

Oral History of: Boris Drigant
Interviewed by: Faye Wolf
Date of Interview: February 20, 2020
Location of Interview: Max M. Fisher Federation Building, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Subject Matter: Diaspora in Detroit: the Jewish Immigrant Experience

Boris Drigant: [00:00:03](#) Nice to see you.

Faye Wolf: [00:00:05](#) Nice to see you.

Boris Drigant: [00:00:06](#) Thank you for inviting me.

Faye Wolf: [00:00:07](#) You're welcome. This interview is part of the Diaspora in Detroit, the Jewish Immigration Experience Oral History Project. Do you give permission to Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes and for use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

Boris Drigant: [00:00:28](#) Absolutely, I believe that it is good idea.

Faye Wolf: [00:00:31](#) Great. State your name.

Boris Drigant: [00:00:37](#) Okay, so I would like to make a kind of short, not very short introduction.

Faye Wolf: [00:00:43](#) Absolutely.

Boris Drigant: [00:00:45](#) I would like to talk about my story, the story of my family shortly and short version. Then try to explain why we decided to leave Soviet Union. Then our experience. Does it work?

Faye Wolf: [00:01:13](#) It's working, I'm just checking.

Boris Drigant: [00:01:14](#) Then our experience when we came to United States and live in the United States and in the country. Then also try and finally became part of Jewish Community.

Faye Wolf: [00:01:37](#) Perfect.

Boris Drigant: [00:01:37](#) First my name is Boris Drigant. Some people say Drigant, I don't care. I am a Jew. Based on 23andMe Test, 97.7%-

Anna Drigant: [00:01:55](#) 99.

Boris Drigant: [00:01:55](#) 99.7% Ashkenazi Jew. Came here with my family from Moscow, Soviet Union in 1987 to Detroit, because we've had distant relatives as an anchor family here. From '87, I live here in Detroit more than 30 years up to date.

Faye Wolf: [00:02:47](#) So how old were you when you came to the United States?

Boris Drigant: [00:02:52](#) I was 43, middle age. I came, as I said, from Moscow, Soviet Union. At that time, it was still Soviet Union. My parents came from Belarussia, from small shtetl to Moscow after the Russian Revolution when Pale of Settlement became not existent so Jews could move to any place in Soviet Union. They came to Moscow, lived in Moscow.

Boris Drigant: [00:03:40](#) I was born in Moscow in 1944. I went to a school in Moscow. Went to college in Moscow, graduated from college, started working in a research center. It was very lucky to get that job to that place. So from college, I had master in mechanical engineering. Through my work in research center, I prepared dissertation and earned Ph.D. in mechanical engineering. Everything in Moscow. In Moscow, I met my late wife, married. We had daughter.

Boris Drigant: [00:04:52](#) Finally, we decided to leave the country, applied for permission to leave in '79. It was rejected. For eight years, we were Refuseniks, with everything what it means. Then, when government start changing, Gorbachev came to power. Finally, in '87 we were permitted to leave the country and to come here, and then started life here in United States. This is short description of our life before immigration, if you would like to have any details right now.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:00](#) I have just a couple questions. When you immigrated to United States, it was with your, first-

Boris Drigant: [00:06:07](#) Yes, my wife.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:08](#) And daughter?

Boris Drigant: [00:06:08](#) Late wife and daughter.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:11](#) You came to Detroit?

Boris Drigant: [00:06:11](#) Yes, we came directly to Detroit through Italy, through Vienna, through all the several months of movement. We came to Detroit, because my wife had distant, distant relatives here who became our anchor family.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:34](#) Why did you have to go to Italy and Vienna?

Boris Drigant: [00:06:37](#) At that time, you could not go directly from Soviet Union.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:41](#) So that process was how long?

Boris Drigant: [00:06:43](#) It was three months.

Faye Wolf: [00:06:46](#) Three months in each place, or three months total?

Boris Drigant: [00:06:48](#) Total, one month in Vienna. No, one month in Vienna, and then three months in Italy. It was summertime. It was not bad.

Faye Wolf: [00:07:04](#) Tourist season.

Boris Drigant: [00:07:06](#) Yeah, yeah. Now I would like to try to answer question why we decided to leave Soviet Union, because at glance history of our family in Russia does not look bad at all, and it's true. We were rather successful professionally. We had comfortable living. We did not experience any hunger. So it looked okay, but still we decide to leave. Why? Maybe you don't know, but at that time in Soviet Union I was a Soviet Union citizen, so I had passport of Soviet citizen, like in America people have, and I now have American passport. In that Soviet passport, when you open it, you can see first name of people, last name, date of birth and nationality. It may be Russian, it may be Belarussian. For me, it stated Jew. If in Russian Empire, before revolution, to be a Jew mean to practice Hebrew. In Russia after revolution, overtime when religions became nonexistent in Soviet Union, it became biological, like in Germany Nazi time.

Boris Drigant: [00:09:09](#) Officially, I was a Jew. Any place I would apply for job, I had to write down that I'm a Jew. Apply for education to go to university or some school, I have to write down that I am a Jew. It was coming with some, mostly nonofficial, but restrictions, second level citizens. Russian Empire first, had long history of anti-Semitism, long history.

Boris Drigant: [00:10:07](#) Then in Soviet Union, when I was born, as I said, in 1944, it's end of Second World War. Soon after that, Stalin started big campaign against Jews, against Zionists, against Jews as enemies of the country, Jewish doctors were blamed that they

poisoned, killed the leaders of Soviet Union. It was every day in every newspaper, on every radio program, talk on the streets. I was a small boy at that time. I was six, seven years old, but I still remember that my father lost a job. Everyday, he was leaving home, trying to find a job, and then coming back in the evening. We lived in multi-family apartment in one room, my parents, grandmother and me. They could not separate from me when they talked.

Boris Drigant: [00:11:44](#) Every evening, my father used to tell same, same stories; that he called place where he believed that they have opening for an engineer of his specialty, and they said, "Oh, yes. Yes, we have. Please come." He used to come to the place, and sometimes as soon as they saw his face, most time as soon as they saw his application, that he a Jew, they said that, "Oh, I'm sorry. Between your call and your visit, it changed. We eliminated this position, or we hired somebody else to this position." It was every day. As we lived in multi-family apartment, there were different families living next to each other with different background, different nationality and different understanding of what is going in the country.

Boris Drigant: [00:12:59](#) My grandmother was crying afraid to go to community kitchen that was shared by all families. She was crying that she is afraid to go to the kitchen, because every time people talk about these Jewish doctors who killed leaders of the country, about all Jews, that ready to kill everybody. We have to wait, they talked, just short time and all of them will be pushed out, send to Siberia. I still remember this, even I was a small boy. Several times, I was stopped by adults on the street. Again, six, seven years old. They stopped me, did not hurt me physically, but angrily explained me that I am a Jew [inaudible 00:14:00], bad boy and so on. A lesson for whole life.

Boris Drigant: [00:14:14](#) Historians believe that Stalin really planned to exterminate the Jews, what Hitler could not finish. We also know that during World War II, in Holocaust, six million Jews were killed, because it was policy of German Nazis. But they were killed mostly but not Germans, but Ukrainians, Belarussians, Lithuanians, Polish people, Hungarian people.

Anna: [00:14:51](#) Bulgarian

Boris Drigant: [00:14:51](#) Hm?

Anna: [00:14:51](#) Bulgarian.

- Boris Drigant: [00:15:01](#) Bulgarian people, anybody. Then, through the life, after Stalin died, all the tension came down. It was not so bad, but it was always some back noise that you're not part of title nations. You're different, you're lower. All Jewish kids knew that they have to learn harder to get better education to avoid street anti-Semitism. It was kind of experience through my whole life over there that strangers on the street called you Jeed or some people I knew, I worked with come to you and tells that, "You know we love you. All Jews are bad, but you are so different. You are a good man, so are your friends"
- Boris Drigant: [00:16:10](#) It was life experience. Based on life experience, based on knowledge of Jewish history, it was understanding that there are two different level of anti-Semitism, through the history. One is at the ground, street anti-Semitism, mob that hate you. Another, government level, might promote anti-Semitism or push it down; depends on their view or their political interests, on many different things. Not necessarily pure anti-Semitism but what is better for them to keep power. What I learned from the history that pogroms or such could happened to Jews when it was directed by government, like Hitler government or Stalin government after war, or it was allowed by government, government closed eyes what was going on, or government lost power and have no control what mob was doing. So when mob feels that they can do anything and it will be no punishment at the end, they do everything.
- Faye Wolf: [00:18:05](#) Is that during when you were how old, from what age to what age? Did you experience those type of Pogroms?
- Boris Drigant: [00:18:15](#) As I told you story when I was small boy, then later it became better. But again, it was like background noise through the whole life-
- Faye Wolf: [00:18:24](#) Always there.
- Boris Drigant: [00:18:24](#) It did not go anywhere, it's still here. It's oppressed down, but it's still here. As working close to government information in industry, I could see that economy is coming down in the country. Ideologically it's coming down. It could break sooner or later and finally it happened. Soviet Union had no chance to survive. I was afraid that when it breaks, it will be no centralized control and mob will be free to kill anybody, and even will be directed, told that you can blame Jews for an economical problem and so on. It will be bloody. I was afraid for my family. This is why me and my wife, we decided that in interest of our daughter, in the interest of ourselves, it's better to leave the country. So we applied for permission to leave the country, it

was '79. They rejected our request, and then eight years we lived under tighter control from police, from KGB. Lucky, I did not get into prison. I continued working. It was very unusual, but I was able to work. Then in '87, when we got permission, we left the country.

Faye Wolf: [00:20:34](#) Other members of your immediate family, your parents, they were back in Russia or?

Boris Drigant: [00:20:41](#) My wife's parents were back in Russia. My dad died by that time, several years before. My mother moved to Israel. Actually, when we applied for permission, we planned to go to Israel, not to United States. But after waiting eight years, to be in middle age with open ulcer, not knowing whatever is waiting for us. Immigration, at that time, was like you jump into big, black hole and don't know what will be at the end. After eight years we did not expect that we will get permission, so when we got a phone call that we have to leave the country, we started looking around. We called relatives in Israel. They said, "Economy is very bad, very difficult to find a job. So think maybe it's better for you to try to go to United States," and we decided to go to United States. I still try to answer to myself if it was the right decision or wrong decision. I don't know. I cannot answer this, still.

Faye Wolf: [00:22:21](#) It's okay.

Boris Drigant: [00:22:24](#) Four years later, I cannot answer. But we came here and started life here, it was a nightmare, in spite of full support from Jewish community. We first had to go through Vienna and Italy with help of HIAS. HIAS assisted through that move through Vienna.

Faye Wolf: [00:22:54](#) What was the name of the organization?

Boris Drigant: [00:22:54](#) HIAS.

Anna: [00:22:54](#) HIAS.

Boris Drigant: [00:23:01](#) HIAS, joint HIAS.

Faye Wolf: [00:23:01](#) Okay. Go ahead.

Boris Drigant: [00:23:07](#) H-I-A-S.

Faye Wolf: [00:23:11](#) I got it.

Boris Drigant: [00:23:14](#) But yet, I thought from the beginning, with my accent, maybe some difficulties.

Faye Wolf: [00:23:19](#) That's okay, I got it. Not a concern, I got it.

Boris Drigant: [00:23:25](#) We came here. Again, we got some assistance with some monies, enough to survive. Started going to school to learn English. Our daughter went to school.

Faye Wolf: [00:23:47](#) How old was your daughter?

Boris Drigant: [00:23:49](#) 13.

Faye Wolf: [00:23:50](#) Okay, so she was middle school aged. Okay.

Boris Drigant: [00:23:53](#) Yeah. She was 13, and interesting, because we were Refuseniks. At that time, all over the Jewish world, a lot of families celebrated Bat Mitzvahs, for their selves and for girls Refuseniks. She came here, so first few months in United States, she celebrated Bat Mitzvah about half dozen times in different cities of United States.

Boris Drigant: [00:24:31](#) In spite of all this support and help, you know it's impossible to overestimate. It was great. It was absolutely necessary. It made our move much easier. Still, it was like a nightmare, so difficult. You move to another country with a completely different style of life. We had no information how it will be. Completely different and different language, by the way, not Russian but English. A different style, different requirements at work and so on, and so on. Everything. First steps, again, it's like a nightmare. Looking for a job, first I was told that I should never tell anybody that I have a Ph.D. because then I will be over qualified and would not have a chance to find a job.

Boris Drigant: [00:25:44](#) I started looking for a job. With help of one of my new friends who immigrated a little bit earlier, I was referred to small company, started working as a draftsman. My hourly rate was lower than the unemployment rate, but I was happy because it was the first step I can tell that I was getting some American professional or some kind of professional experience. So I started the job. People talked around me. It was mostly like white noise, because I could not understand much, but I worked on computer. So with computer, it was easier. Then half year, about six months later, I found another job through another friend. That time, it was a little bit higher. It was design position as a contractor at GM. After about year at that position another new friend referred me and I got position as a field engineer in

General Electric. I worked in General Electric and had a chance to travel through the country to many, many places, small towns, talk to many people, mostly blue collars, some white collars.

- Boris Drigant: [00:27:39](#) It was very interesting experience to understand better people in America, what they think about, what they worry about, everyday life. They shared all of this with me. At every place, people were very, very friendly. They all thought that I'm Russian as I came from Russia. They asked me why if I'm Russian I left Russia. I explained them, I'm not Russian, I am a Jew. Okay, then it makes difference.
- Boris Drigant: [00:28:20](#) Anyway. I start getting closer and closer to these people living in America. It was great. Then, eight years later, it was huge layoff in General Electric. I lost job, and one of my customers at that time invited me to come to join them, to work for them. It was Lansing Water and Light, the municipal power here in Lansing, providing electricity and water for Lansing and surrounding areas. I worked over there.
- Faye Wolf: [00:29:08](#) Did you live near Lansing?
- Boris Drigant: [00:29:11](#) No, I was driving back and forth every day. It was about two and a half to three hours driving every day. I had a lot of time to listen to news, to other information on the radio, knew everything. Again, very friendly, very nice place. All these places, I met a lot of nice people, a lot of friendly people. Not everybody, but not friendly people was an exception all the time. Mostly it was very nice, very good people. I worked in Lansing, and people over there mostly are farmers, blue collars. Again, different life, and it's very interesting. So I worked overthere until 2014, until I retired at age of 70. I decided that enough was enough. Few months later, they called me and asked me to come back as a consultant. So I'm still with them now as a consultant, just part time, just few hours. So, this is it.
- Boris Drigant: [00:30:45](#) My late wife, she was a specialist in Russian literature. Again, not easy to find job in America. But finally, slowly she got a job in public library. First, it was small, part time job in Congregation Shaarey Zedek library through Jewish Vocational Service. Then through new friends, she found the job in Hazel Park Public Library, part time. Some years later, she got job, this time full job, in Livonia Public Library. Then she became sick and died from cancer. It was about 17 years ago, relatively young age, 55. With Anna, my second wife, we knew each other through friends from Russian-Jewish community. She lost her husband; I lost my wife. Finally, we decided it makes sense to get together.

I'm very glad that we agreed with that. She takes care of me now and I take care of her.

- Boris Drigant: [00:32:29](#) Some more small details, my daughter married, have two children. Unfortunately, they live far from here. They live in Virginia. Grandson now accepted to Ph.D. program in California, so he will live even further.
- Faye Wolf: [00:33:01](#) Did your daughter go to college here?
- Boris Drigant: [00:33:07](#) Lansing, Michigan State.
- Faye Wolf: [00:33:08](#) What did she major in?
- Boris Drigant: [00:33:10](#) Finances. And with Anna I now have also her children and her grandchildren in this area. A couple grandchildren you can see time to time in our synagogue, mostly in the kitchen. On Fridays, they help to prepare food. Other days, hunting for some sweets. This is this part, and then another last part I would like to talk.
- Boris Drigant: [00:33:55](#) I can hear quite often complaints from American Jews here: "We helped Jews from Russia to immigrate to United States, but we don't see any participation in Jewish life of those". It's partially true, partially not true. So what is that, and why is that? As I said, in Soviet Union any religious was against the law. Not just Hebrew, any religious. Almost all Synagogues, all churches, almost all of them were closed. It was just I believe about five or six Synagogues through the Soviet Union with official population of Jews at that time, I believe, four or five million people. In Moscow, it was two Synagogues with about 400,000 Jews or more living in Moscow, but it was dangerous to go over there. If you go to Synagogue, if you're a student, they had to report to your college that you come into Synagogue. If you're working, they have to report to your work. It might be a big problem for you, so people were afraid to go to synagogue.
- Faye Wolf: [00:35:51](#) So could you practice any of the rituals and holidays of Judaism in your home?
- Anna: [00:35:58](#) Nope.
- Boris Drigant: [00:36:00](#) Possibly, maybe. But first when we lived in multi-family apartment, there's a lot of anti-Semitism around. It was dangerous. Second, I grown up and my wife grown up, we had no knowledge. We had no practical experience, nothing. We started when we finally had our own apartment and applied for

permission to leave the country. We had several underground classes with a teacher teaching Hebrew. Again, not professional, getting some information from other people from Jewish tourists. It was against the law. It was like criminal act, but we had some classes so we got a little bit knowledge of Hebrew. Then, when our teacher invited us to Passover service in his apartment, it was our first experience. Then, he was pushed out of the country. He left country to Israel, and next year we decided to have Passover service in our home. But we had just one time attended service, and we knew that we need Passover book.

- Boris Drigant: [00:37:44](#) Okay? So I ask friends around, they said that, "If you go to Synagogue, find there a Rabbi Friedland, do not remember his last name but likes it. He is the director of synagogue' yeshiva. They had small Yeshiva in the synagogue. Talk to him, ask him. He will give you a Seder Book." So I asked for him, found old, old man. He looked at me, and obviously he mistaken me with somebody. He asked me, "I waited for you for so long time. Why you did not come?" "I don't know. I did not know that you waited for me." "Yeah, I was waiting for you. So, did you decide to go to my Yeshiva to study?" "I did not think about this." "Why?" "I think I'm too old." I was 36, 37 at that time. He said, "No, you're not old." He said, "Rabbi Akiva started about same age, so you can come". I said "But I have family, I have to work. I need to support my family". "No problem, we will pay you stipend so you will have money to support your family".
- Boris Drigant: [00:39:22](#) Then I said, "We just applied for permission to leave the country, to go to Israel." He said, "Wow, then I cannot take you to the class, because your candidacy has to be approved by Soviet government office communist ideological committee. If you want to go to Israel, they would not approve you."
- Faye Wolf: [00:40:12](#) So there were certain Yeshivas that were allowed to function and teach people and the government knew that? It was illegal?
- Boris Drigant: [00:40:20](#) No, this was legal. It was in synagogue. I know that at least one Yeshiva was in Moscow, small, small Yeshiva. Not officially published, most people did not know about it. And another Yeshiva was in Hungary.
- Anna: [00:40:47](#) What year it was?
- Boris Drigant: [00:40:51](#) It was about 1980. It was 1980. Again, all these Yeshiva activities were under government strict control. People was afraid. Through the generations, everything was lost. First, I tested matzos I was at that age, 36 or 37. I never had a chance to see it

or test it before. I knew about it, but it was from literature. We did not know how to pray, and we did not know any practice.

- Faye Wolf: [00:41:35](#) No Shabbat, no Passover, no Yom Kippur.
- Boris Drigant: [00:41:38](#) Nothing.
- Faye Wolf: [00:41:40](#) What about a bris?
- Boris Drigant: [00:41:42](#) No.
- Faye Wolf: [00:41:44](#) No bris.
- Boris Drigant: [00:41:44](#) No.
- Faye Wolf: [00:41:44](#) Okay.
- Boris Drigant: [00:41:46](#) So we came to United States with no knowledge at all. At least in this part, Soviet government was very successful to push people out of religion, any religion, to raise new generations that had no idea what religion is. Then, to go to here to any religion institute, it was very difficult.
- Faye Wolf: [00:42:26](#) Can you expound on that? Why was it difficult? Because it was unfamiliar to you, or you were fearful?
- Boris Drigant: [00:42:35](#) No. From the beginning, we decided that we have to be members, not just of American Society, but Jewish Society, to be members of Synagogue, to live Jewish life. Okay? So we tried something close to I would say maybe between eight and 10 different congregations.
- Faye Wolf: [00:43:12](#) You have a choice. That must've been a very interesting concept, to have a choice of not only which Synagogue, but do you want reformed, do you want conservative?
- Boris Drigant: [00:43:25](#) We tried Reform. We tried Conservative. We tried Orthodox. We tried Ultra Orthodox, every place we were welcome. Every place, people were friendly to us. We could not stay, because it was so new. It was so unknown. We felt so outsiders, not in a bad. I don't know good or bad, but we came to the place we don't know what it is, why it is, what is it. At the same time, different from old shtetls, when Jewish everyday life and religious life was same. Here, in America, it's different. It was big concern, even 100 years ago, how to survive here that Jewish life not part of everyday life. If you want to live in the country and be successful. Same time, when you go to synagogue and

you would like to be here and you don't understand anything, you feel absolutely stupid.

Boris Drigant: [00:44:48](#) Same time, you have thought that you still need to find a job. You still need to learn English, besides Hebrew, learn English. You have to feed your family, all this. So finally, at all these places we rejected ourselves. We could not stay. It took long time before we became more comfortable in everyday life in America.

Boris Drigant: [00:45:29](#) Then, when my late wife, Natalie, passed away, I wanted to read Kaddish for her. Our friends, Lev and Olga, they also are members of our congregation. I think you saw them. They, couple years before, became members of B'nai David. And they suggested me to come with them to B'nai David to read Kaddish. But at that time B'nai David was not old B'nai David. It became a small group maybe about 30 people. They were so happy when I came: "Our congregation is growing now". I started reading Kaddish over there. They had service only on Shabbat. I was going over there every Shabbat for eleven months. So became member of the Synagogue family, started slowly understanding the services and what it is about and how it is about. Anna joined me over there, because she had the same difficulty, could not stay in any Synagogue before. Slowly with my help, with my support, she was able to adapt to the B'nai David Congregation. Then B'nai David closed the door.

Boris Drigant: [00:47:27](#) We started looking for another place to go. We decided from the beginning that we would look only for Conservative Synagogues. We tried several Synagogues. Then we can to this Synagogue.

Anna: [00:47:48](#) Beth Ahm

Boris Drigant: [00:47:53](#) Beth Ahm. It was the end of Shabbat Service, everybody stayed and Torah was moving around and Rabbi was following the Torah. He stopped and asked, "Who are you? What are you...?" We said we are just visitors, we never been over here. He said, "I can see it, that you are not members of Synagogue, so why did you come here? What are you looking for?" We said, "We are looking for a new Synagogue to become member." Then he called Nancy Kaplan. Nancy called David and also asked Sara Nadis to talk to us. They all talked to us. We decided to try to come another time, and then another time. And this is the end of the story, we are members of the Synagogue with you, happy to be members of the Synagogue. I believe, from my experience, this is one of the most welcome, one of the most nice Synagogue in this area, at least for us. We can feel it. We

feel like we come home every time, we a part of the family and glad to be here. But it is a long story, a long way to get to that point.

- Boris Drigant: [00:49:29](#) Not many of our friends, that immigrated here could make it. But you can find in most Synagogues here at least a few families immigrated from Russia. And then almost all our friends, maybe are not members of Synagogue, maybe not practicing Judaism on a daily basis, but they are members of Jewish Community, at least going to marches, meetings or sport club of Jewish Center. Many of them became members of different congregations through their children, maybe even through grandchildren. Every family is different, but it is not an easy story.
- Boris Drigant: [00:50:27](#) Immigration not easy. We are glad that we are here. I feel that it's our home. I never had feeling at Soviet Union that it was my home. This is it. Any questions? Sorry for such a long speech.
- Faye Wolf: [00:50:55](#) I have a couple questions. What year did you become members of Beth Ahm approximately?
- Boris Drigant: [00:50:59](#) I can tell you that it was when my wife passed away. It was 2003, summer time when I became member of B'nai David. And about 2012 we came to Beth Ahm.
- Faye Wolf: [00:51:10](#) You've been members a while. I want to mention you are now on the board of Beth Ahm. You are on the Board of Trustees.
- Boris Drigant: [00:51:16](#) Yeah. I'm so shy to mention it.
- Faye Wolf: [00:51:21](#) Now compared to your practice of Judaism, when you first arrived in the United States? What do you do now? I know I see you in Synagogue most Saturdays, or several Saturdays. I'm not there every Saturday, but I'm there several Saturdays.
- Boris Drigant: [00:51:38](#) And Friday evening.
- Faye Wolf: [00:51:39](#) Friday evening.
- Boris Drigant: [00:51:40](#) Then yahrzeits, this is mostly what it is.
- Faye Wolf: [00:51:42](#) What about the holidays? What is your practice of Judaism now you are comfortable in society?
- Boris Drigant: [00:51:51](#) We are comfortable in almost everything. We've finally learned it. As I said, we started celebrating Passover as Refuseniks in Russia. We celebrated Passover here, until last year at home.

Our friends, Olga and Lev, who are also members here. Usually we celebrate First Seder in their home, and in our home Second Seder.

- Faye Wolf: [00:52:30](#) Yom Kippur?
- Boris Drigant: [00:52:31](#) Yeah. Well.
- Faye Wolf: [00:52:33](#) Rosha Hashanah?
- Boris Drigant: [00:52:34](#) Yeah. Usually we come to Synagogue.
- Faye Wolf: [00:52:35](#) Purim?
- Boris Drigant: [00:52:40](#) Purim not as much.
- Faye Wolf: [00:52:43](#) Any of the minor holidays that you feel free to celebrate now?
- Boris Drigant: [00:52:45](#) Hanukkah we will always light the candles. We will always give Hanukkah gifts to children and sweets. And go to Synagogue.
- Faye Wolf: [00:53:01](#) What about your daughter? What about her practice of Judaism? So your daughter was grown up by the time you came to Synagogue?
- Boris Drigant: [00:53:16](#) Yes she was 13 years old when we came to US. She had about half dozen Bat Mitzvah at that time.
- Faye Wolf: [00:53:34](#) She must've picked up Hebrew very quickly.
- Boris Drigant: [00:53:36](#) Yeah. She picked up English much faster than me.
- Faye Wolf: [00:53:42](#) Kids do that.
- Boris Drigant: [00:53:44](#) In a couple of years she was better than I am now. We wanted her to go to Hebrew School. She joined several young groups of Jewish kids. First summer with help from Jewish community, she spent some time in Jewish Center Summer Camp. Overall, I don't want to go into details, nothing worked. Every time something happened. I don't want to blame anybody and It wasn't our fault, it was like a disaster, but as a result no plans we had for her came through. Then she attended and graduated from Public School. Did not stay close to any young Jewish groups.
- Boris Drigant: [00:55:08](#) Graduated from college. Tried to be member of Hillel in college. At that time she lived on campus at southwest corner of

campus. Longest way, very last building. She asked if, late evening when she go back from meetings at Hillel back to her dormitory, if anybody can go with her. The response was, no we don't have people for this. So she did not go. Nobody's fault. She is married. It's intermarriage. Her husband is Hindu, from India. Very nice person. I would like to have Jewish son-in-law, same good as he is. If it's possible to combine this in one person. It's possible, but not always. They celebrate all holidays, all Indian Holidays and all Jewish Holidays. They have Passover, they have Hanukkah, they have everything. Kids know they half Jewish, half Hindu. My grandson sent me a letter that he has 52% Hebrew, again based on Jewish law he's 100% Hebrew, because Mother is Jew.

- Boris Drigant: [00:57:15](#) They had wedding here and it was two weddings. Hindu tradition and it was Jewish marriage under chuppah with Rabbi Conrad. And they-
- Faye Wolf: [00:57:35](#) Okay. They maintained some Jewish identity. Your daughter has maintained her Jewish identity.
- Boris Drigant: [00:57:40](#) Yeah. My son-in-law practice in Hindu, really believe in Hinduism and Judaism, both. This is it. They decided their children will make a choice, if any, when grown.
- Faye Wolf: [00:58:13](#) Since you have come to the United States, and you have been here such a long time. What do you feel is your nationality?
- Boris Drigant: [00:58:24](#) I am an American Jew. I am a practicing Jew, but I am an American. I love America. I love Israel. I would do everything for both countries to be healthy and happy. I feel here that it is my home.
- Faye Wolf: [00:58:49](#) Okay. Is there anything you would like to add?
- Boris Drigant: [00:58:53](#) I am glad that you invited me to this interview. I believe it is a good idea to share it. It might be likely that we will have evaluation of Immigration and can use it as well.
- Faye Wolf: [00:59:10](#) I do have one other question for you. In the United States, I know it's difficult sometimes to differentiate, because you know you said that Immigration is difficult. Do you feel anti-Semitism here in The United States?
- Boris Drigant: [00:59:24](#) Sure. But it's not as much as it was in Soviet Union or Russian Empire. It not as ugly here, but we know history of anti-Semitism in The United States, we know Henry Ford history. We

know hospitals here like Botsford or Sinai, because Jewish Doctors could not find a job. It was part of American History, but it was never as bad or bloody as it was over there. It worries us that it is growing now, it is raising now. As long as government controls, pushing down it will be down, but mob is mob. Any mob ask to go and kill somebody or destroy something, you can always find enthusiasts to do it. Did I answer this question?

Faye Wolf: [01:00:42](#) You did. Only because you brought it up earlier, so I wanted to know the comparison of the two. Anything else-

Boris Drigant: [01:00:56](#) Another small example, J.A.P., Jewish American Princess, is it positive or negative? What do you think? It may be anti-Semetic, maybe just-

Faye Wolf: [01:01:09](#) It's negative.

Boris Drigant: [01:01:12](#) Both.

Faye Wolf: [01:01:16](#) Uh-hum. Sometimes we become so used to hearing things, we don't think of it in the way other people think of it, but that's what we need to look at. What do other people think of it, as we think of ourselves. Okay. Have you ever gone back to the Soviet Union?

Boris Drigant: [01:01:39](#) No. And I don't want to go.

Faye Wolf: [01:01:48](#) Okay. Is there anything-

Boris Drigant: [01:01:52](#) I did not miss that country. I do not trust that country. Even though there's friends left, not many, less and less friends. But some immigrated to different place, some in another world now. Country is different itself, so many changes happened over years. It's not Soviet Union anymore. There are several countries in the place of that, and they hate each other, and fight with each other. At least, I was afraid that when it starts breaking apart it will be huge pogroms through the country. It will be a lot of blood, thank God did not happen. But I still believe we made the right decision to leave that place. It's not our country. We were never welcome over there.

Faye Wolf: [01:02:58](#) Have you ever been to Israel.

Boris Drigant: [01:03:03](#) Many times. I love Israel. I visit Israel about eight time through the years. I traveled through the country back and forth many times. I love it. Several times it was with Anna. I celebrated my

70th Birthday in Israel with my daughter's family. My daughter, traveled with us through Israel even it was war at that time, with Gaza, lots of. But it was still great time. I love Israel.

Faye Wolf: [01:03:58](#) Well. Thank you so much for taking the time. I'm glad you finally decided to do it. And I'm glad-

Boris Drigant: [01:04:03](#) Thank you. Thank you.

Faye Wolf: [01:04:03](#) Glad I was here to interview you.