the last years and months of our life in Moscow certainly shattered a great deal of my already-poor health. I did hope that, by throwing off this load, by getting normal food, and by being in an environment of normal human relationships, my health would not only stabilize but also be restored. I am afraid that it will be difficult to achieve this. Jacob suffers especially from the lack of language and the thought of the responsibilities that are just months ahead. And, psychologically, life has not returned to normal. The cause of anxiety has changed, but the anxieties remain. The sharp reactions to them—those remain, too. There is a need for us to change. Is this realistic? You have more time for such work. In addition, you are more sensible people, purer souls, and more joyous than we are. We believe in you and wait for you. We'll believe in ourselves, too.

Kiss you,
Jacob, Kathy, Leshenka, May and Yasenka



***BEGINNING OF JULY 1991—EXACTLY THREE MONTHS
IN AMERICA***

(From May to Andrew's parents and grandmother in the Soviet Union)

Our dears!

Thank you very much for your letter. It was very kind, and our cup of tea.

Yesterday's phone conversation convinced me that our letter might yet find you in Moscow and perhaps something in it (maybe a very small part of it) would be helpful in preparing you psychologically for your future marathon in American reality.