Nadia Fradkova Transcript

M: The recording is on.

Nadia Fradkova: What is this?

F: It's exactly the same. Just in case this gets deleted, then we have an extra. Mine's pink, so it's prettier.

M: So, first, just for our own sake, can you state your name, where you were born, and where you lived?

NF: My name is Nadia Shimonovna Fradkova. I was born actually in Kuibyshev, which is Samara now, and it has always been Samara. A couple of years ago – not a couple, but still. Now it's Samara again. It's the original name. It's in Volga. But actually, my parents were living in Moscow at that time. But just my mother went to Samara to her mother to give birth to me. I spent my really young months in Moscow. So, what else?

M: You spent your young months in Moscow, but the rest of your time –

NF: Then my mother – I could not walk yet, I think – not to say I could not speak either. She left my father. She had, I think – I don't know. It's not my business. She left him and went to Samara to her mother. When we lived there, my father tried to reconcile and something like that, but nothing went out of it. So, I started school in Samara. What else?

M: Growing up, did you know that you were Jewish? Were you involved –?

NF: You know what? Actually, according to Israeli law, which is, unfortunately, totally religious. You know they are called Black Jews. [Editor's Note: Ms. Fradkova may be

referring to Haredim, sometimes referred to as Black Hat because of their formal dress.] They make many things which Israelis don't like. I lived in Israel, you know. My father was Jewish, absolutely Jewish. But my mother was Russian. And they were married, and I think, my mother and her family – they lived with my mother's family – they didn't understand my father because he was a Jew. And there was some confrontation. I think maybe this was part of the reason why they parted; I don't know. I just don't know.

Then, while I was studying at school in Samara, I entered the university at that time.

There was a very good university; it still exists, but I don't know – it was still so good. It was new, and it was better than Moscow University, anything. Everybody knew that in Novosibirsk, in this special place, it was called the Akademgorodok. [Editor's Note: It's known as Novosibirsk State University.] It was a special place for scientific institutions in the university, and I entered this university. I got many antisemitic things in my life, but I was brought up by Russians. Russians do not bring up their children as Jews do. A Jewish child knows about antisemitism. The Russians don't know. There are so many of them; they live like [inaudible] – many things. For example, when I was in the first or second form, the boys were beating me and saying, "You are Jewish," and I have come home, and I didn't feel anything like that because I was in a Russian family. And I said to my mother, "Mama, oh, they are beating me. They say I am Jewish." She says, "You know what," she says, "You tell them, okay, I am Jewish, so what?" I did, and you know what? They stopped. They stopped beating me because they didn't know what was wrong with that. They just know that Jews have to be beaten. But when I said, "Okay, I am Jewish. So what?" They stopped beating me – everything was alright. There were many other things. When I was – I know that here in America, you don't have entering exams in the university. You have some special exams for general, but at the university, you don't have them. In Russia, they used to, and I think they still have, very serious examinations in the university, in the place itself. And in my specialty, I had to have mathematics: written, mathematics: oral, and some other things like German and Russian, to write something in Russian. So, the most important was the written math.

On the oral math, they were giving the written work to the student, to the abiturient. [Editor's Note: an abiturient (??????????) is a high school graduate.] I don't know – what is abiturient in English? The person who enters and wants to enter. It is called abiturient in Russian. I don't know what the English word is.

F: What does the person do?

NF: I am passing exams to enter a university. But the name in Russian for such a person is abiturient. But you don't have exams, so you don't have this. [laughter]

F: I think something similar would be maybe a matriculant. Somebody that's allowed to go to the university because they meet the application standards. I'm not sure if that's exactly the same word.

NF: Whatever, you don't have a word. [laughter] You don't have many words. So, they gave it to me my [inaudible]. One of the problems was crossed out, and there was a three. Three, it's like a "C" here, maybe – I mean, the grade. But it was absolutely correct. And it was just crossed out.

M: Is that because you were Jewish, they did this?

NF: Yeah, and they never tried to conceal it. The guy who was taking the exam from me, the written one – I already passed the exam, and she said that he has given me the best, the best grade. I said to him, "Have a look. This is the absolutely correct problem which is crossed out. And the grade is not – I don't know what's going on." He was not Soviet. He was from Czechoslovakia. There was such a country. You know, Czechoslovakia at that time? And he got very angry and said, "Okay, I go to them." When he came back, he was red like I don't know, and he said, "I couldn't do anything. You sue them." I said, "Ha, I have nothing to do to sue them." He said, "Okay, you know what you do? You pass your papers." We were taking the exams together with the people who entered mathematics. "In mathematics, you will go here. You have twenty-

five [inaudible] for one place for twenty-five people. With this grade, you will not get it." I said, "No." I knew that I was stupid. Of course, I thought mathematics was better, but I was young and stupid, and I said, "No, I want this specialty." "Okay," he said, "Okay, I will give you five." Five is the best. "But, with this three, you have no hope." [laughter] Then, the Jewish thing happened again, but in my – good for me. Because, of course, I wrote this Russian exam, and everything was right. There was an exam in German, and the person who was taking this exam was very interesting. He was a Romanian Jew, a Jew from Romania. But he was a Jew. He didn't know much at first. He was taking the German [exam]. And the Jews always knew that I was Jewish. Goyim don't. Very often, they don't understand because my name was Fradkova. If it's Fradkin, know everybody that's a Jewish name. But Fradkova, it's the same like Fradkin, but people usually don't understand. This guy, Romanian Jew, did understand. And I was really bad at exams because I am too nervous. And I knew the school German well, but still, I was very nervous, and I made a mistake on the rule. This is the end. If it was a mistake on the rule, you cannot get five. And the guy said, "You know what? You made a mistake on the rule." I said, "Yes, I did." "I am not supposed to give you five, but I have never ever heard such a good pronunciation of German from a person who [inaudible]. [laughter] Of course, he didn't know. So, it worked on me. [laughter] So, then, all exams were done. In my specialty, they have two people on the place. They made another exam in math. It was like conversation, officially. But actually, in reality, it was one more exam in math, a much more difficult than the normal. And the person who was accepting the exam was a very high position and very good mathematician. They could not tell him to cross out – this was just not possible. He was a different guy. So, I entered the university. It was a [inaudible] university. So, I studied there for two and a half years. Then I transferred. You know, it's Siberia, and it was very cold, and life was very difficult. I was not very strong. So, I decided to transfer to Saint Petersburg – it was called Leningrad at that time – University; it was what they called the university, too. And I actually did, I transferred – there were many problems again, for the same reason. When I (inaudible)

with many troubles, I was transferred on the philological faculty. My specialty was mathematical linguistics. It was the philological faculty and the historical faculty. In the whole building, there were one Jew and a half. (Lila Abramovich?), my friend from – you don't know anything. You don't know Russia. It's very, very far from Europe. You don't know anything, anyway. And half of me. Everything – just us. It was a special time. They didn't accept Jews, even on the math. Jews are good with math, and usually, there are many Jews in the mathematical faculty. But in that moment, even the mathematical faculty didn't like (inaudible). Then I graduated [from] Leningrad University. With a specialty in mathematical linguistics. It was in 1970. Then they give me the direction – you were supposed to work as you were instructed because the education was free. So, they gave me direction to someplace. They didn't accept me. So, I was free. I tried to get a job. And I couldn't do anything. My mother said she was tired of giving me money. But still, I could not do – in the end, I found a job. This is very much difficulties. One more thing. When I just graduated, there was a guy coming from one company, a very important company. It was something connected to military and acoustics. They were making acoustics for the submarines, to [inaudible]. And I had a course on acoustics, and the guy who was taking the – was it [inaudible] – who was giving the course here liked how I studied and everything. And he gave my name to him. He came over to me and said, "Okay, so we will take you." We even started to discuss how I have to buy an apartment because I had nothing. And then, already he went. Then, it was so strange. He didn't recognize my origin. He felt something in him. "Tell me," he said, "Nadia, you don't want to tell me anything." Why did I know what he meant? I don't know, even now. I said, "You know who my father is, too?" He said, "I'm sorry. I can't do anything for you. I cannot give you the work." I said, "Why? My father is in a very, very responsible position. And he is a military person. He has the have the rank and everything. And he is working." They were making rockets, and one rocket was enough to – I saw it – destroy Massachusetts and Maine and everything around. They were making ballistics, it was called. He was a very important person to this

institution. He said, “I cannot do anything for you. He's already working for many years. You know we do not accept now Jews.” He told me absolutely, like that. Then I had many problems trying to find a job. It was very, very understandable why I couldn’t find a job. In the end, I got a job. Not very good, but still, it was a job. My mother stopped sending me money, and everybody was –

M: So, the issue [of] finding a job was connected to being a Jew?

NF: Well, listen, it's my opinion. I cannot give any proof, but I knew that, and everybody else knew that. My mother said I was not right. She was a communist and Stalinist, my mother. But I know that it was like that. But then I got this job.

M: What were you doing? What was your job? In what field did you work?

NF: Listen, this is called here now, software engineer. It was like that here even. There were no personal computers, so I worked on the mainframe. But still, it was the same. It is called algorithmist in Russian, but here it’s called software engineer. I worked here as a software engineer, so I know what it’s called. It was exactly the same job. So, software engineer is called here. But in Moscow, engineer is not algorithmist. Engineer is engineer. Algorthimist – you know what – it’s not just [inaudible] coding. Then, I found out that if you apply for a postgraduate or a doctorate – if I apply for a doctorate, I will have forty days’ vacation. Not fully paid, but still paid. It was a good thing – I was not going to enter any doctorate, but I thought, “Okay, if I do that, I can go to mama, to Samara.” And so, I did apply. It was in Moscow, and the institution was VINITI [Editor’s Note: In Russian: ??????. All-Union Institute for Scientific and Technical Information. It's now: All-Russian Institute for Scientific and Technical Information.] What was it called in English? All-Union, it was Soviet Union. Information and something institution. VINITI, it was called. It was one of the academic institutions. They had the doctorate of exactly my specialization. So I [inaudible]. The first exam was, of course, specialty. And the guys who were taking the exams were more than satisfied with me and said I have to

pass all other exams and study that. I said, “I’m very sorry, I’m not going to,” I wasn’t going to do it. It was an exam – you’ll never understand; it was an exam on the history of the Communist Party of the USSR. It was a must. I could not read it. How I had this exam in the university, I don’t know. But I didn’t really read the textbook. I just could not read it. “I just cannot do it,” I said, “I cannot have this exam.” Of course, there was English also – it’s all right. But the History of the Communist Party of the USSR? I just cannot do it. I cannot read it. They were yelling at me, went with me to the bookshop, bought me everything for this History of the Communist Party of the USSR, gave it to me, and said, “You study. You have several days, and don't be stupid." Listen, I’m a shy person. They were yelling at me. They were actually – you can find them on the Internet, too. One of them was Vyacheslav [Vsevolodovich] Ivanov. He is a very good – and he is now in a really high position, but he is very old. But at that time, he was not so old. It was so long ago. And the other was (Yuri Schreader?). There were two of them. And they were very important people. So, they gave it [the book] to me. I read some beginning of this history of the Communist Party, and some related topics from an [inaudible]. You don’t know what – it’s terrible. You cannot believe me. I passed this exam. The history of Communist Party, because I got the ticket. They give tickets in Russia – I don’t know if here they do it or not – with questions. I got the ticket with what I managed to – at the beginning. So, I passed it. Then there was a very interesting thing. I was accepted because I had – all grades were the best for the entering exams, just the best; they couldn’t be better. I came to the secretary. She gave me some tea and some cakes, like secretaries do. She said, “So good that you were accepted. Vyacheslav Ivanov was such a good opinion of yours.” This guy was very important at the school; he was taking my exam. “And you know what? Jews are applying to us. Of course, we give them three on the history of the Communist Party, and they will never enter.” What a Jewish guy or girl in this situation [inaudible]? (They wouldn’t say anything?). But I was, like Russians; I said, “Ha, well, I’m Jewish.” Then she [inaudible], “Listen, I like you anyway. But I warn you; you will live in the dorm. Never, ever tell anybody about that.”

She, of course, didn't understand why I told her that. But she said, "Don't tell anybody." I said all right [inaudible]. Then, there was another – in several days, she said, "You know what?" There was a commission. It's called sebranje. How do you call it here? [Editor's Note: the Russian: ????????. It means meeting or gathering in English.] Gathering officials – conference, it's called. At any rate, at my job, it was called conference – for confirmation of the people who were accepted to the doctorate. And there was, of course, the person from the KGB there. It was called the First Department. You'll never know – the first department is – I don't know. It doesn't exist anymore, maybe. But at any institution, at any organization, there was First Department; it's for the KGB. They were looking at [inaudible]. And the guy from the First Department said, "Are you crazy? She's Jewish." He knew. It was his profession. He said, "Have a look at her name. Have a look at her father's name." My father's name is – was, he died – Fradkov. But his name was (Shimon Schefftelovich?) There is not a name in Russian which starts with an "sch." [Editor's Note: In Russian, ?]. It's just doesn't exist. Schefftel is a Jewish. And he was not Semjon – in Russian, Semjon. There is Semjon for – but he was (Shimon Schefftelovich?). I did not put Schefftelovich; I put (Schercher?). But he was KGB man; he knew. "Have a look." And they were thinking, thinking. It was very difficult to do anything already because I've already accepted, and I had the best grades. What could you do? Nothing. So, they didn't do anything. I stayed. But she [the secretary] told me that. Like it was – if he said, "No, you cannot accept her because she's Jewish. Have a look. She's Jewish." As was if I was – I don't know what – imbecile, or what. She told me that because she was playing my friend, this secretary, of the doctorates. So how it was. There were many antisemitic incidents in my life, but I never – I was brought [up] by Russians. I never took it like Jews do. They know, and they know how to behave. I didn't know, and I didn't know how to behave. I was just, "Huh, why?" Like that. So, then they started to let Jews out of the country. Immediately, I decided to go out. I said to my mother, "Mother, I will leave this second."

M: What year was this?

NF: I was still in the doctorate. So, I entered –

M: Was it maybe the ‘70s? You were saying –

NF: Listen, listen, my mother died in ’74, maybe ’73 – ’73 probably. I said, “I am going to immigrate.” She said, “If you do it, I will die.” And she would do it. She was like that. If she said she would die, she would die. I could not [inaudible] dead mothers. So, I stopped. She said, “I will die,” and she would. What could I do? Nothing. Then she died by herself. Infarction. So, I started to try to apply. I couldn’t even apply because to apply for immigration, you had to have a paper from your parents about how much money he wants [from] me, or he – maybe he doesn’t want anything. Whatever. So, I tried to ask my father for such papers. I said, "Okay, if you think I owe you something, you just put the sum, and let’s try to get somewhere.” But he said no. They were taught not to give – if they don’t give the paper, I cannot apply. So, for many years, I couldn’t do anything. I tried and tried and tried. This is the (worst?) regulation. You have to [inaudible] the paper from your father. My mother was dead.

M: What was your father’s view on you leaving?

NF: Listen, my father was like my mother, communist. And he did everything to kill me with the KGB. The KGB was actually – and he did. He was helping the KGB. But when the Jews, when everything was – you know what happened in the Soviet Union? And the Jews had the right to immigrate, immediately he immigrated. And you know where? To Germany. It was all his family and everything.

M: When was this?

NF: Well, when the Soviet Union stopped to exist. I don’t know. It’s not my family. But I knew that my brother by my father – how is it called in English? We have the same father but different mothers. He's still brother by father.

M: Yeah.

F: Half-brother.

M: Half-brother.

NF: We have a special word in Russian for them. But he is in Germany with his family and everything like that. My father died in Germany. Immediately – he did understand everything. Immediately, when there was a possibility, he left. But when the KGB told him, he did everything against me and did many very mean things to me. Because he was of such a position, making rockets, one of which would have destroyed the whole New England. And he was Jewish. So, he was like that before the KGB. I hate it. Well, he is dead; I cannot say anything. It's not good that I am saying it, but it's true. This is how it was. So, there were many people in Russia who were refuseniks [inaudible]. But I was not the one refusing because I didn't get any refusal. I didn't apply. I couldn't apply. I tried to do everything. And at that time, you maybe don't know, the Irish people – they're always fighting England, the Irish. They invented such a means to fight as hunger strike. Hunger strike to death. Okay, I keep hunger strike, and I keep it until I'm dead, or you do what I want you to do because it's legal. Many Catholics made hunger strikes. I did several, too. One of them was twenty-three days. Then there was forty-four days or something. It was already – I said, I will not stop it until – like Irish. But they arrested me. They brought the KGB to my place and arrested me to put me to the hospital. It was several times. It was more than half a year altogether. And these were more difficult things. They put me in the – here it is called intensive care – in a men's hospital of Leningrad. It was the worst which I had. It was worse than the jail, worse than the punishment cell, worse than the labor camp, worse than the psychiatric hospitals because there were several, and I was alone. In jail, there are many people, so it's all right. But there, I was me, and there were several against me. And there was a KGB person who was sitting the whole day there. I don't know why. Watching at me. I could

not leave because it was – it was not impossible to escape, but he was sitting there. And during the night, there was a policeman. It was militsioner – it was called militsioner. [Editor's Note: Russian: ??????????. It means police officer; the term is specifically associated with the Soviet Era, whereas police officers in Russia are referred to as politsiya (???????).] But the policeman was very good; we were friends with him. He was studying in the academy over there. I was making some assignments for him on German because he didn't know it, and he brought it to me and was making me – they were so simple and [inaudible] policemen. I said, "Why are you sitting at night, and the KGB is sitting over the day?" And he said, "They are so important; they can't work at night. We are supposed to work at night." Like that. You know there was a confrontation because the KGB and militia, like that – they were organizations who hated each other. [Editor's Note: militia refers to the formal police forces in the USSR.] I don't know why. And also between Moscow and Saint Petersburg, which was called Leningrad at that time. It was very, very funny. So, they kept me there. Then at some moment, they placed me to the psychiatric hospital. They [inaudible] keeping me there how long? Several months. Before, it was life like – every day, you could be arrested. We got accustomed to it. But we're always speaking to the KGB. They were telling us – in that moment, they said, "Okay, you will be put to jail," to me, "but we are not going to make a hero of you. We will find something to put you in jail for." Now, before they were putting in jail, people, giving them – they were anti-Soviet, or something like that. But that moment they decided to make – for example, to one person, they put a gun in his – I'm forgetting words in Russian and English. [inaudible] It never happened to me before. Wardrobe. A wardrobe.

M: Is there a word in Hebrew?

NF: What?

M: Word in Hebrew?

NF: No, no, in English and Russian.

M: Okay.

NF: Hebrew, I don't remember at all. I don't use it at all. I still can find – I can ask for directions and give a [inaudible] for somebody, like [inaudible] that. This is very important. You have to – you know Hebrew?

M: A decent amount.

NF: So, you understand what an [inaudible] is?

M: [inaudible]. Quick question. You said the KGB was following you around.

NF: All of us. Not me exactly. Everybody.

M: Everybody, of course. How often –?

NF: Yeah. I don’t say it was me – just everybody.

M: For sure.

NF: There were many people

M: How often were you arrested?

NF: It’s not that arrested. Suppose they [inaudible] you. For example, how I got this paper from my father. I told you that he said, "You don't owe me anything but will never get the paper." But then I had the hunger strike. They arrested me. Well, the KGB intruded my room and took me, put me in this hospital. Okay. I didn’t stop my hunger strike. I promised. So they didn’t know what to do. They shot me with narcotics. I stopped speaking Russian correctly. Believe me; it was – narcotics are like that. For some reason, sometimes, I started to speak English. I don't know why. They were

calling for a guy who knew English because they were putting everything [that] I told. How important – they put down everything I told, every stupid thing. Oh, unbelievable. And they didn't know what to do. I was force-fed, so I wasn't going to die. I was force-fed. I did not do anything to stop my hunger strike. And they didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do either. Then, once I developed some very good relationships with some doctors in this intensive care department and with some nurses. And one nurse said, "Nadia, the KGB brought your father. They are downstairs." They brought him from Moscow. And he entered and started – they thought maybe he would do something for me to stop. And he said, "You are doing a very bad thing to me." Of course, it was not good for him that his daughter makes such a thing. I said, "Okay, you didn't even if I was still alive. You were told by the KGB [inaudible]. Why am I supposed to think about you?" I said, "I'm not going to do anything. Just leave me alone." He went, then he returned. And he said to me, the KGB too, "Promise her to give her this paper. Let her stop her hunger strike. And when she is out in several days, we put her more or less in order. You'll see her. And she will get this paper from you that you owe him nothing." He said it to me. I said, "Okay." It was some way to resolve the situation. I said, "All right." Then, in several days, I called him to Moscow. I was at home already and said, "Okay, I'm going to come over to Moscow. You promised to give me the paper." "I have to speak to people." I said, "Okay." "And to give your own daughter the paper that you don't owe her anything, you have to speak with the KGB. You think it's decent? You don't behave decently." It was terrible. Then he said, "Okay, come over. I'll give you the paper." So, I have come to Moscow, and he gave me the paper. It was confirmed by people – it was a special form, a special procedure. He did everything. I got the paper. My best friend Natasha, who lives now in Jerusalem; she used to live in Moscow –

M: Who was this in Jerusalem?

NF: My friend –

M: Your friend, okay.

NF: Natasha (Ratner?). (Ratner?) is the last name. Her mother-in-law had a birthday, and she invited us, so we bought some presents and flowers. I couldn't even walk after all this happened to me. I was very weak. So, Natasha was carrying my things which I brought – I was coming to the city, so I had some things, clothes with me. I was carrying only – I was able to carry only flowers. So, she was carrying stuff, and I was carrying the flowers. We were arrested by the KGB near the metro station. They demanded my passport, look at the passport, and said, “Okay, it’s a false document.” I said, “It’s good that you told me; it’s very dangerous to have a false passport.” Passport is very important in Russia. Still, now, it is very important. Very important document. I said, "Okay, it's false, and you told me. Thank you very much." "So, we have to arrest you. Your passport" It is called (zaderzha?) . It is not arrest. I don’t know how to say it in English. So, they brought us to some station of militsioners, and stuff [inaudible]. We were arrested. Then I asked them, “Just give the flowers to Natasha. Bring my things to me, and let Natasha go. You will have scandal. You don’t want it. They will call to the United States,” because they are expecting that. They did it. Then for several hours, [they] were keeping me. They brought me to the railway station. There was a KGB person who wanted to – you have no time; maybe I’m too long, but I’m trying to answer the questions. So he put me [in] the car and brought me from Moscow to Saint Petersburg by force. I didn't do anything illegal. I had the right to be in Moscow. But they did it, like that. Such things were happening all the time, all the time. They were speaking to us. That was how they said to me that they had an instruction not to make heroes of people. [inaudible] was fine. You cannot leave – not to have anything to be put to jail for in this country. So, it’s good the KGB person who said this said this is how it was. Then, after being in the psychiatric hospital for several months, you know what happened? They used psychiatry as a punishment for dissidents. It was very well known. And at that time, the Soviet Union was already actually excluded from the World Psychiatric Association for using psychiatry for political reason. It was very bad for the

Soviet Union, and they wanted to get back. I don't know if they got already back or not, but they did say that "Yeah, it happened, but now it never happens." So, they were in a difficult situation with me. But they still threatened me with putting me into the psychiatric hospital. And then I call to America. Or some people did, and they said, "Listen, send me some American psychiatrist to make the exam," because they are going to put me to the [psychiatric hospital], they already said, and they will, I knew. The psychiatric hospital. They send a couple of people to Moscow – have come to Moscow, but the KGB somehow prevented this to me. Then I returned back to Leningrad and to some other guys from California, Dr. Baer and Dr. Silverstein, they were. B-A-E-R, the first, Dr. Baer, and Silverstein from California. They were making a tour; they were tourists. They were asked by Jews to make me an exam. Maybe they were paid also. I don't know. Somehow, the KGB skipped that. They were Soviets. They didn't work properly. So, we met, and it was such a terrible experience for several [reasons] – the two of them were – you don't know how psychiatrists work. You're asking and asking and asking and asking and asking people about this and that and that and that. In the end, they turn backs to each other and wrote, both of them, separate conclusions. They both were that I was mental absolutely out of it. I put them in my [inaudible]. I was arrested [and] put in the psychiatric hospital. And so, when the psychiatrists were speaking to me, I said, "Okay, you took my bag from me. Have a look at the [inaudible]. Nobody will trust you. You can do whatever you want to. You can keep me here. You can kill me. Nobody will trust you. I had very good American psychiatrists [who] made an exam, and they said I was healthy. So, now you can do whatever you want to." They were so angry; the KGB was in a rage. Nobody did such a thing before. For example, they put somebody [in] the mental hospital. And then the person, after many years, got to the West, got to the United States, and he was examined and said, "The person was all right." So, they always can say, "Well, we treated him." But before, nobody did it; I was so happy I did it. "Now, you can do whatever you want to, but nobody will trust you." They were angry until the end when I [had] already served my term in the labor camp, and they put me in

jail in Saint Petersburg – in Leningrad – again and put me in the psychiatric hospital in the jail. The psychiatrist there said, “You had an exam with the Americans. I’m not from California.” I said, “Doctor, I know you’re not from California. They were so beautiful. So clean.” And he was dirty, like that. They wear white robes. But there is a word [inaudible] – uniform. It was not white already. It was summer, August. It was hot in St. Petersburg, so he was all open here, was naked here, was black here on the – he looked so disgusting. And I go, “No, you don’t look like Californians. They are beautiful. They are civilized people. I know that you're not Californian, Doctor. You don't have to tell me.” So, how this was. But it was already after everything after I served my term already.

M: I think you had mentioned – you were in the psychiatric hospital, but you also were in a labor camp, you were saying?

NF: I told you about these papers from the American psychiatrists because they were in the West. And then there was such a person – I think it was Martin Gilbert or was it (Rizal?). There were two people who were working for Soviet Jews. (Rizal?) and Martin Gilbert. I think it was Martin Gilbert. He came to Moscow, and he was working for Jews. Then he said, “Well, this person, I have the documents that she is healthy. She is for several months in the psychiatric hospital, and nobody does understand how come." So, they got scared. I saw it. I was in the psychiatric hospital; I saw they were scared. I was told about it afterward, already when people knew it. But when I was in the psychiatric hospital, the doctors said to me, “Why [inaudible] to go to jail and go or stay in the psychiatric hospital?” I said, “Listen, [inaudible] truth.? I knew that I am mentally healthy. In the end, what they did – I was in a psychiatric hospital. I didn't see any people. There are visitors, and this was [inaudible] hospital. So, the people had to write to see me. Nobody saw me. They didn’t allow anybody to see me. And I was in the ward for the most severe cases, where people lived who didn’t know their names. There were, for example, some relatives, or a daughter was visiting her mother; her mother didn’t know

her daughter. They were really sick. I was like, “I’m not like this,” but whatever. And from such a group, they put me to the [inaudible]; it’s the jail for the people who are just arrested. They put me there, and then I had a trial, and they put me to real jail – Kresty, it was called in Russia. It was Kresty. It’s a jail in Saint Petersburg. I spent there many months. Then they sent me to the labor camp on the north of the Arkhangelsk region; it’s beyond the polar circle.

M: How long were you there for?

NF: My sentence was two years. It was called parasitism because I had no job. Listen, all the jobs in this country belong to the state. I couldn’t get a job. Once, I tried – [inaudible] it is called blyat in Russian. [Editor's Note: Russian: ????. It refers to corrupt political favors.] People knew each other, and they were – I was trying to get the place to be a caretaker on the cemetery. And the guy who was speaking to me said, “You don’t even know how I want you.” At any rate, I would have one guard who would not be drunk. They looked at me, and he understood that I was not drinking vodka like everybody who is taking such positions. “Well, you know what happens. The KGB will know. You will not get the job, and I will have a lot of troubles.” So, I couldn’t get any job. For this, I was supposed to – but I made such things. For example, I taught people who were entering institutions for – and I taught math to them to pass the exams. So, I had money, but still, it was not an official job. So they took me from the psychiatric hospital and put me [in] jail. [inaudible] When there was a court, I said, “Listen. How could I work? They kept me kept in – not even that I couldn’t get a job; they kept me in the intensive care. They kept me in psychiatric hospital. How can I work if I was kept for half a year in psychiatric hospital? How could I work?” The commission said, “You were healthy mentally.” I said, “Of course, I am healthy mentally, but can you tell me what exactly I was doing for so many months in the psychiatric hospital in the ward for the most difficult cases?” “You were treated.” I said, “For what? For flu?” You said I was healthy, and it’s true. Like that. One thing more. There was a guy – when they put me

from the mental hospital, put me to this [inaudible], where militsiya keeps the people who were arrested. The KGB brought a lawyer to me, a young lawyer. He tried to persuade me not to mention – in the court, not to mention the psychiatric hospital. I said, "Why not mention? This is true." "So what? So it's true, so what? It doesn't mean anything. Because if you do not mention the psychiatric hospital, it would be better for your" – how you call? – "you will get less term, less term." And he was all trembling like that. He was a young guy. I said, "Why the hell are you trembling? It's me; it's not you. I have been to many places. I'm sitting here in the jail, and you see my hands do not tremble." He said, "It's good for you. You are not afraid of them." He showed the KGB; they were standing there. "I [inaudible] afraid of them." He was, at any rate, honest. So he was my lawyer. They give the lawyer. So, he made the term which I – you asked about the term. He made the term which I spent in the psychiatric hospital part of my serving term. So, actually, the term started several months before. So, in jail, in a labor camp, I was less than two years because the months that I spent in the hospital were included in this.

M: I want to shift a little forward. What was the process for you leaving the Soviet Union?

NF: You know what? I was released from the labor camp. They told me it was the usual procedure. When the person was serving his term, they were opening another case, and the person stayed in the labor camp if they see that the person didn't change. I never changed.

M: It's like finding an excuse.

NF: So, they opened another case for me. But then, somehow, it didn't work out. Because it was already the time when everything started. It was not one day that the Soviet Union died, but it started –

M: When Gorbachev –

NF: Yes. They promised me that they will – first of all, they opened the psychiatric case again. They brought me from Arkhangelsk region to Saint Petersburg again, to the Kresty, and put me in psychiatric department of the hospital of the jail. My term was supposed to be ending in two days or something, and then I was already – and they said, “Okay, you’ll be in jail or in psychiatric hospital. You're not going to get out." What could I do? Nothing. But then, of course, it started already. So I was deprived of everything. No room. I had a room before. No room, no belongings, no nothing. I lived with my friends and stuff like that. We were going to demonstrations. And before we were arrested, at that time, the KGB only made pictures, photographs; they didn’t arrest anybody. I went to the telephone office to speak to America. They had such manners. The KGB were two guys who were working openly against me. I called to America. They were right there, and they didn’t do anything. It was like that.

M: What did you think? Were you shocked?

NF: [inaudible] Then they started to let the political prisoners out. We were already [inaudible] meeting people. There were so many that were coming back. There was something very strange happening. Then, the word came from London, from BBC. They were making [a] film of wives of the Prisoners for Zion who were still in jail, still in labor camps – were [inaudible] me. But I was not a wife. At the time, I was already divorced, and my husband has no relation to this stuff. So I was myself, a Prisoner for Zion. Israel gave me the Prisoner for Zion – how you say it? What is this Prisoner for Zion? What is it? Prisoner for Zion is what? Rank? No. Name. So, they were my friends. They were wives of Prisoners for Zion, and I was a Prisoner for Zion myself. They made the movie. It was in Moscow, and nobody did anything. They [inaudible] movie people was [inaudible]. And they came to Natasha’s apartment, and they made a movie. In the park, they made the movie. Nobody touched us. Nobody was arrested. [inaudible] something really strange. Everything has changed. But people who I knew, nobody could say that there would be no Soviet Union. I didn’t know such a person. Nobody would believe it.

Nobody. But it happened.

M: So, you said you went to Israel, correct?

NF: Yes.

M: How was the process of getting to Israel? And why Israel and not the US right away? Not somewhere else in Europe?

NF: Yeah. You know what? Actually, my old friend – [inaudible] friend of mine, actually, before they went to the United States, but then, I can't just do – the KGB wanted me to – when they gave me the permission, I understood they wanted me to go to the United States. [inaudible] For me, it matters only one thing – to go out. Like I said, because I had many friends in Israel, too, already. Natasha was already in Israel. Some other people, too. So, I decided I'd go to Israel. Why not? At any rate, in Israel, there couldn't be official antisemitism, that's for sure. It could be, but it's not official. So, they gave me permission, and I went to Israel. At that time, in Austria, there were people who were taken – the people were bringing them to Rome and then to the United States. I never did this. Okay, I'll go to Israel. So, I went to Israel. Everything was alright. I liked it there, and I had friends there. It was so hot. This is very difficult. I was from the north. Saint Petersburg is in the north; it's Finland practically. It used to be Finland. There was no such heat. Israel, I have come here in the middle of summer. I was in Tel Aviv. You cannot imagine. Well, maybe if you have been to Florida. I had a guy who was from Florida there, a Jew from Florida. He said, "The weather here is exactly like Florida. The same palm trees and the same weather, the same heat, and everything." So, maybe if you have been to Florida. But everything else was alright. So, then how come to the United States. I got a job in Tel Aviv University [inaudible] on grants. You know, grants is [inaudible]. Not stable. Today, you have a grant, but tomorrow you haven't. So, it was working there; everything was alright. Then my boss said, "I cannot get any grants for you more. So, look for a job." I tried. I did everything. But the times were bad; I couldn't

find a job. I couldn't find a job. So, I said, "[inaudible] In the United States, I can find a job." I had a very good education, and I had experience in the West already because Israel is like the West, and I worked at a university. I had the best recommendation letter and everything. So, I come here. I couldn't find a job [inaudible] because I didn't have the papers. I didn't have the work permit. You don't know. To work here, if you are a foreigner, you have to have a work permit.

M: It's much tougher than –

NF: It was not possible for me, for sure. If a company wants you very much, the company can make a work permit for you, but it costs a lot of money for the company. And besides, he has to want you very much. So, I couldn't do anything. Then people told me – they said, "What people do. You enter a university." I had some money because I worked for several years, and I saved some. You enter some university. You don't have to graduate, but you will have time to look for a job. And I did. I did apply for Brandeis – for grad school at Brandeis in computer science. I paid enormous amounts of money. It was terrible. It was very expensive. I don't know how it is now; it was very expensive. I paid my tuition for the first year, and I started. I couldn't find a job [inaudible] still. I couldn't do anything. And then they asked for money for the second year, and I didn't have any because there was no money. I paid for them all my money. Besides, I had to live, to eat and stuff like that. So, they excluded me from Brandeis. I still went to my computer room and everything, but I already got the letter that I am not a student anymore. Then a guy, one of the refuseniks who knew me by Russia. He went to this Conference for Soviet Jewry. There was a department with their office in Waltham, too. There are many. And said, "What's going on? Brandeis itself is sort of a Jewish university. The person is a Prisoner of Zion, and she paid so much money for the first year already." So the Council of Soviet Jews – I didn't know even who did it for me because so many people knew me. Then came to Brandeis, a Rabbi.

M: Was it Rabbi Al? [Editor's Note: Reference to Rabbi Albert Axelrad, who served as the Jewish Chaplin and Hillel Director at Brandeis. He is credited with making Brandeis a major center of activity in the fight for Soviet Jewry.]

NF: Rabbi. I don’t know who it was. It was long ago, very long ago. But they [the Council of Soviet Jews] came to the Rabbi and explained the situation. The Rabbi came to the reaktor; it is called reaktor of the university. [Editor's Note: Russian: ??????. It means president or rector.] Reaktor, it is called, the main person –

M: The President.

NF: I don’t know. It’s called reaktor in Russian; I don't know how it is in English. The main person of the university. The main administrative person at the university. We came to him and said – and they gave me tuition waiver. Besides, they gave me a position as a helper of secretary on the faculty. I was getting some money to eat. Then I find some other job on the campus as operator of the computer system, which was responsible for all the libraries of Brandeis. So, I had some income. I could eat and pay some. So I graduated from Brandeis like that because I was helped by this Council of Soviet Jewry and the Rabbi.

M: I think we’ll stop on that note. I think that’s really good, a really good point.

[END OF INTERVIEW]