

Chapter 1

Reversing U.S. to S.U.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions
(Russian proverb)

I was born in Moscow, the capital of the USSR, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, known as the Soviet Union or often simply Russia. Strictly speaking, the latter name was not correct, for in 1930s Russia per se was only one albeit the largest of the then-eleven republics of the country that had the Russian as its official language.

The first words I heard were English, which is American English; the first words I pronounced were also American English; and my first nursery books were American. But the environment where I was growing up was Russian; the first words I learned to read and write were also Russian; and my first textbooks were Russian. It does sound odd or unusual and it is only natural to ask questions, like what actually took place, why did it happen, and how it all began?

My mother, Pauline Rose*, was born in November 1898 in New York City, or rather in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents were descendants of Lithuanian Jews and came to the United States in early 1890s. Their family name used to be Rosencrantz, but upon settling in the U.S., the family name was abbreviated to Rose. They had nine children, seven of whom lived to old age and left behind

* Most (not all) names appearing in this book were changed, except those of my parents, my own, and some other.

their own children and grandchildren. My maternal relatives reside mostly east of the Mississippi River, predominantly in the states of New England and New York, with one cousin in Hawaii, one in Los Angeles, and a couple in Israel.

My mother was the oldest girl in that big family, although she had older brothers, so it was her natural duty to help the parents with her younger siblings. She graduated from New York's Hunter College, where she majored in physics and mathematics and took a course in Russian. She graduated in early 1920s, but could not find a job. By mere chance, she came across and established contacts with one of the first trade missions from the Soviet Union to the United States, whose name was "Amtorg", the Russian acronym for "American Trade", responsible for developing commercial contacts and activities of the Soviet Union with the United States.

This is when mother's college course in the Russian language played an important role in her employment career and entire life. She got a job with Amtorg, initially as an English typist and stenographer and later as a Russian-English translator. She made several transatlantic roundtrips by boat between the two countries with Amtorg, every trip lasting about one week each way. Those trips gave mother an opportunity to see the new country and its major centers of industrial development. Evidently, she liked what she saw. Being liberal in her views and attracted by the magnetic forces of the new society proclaiming its goal of freedom, fairness, and prosperity to all, she decided to settle in Moscow and take a permanent job there.

It was mid 1930s, the period of the Great Depression in the United States. At the same time, the Soviet leadership and the Communist Party were trying to lure foreigners to the USSR to help build their new society that promised prosperity and equality of all under the law. Many liberally minded people from the West fell for those idealistic and populist slogans, forming a so-called wave of American immigration to the USSR, and my mother was part of that wave.

After her assignment with Amtorg was over, mother taught English at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature, and History, known under its Russian acronym IFLI. Later, she took the job of a Russian-English translator with the *Moscow News*, the English lan-

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guage newspaper that was quite popular among the English speakers in the country. Mother also worked as a Russian-English translator with the All-Union Radio Committee. Mother's touch-system typing skills were superb and helped her complete large amounts of work in short times.

Mother truly deserved the title of a polyglot. Besides her native English and fluent Russian, she spoke fluent French, German, Spanish, and Italian. She could also speak and write Hebrew and Yiddish, and read and write Latin. Thus, being an American, she was an exception to the popular phrase, "A person who knows several languages is called a polyglot, and a person who knows only one language is called American".

However, no matter which language mother spoke, her accent would immediately give her away as a native of Brooklyn, New York. The moment she opened her mouth and pronounced the first words in any language, it became obvious that her native tongue was English of New York City. Her strong accent in all the languages she spoke was somewhat puzzling and strange, because she had a good ear for music.

There was one more interesting feature about my mother. According to her own admissions, she was developing physically quite late, compared to her schoolmates. Perhaps this contributed to her looking much younger than her age, and that was true during her entire life all the way through her seventies.

My father, Sam Raphael Friedman, was born in June 1910 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His parents were descendants of Polish Jews, who in 1907 left their city of Lodz in Poland and came to the United States. At that time, Poland was part of the Russian Empire, which brings about an amazing coincidence. Poland shared a common border with Lithuania, which meant that my mother's and father's parents were close neighbors, geographically speaking, having lived in the neighboring states of Europe, which were parts of the Russian Empire. After moving to the U.S., they again became close neighbors, having resettled in the neighboring states of New York and Pennsylvania, where my own parents were born. "It's a small world, after all!"

My father was the first child in the family. Soon after his birth, the family moved from Philadelphia to the Greater Los Angeles area in California, where dad's parents had three more sons and a daughter. All my three uncles and aunt reached their senior ages, residing with their families in the same general area of Greater Los Angeles.

My father got his higher education in the system of University of California. He received his Bachelor's degree at Los Angeles (UCLA) and did his postgraduate studies at Berkeley, majoring in English literature. Later, he went to England to do research on Homer and Shakespeare.

Besides literary studies, there was another reason impelling my father to go to England. He wanted to meet with his father's sister and her children who were in London. They were quite wealthy, and my liberally minded father intended to find out the truthfulness of this fact and the reasons why the world was so imbalanced with respect to the level of people's well-being. After meeting with his relatives, dad compared unwittingly the wealth of his relatives with the modest level of his family and started asking himself how he could help correct the inequalities.

Eventually, my father turned his eyes toward the USSR, the world's new society that was proclaiming all he was thinking of in terms of fairness and equality of all. He arrived at a conclusion that he had to go to the Soviet Union to help build the new society promising his own sought-for ideal of social justice. With his liberal views, in 1933 my father found himself in Moscow. He was planning to settle there and contribute as much as he could to the development of that nation and to help it reach its goal of a fair and prosperous society.

Being the first child in the family, dad was the beloved older brother to his siblings and the dearest son to his parents. So his decision to leave the U.S. for good and resettle in the USSR became the most dramatic event for his family, delivering the hardest blow to his mother who did not recover from the factual loss of her first son and was not mentally sound ever since.

The liberal views, while popular then in the U.S. in general and in the Jewish community in particular, were no less popular in the Friedman family. One of dad's brothers, Harry, who was two years his junior, openly envied his older brother and even wanted to join

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him in his journey to Russia. To his own bad luck and to the good fortune of the family, he was not able to gather enough money for the trip and thus had to abandon the idea.

My father started his life in the new country by studying the Russian language. To earn money for all his living expenses, he worked for some time as a construction worker at one of the first subway construction sites in Moscow. He also taught the English language and literature and later joined the team of the *Moscow News* staff, and this was where he met my mother for the first time. He also did English translations of Russian animated cartoons and of poetic works of the prominent Soviet poet Samuel Marshak with whom my parents became friendly.

While in his teens, dad was developing intellectually very early. He was admitted to the University of California (UCLA) after his graduation from high school at the age of seventeen. His early mental development explained why he used to hang around with young people several years his senior and why he was interested in older girls. Apparently, that was the reason why he started dating and eventually married a woman almost twelve years his senior, although, as was mentioned, my mother looked much younger than her age.

So, the first meeting of my parents happened at the *Moscow News* Publishers. They were spending time together at the company's parties, started dating, and eventually decided to tie the knot. But before they married, mother raised the issue of their significant age difference and that it was she who was a dozen years older. Dad dismissed the potential problem by saying that they should enjoy their life together now when they loved each other and not worry about

future problems that should be left alone and allowed to be resolved at their appropriate times.



My parents (the couple at right) at "Moscow News" in November 1936

PAUL RAPHAEL FRIEDMAN

That is the brief story of my parents' individual paths bringing them to their first meeting, date, and marriage in Moscow. It is obvious that their liberal views outweighed their established way of life in the United States and pushed them on the path to the unknown, while leaving behind their parents, relatives, and friends. With this move, my parents changed the name of the country of their residence from the United States, or U.S., to S.U., or the Soviet Union, thus reversing the order of letters in the name abbreviation. This reversing, while being superficial in itself, seemed emblematic of upcoming major changes in my parents' lives.

When my mother was working at IFLL, she befriended Ms. Julia Starsky who worked there as a teacher of the French language. Julia was the wife of Eric Starsky, a scientist in outer space research. He had no affiliation with any particular institution and been doing his research and publications from home. Eric's name, "*Star-sky*", apparently predetermined his occupation of studying many a "*star*" in the "*sky*", or astronomy. Both Julia and Eric were born to families of Polish Jews and immigrated to France where Eric did his post-graduate studies in physics and astronomy. The Starskys moved from France to Moscow in 1935 lured by the same appealing communist slogans that attracted my parents and many other liberal idealists. An amazing coincidence is that Eric was from the Polish city of Lodz where my dad's parents had their roots, which perhaps strengthened the friendly ties between the two families.

Chapter 2

Early Years

*Although crowded, no one is offended
(Russian proverb)*

I was born in Moscow on March 25, 1937. My parents were U.S. citizens then and got two birth certificates for me, issued respectively by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and by the Moscow City Civil Acts Registration Office. The latter document showed I was the USSR national, while the former proved I was the USA national, which meant I was born with dual citizenship. Father kept his U.S. citizenship until 1946, while mother gave up hers in July 1938 on the same day and just hours before my U.S. birth certificate was issued, one year after my birth.

When I was born, each of my parents wanted their first child's name to bear something from the other parent's name. Thus, my first name became Paul, the shortened mother's first name Pauline, and my middle name was a copy of father's middle name Raphael. So, I was named Paul Raphael Friedman, and that's how my name appeared in my American birth certificate.



Paul Raphael Friedman
in September 1937

In Russian society, a middle name is not used, instead of which the so-called patronymic is used, made up of the father's first name with a suffix "-ovich", "-evich", or "-ich" for males and "-ovna", "-evna", or "-ichna" for females. When I was born, my parents knew Russian language and norms quite poorly, and my Russian birth certificate had my name simply transliterated from the English with a hyphen between my first and middle names. And since my certificate already had my two names, the clerks refused to write in my patronymic, although my father's name was written down. It was strange, since I obviously had a father and thus was entitled to a patronymic. In Russia, the most natural and polite way to address a person is by first name and patronymic, except one's close relatives and friends or someone not deserving one's respect.

Soon after my birth, mother hired a live-in nanny who served as our cook and housekeeper at the same time. In April 1939, my brother was born, Mat. In the course of the two years since my birth, my parents mastered their Russian quite a bit, and so Mat's birth certificate had his single first name and patronymic, in full compliance with the norms of the Russian society. The only language spoken at home was English, but Russian environment and nanny helped Mat and me learn the Russian spoken language from our early days and grow up native bilingual.

Our family consisted of five members, nanny being the full and equal member. Her name was Katherine Mossina. She was an illiterate religious Orthodox-Christian Russian, who could barely sign her name. Although my parents were born to Jewish families, they



were atheists in their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, our family was considered Jewish, for Jews constituted an ethnic group in Russia.

Mother with my brother and me in fall 1940

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However, the Jewish issue never came up in our family, nanny making no distinction between Russians and Jews. She was the living proof that illiterate persons are often wiser compared to highly educated anti-Semites.

We were living in one room 13 square meters (140 sq. feet), one of 13 rooms in a dorm-like apartment with ten other families, all sharing one big kitchen, two bathrooms, and two toilets. In Russia, toilets are separate tiny rooms about 1.5 sq. meters (about 15 sq. ft) with only a lavatory, while bathrooms had a hand-wash sink and a bathtub with shower and gas-fired water-heater but no lavatory. Several years later, parents nearly doubled our living space by adding another room about 10 sq. meters (110 sq. ft) adjacent to the first one. These two small rooms were formerly one big room that had been divided into two by its previous tenant.

There were two other families of American immigrants in our apartment. My parents were friendly with one of those families, the Libkins. Stan Libkin was a Russian-born Jew, while his wife, Ruth, was an American who like my parents had immigrated in 1930s to the Soviet Union. Ruth Libkin was working as a Russian-English translator at the National Radio Committee.

Martin Parker and Rose Prokofieva were the other American family, with whom our relations were just “Good morning—Good night”. Like in any close community, my parents were friendly with some families and hardly had any communications with others.

Many years later, mother told me about her method of upbringing children, which she was proud of, specifically pertaining to me as her first child. The core of her method was to do everything possible to avoid spoiling the child. In compliance with her method, she would not take me in her arms when I was crying, nor allowed nanny to do it, believing that doing otherwise would spoil me. As nanny told me much later, mother would let me cry for hours at a time until I would almost lose my voice, but still would not let nanny or herself to comfort me. In the same spirit, mother insisted on her own ways, depriving me of any independence or self-confidence. I discovered all this much later in life, which helped me understand why I was so obedient and never mischievous or prankish. It also explained why it was somehow difficult for me to

develop my sense of confidence or ability to show initiative when I needed it.

As time goes by, come the year 1941, when Mat is two and I am four. It is Sunday, June 22, the day of summer solstice, when in Moscow the sun rises at 3:45 a.m. and sets at 9:15 p.m. (no daylight saving time then). Russians call it the time when dusk meets dawn, for northern skies in Moscow don't fully darken at night, being colored orange-reddish-pink from dusk to dawn. In the predawn hours of that day, German troops attacked the western borders of the Soviet Union. This was the start of the war, known in the USSR as the Great Patriotic War, which lasted almost four full years, or 1417 days to be exact, from June 22, 1941 through May 8, 1945.

About one month into the war, in July 1941, when the German troops were moving east and advancing fast towards Moscow, the majority of children from the capital were evacuated to the east. The authorities were not sure how close to Moscow would the German troops move or how tough would life be in the capital. So they decided to get young Muscovites out of the city while it was safe to do it. The only way was by rail in specially chartered trains.

When our train pulled out of the terminal station, most kids started crying, including me, being separated from our parents. At the same time, it's easy to imagine the outburst of parents' sobbing on the platform, because the hundreds of parents seeing off their children had no idea when they would see their little kids again.

The destination of the train was the city of Gorky 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of the capital, which got back its original name Nizhny Novgorod in 1990. This name means Lower Novgorod (Lower New Town), as distinct from the ancient city Novgorod The Great (currently just Novgorod), which is 500 kilometers (310 miles) northwest of Moscow. All the children were placed in the children's home called "Forest Resort", located in the suburbs of Gorky.

My father wanted to serve in the army to defend his new homeland from the invaders, but his application was denied because he still was an American citizen. At the same time, he could not get Soviet citizenship because of the wartime restrictions imposed by the Communist Party and Soviet Government. The same restrictions

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forced all foreigners to leave Moscow, so my parents had to evacuate in the fall of 1941 to the city of Perm in the Urals.

I am not sure whether this separation of our family was voluntary or forcible. I tend to think it was the latter, for in the Soviet Union authorities gave public no options. The people simply were obliged to do what they were told, whether they liked it or not. I believe my parents would have chosen to evacuate to the Urals with us kids, like the Starskys did, but also they might have decided not to take the risk when their own future looked less than certain.

Lots of stories and facts were known about the hardships in the Soviet Union during the four years of war. However, the Soviet authorities took decent care of the children displaced from their homes. Being far away from the war front, Mat and I never heard any even remote sounds of the war, like military planes, bombings, or artillery shelling.

The Forest Resort, like most of the children's facilities in the country, had sufficient supply of food, clothing, and everything else needed for normal functioning. Unfortunately, the clothing and shoes were not always of the proper quality and, more importantly, the proper size, the latter being too often of the kind "one size fits all". In general, the services were adequate, with kids occasionally getting a treat in the form of ice cream.

Being separated at our respective ages of 2 and 4 from our parents and thus from our native English, Mat and I lost it completely. The only exception was the word "table" that somehow stuck in one of my brain cells during the two and a half years of our separation.

Mother paid a visit to the Forest Resort in winter 1942-43. It was a strange meeting. Mat and I not only forgot our native tongue, but we nearly forgot what our parents look like. When I saw mother coming to us with tears in her eyes, I asked her (in Russian) why she was crying. Through her sobbing, she answered (also in Russian) that she was crying of joy when seeing us after the long separation. After she stopped crying and started talking to us, Mat and I could not understand her. Realizing we had lost our English, mother turned to Russian. But she had to answer our question why she spoke differently from other people.

In December 1943, the battlefield moved far enough to the west from Moscow, and young Muscovites evacuated in 1941 were allowed to return home. This enabled all of us, including our nanny, to re-unite in the same room that had been vacated during all that time. Our parents came to pick us up at the Forest Resort. Returning home is always a happy event, but the train-ride from Gorky to Moscow was not a happy one for me.

During that December night, while waiting for our train, we spent many hours at the Gorky railway terminal station. It was a big crowded hall with nearly all adults smoking, and those days people smoked cheap and inferior kinds of tobacco. Russians call that smoke-saturated air “the air in which an axe could be suspended”. When we boarded the train and were on our way to Moscow, my body was literally turning inside out all night long from continuous vomiting. That night left in me the lifelong loathing feeling to tobacco smoke that I could never tolerate. But Mat did not suffer as bad as I did and later in life became a smoker himself.

Finally, all five of us were back at our home in Moscow. Mat and I were re-learning our first native tongue. As to the war and all that came with it, it still was part of our everyday life. At nights, we had to cover our windows with black shades before turning on the lights. And there were fire-works honoring the Red Army’s liberating some city or reaching the USSR border, which were becoming more and more frequent, almost nightly.

We had a map on the wall, and dad used to stick pins into it and stretch red and black threads around them, to show the battlefield line separating German and Soviet troops. When the allied troops opened the second front in West Europe, dad put pins there as well, with blue and black threads stretched around them. As the time went on, the pins with the threads were moving westward on the East Front and eastward on the West Front.

The war had another aspect. Healthy young men were nowhere around, while women doing all the work, not to mention taking care of children. Besides the usually women’s professions in the USSR of teachers, doctors, and nurses, women carried out manual street cleaning, driving streetcars and buses, road works, and most of the rest. Men were either in the regular Red Army units or in the de-

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tachments of guerrilla warriors (people's militia) called "partisans". Also, not many children were around because of the low birth rate caused by lack of men and wartime stress on women. The few children growing up were raised in a so-called feminist environment, with women replacing men in nearly all facets of life.

Children were spending most of their free time in common yards playing common games, like hide-and-seek. Girls usually enjoyed jump rope, and boys played football (American soccer), using an empty can for the ball and hats or cobblestones to mark the goals, and war games with hand-made wooden pikes, swords, rifles, and shields.

Another attribute of war was a somewhat perverse vocabulary with kids using certain words in an unusual sense. The word "German", for instance, was the synonym of "bad". If we wanted to call someone a bad name, we simply called that person "German" or "fascist". And kids were using some German phrases and words, too, like "*Was ist das*" ("What is this"), "*Hände Hoch*" ("Hands up"), and a bunch of others, all pronounced in German with a Russian accent. Kids are quick picking up words and phrases in the street, even if not understanding their meaning. This relates not just to a foreign language but to Russian curse language as well. It was another aspect of growing up in war environment, the children's accelerated lexical maturing, accompanied by their somewhat impeded physical development.