

Born in Moscow

I was born in Moscow Russia in big Christian family. I have four brothers and two sisters. When I wasn't born yet, my parents change religion from Greek Orthodox to Pentecostal. They were prosecuted for long time. When I was growing up in my neighborhood my friends and the neighborhood would often call me by the names as "American God believers", "Baptist" or just a "nun". I was only five years old and did not know what this all wards mean. I remember once I got upset with my brother and I called him "Baptist". My mother told me that I should never say it again. That time I understood that mean something bad, next time when my friend call me by that name I felt very bad. My parents understood that not only them who struggled, but the children too. When Gorbachev became Prime Minister of Russia, he said who ever want to be freedom in any kind of religion or believes they can go to USA, but have no chance to come back, and they have to give up their citizenship. My family decided to go anyway. USA Governments find a sponsor family in Portland Oregon who would sponsor us and help as at first months in the USA. On December 11, 1988, my family was ready to leave Russia. My family was the first family in Moscow and Moscow's are who was leaving the country. All my Christian friends (I went to church with since I was a baby), my uncles, cousins, aunts and my grandfather came to say the last good bye. All of us thought we will never see each other again. These hours were very difficult hours in my life. My cousin was crying. She was talking about our sleepover times, and parties. We all were in memories of good time when we celebrate Christmas or other kind of events, and difficult time when we try to escape from Russian Militia when we gather together for worship. When the time came to get on

the road to the airport, fifteen cars were full of people. Our neighbors did not know what was going on. When my brother told them they were shocked. I remember one boy in my school called me “American spy” Seeing his face in the crowd, I knew he was hundred percent positive that we were. Our airplane landed in New York City, NY, The Big Apple. Our old friends, who immigrated long time ago finds out that we are coming, drove from Springfield Massachusetts to meet us. We were just preparing for a flight to Portland Oregon, and so their faces and sign: “Welcome to America”. It was so nice to see them again. We all got very emotional. They tell us that they want us to live with them and they want to be our sponsors. We thought it would be great to stay with people we already knew, and we get very excited. We arrived to West Springfield Massachusetts late at night, but I did not want go to sleep; I want to see what America all about. I was disappointed to see small houses around and not famous skylights. Next day our friends introduced us to Pastor of Slavic Pentecostal Church, who came to the USA many years before. He spoke fluently both languages Russian and English. He helped me enrolled to West Springfield High, where some Russian were attended this school. It was not many of us, only first seven. I loved to go to school. It was so different from my country. It was very relaxing, enjoyable and a lot of fun as we met with other foreigner’s students. They were Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish and Italian.

At first, American students did not know that they’re some Russian students in American school. One, I was going to my class and one girl asked me something I did not know much English at that time, so I did not know what she was asking me I told her that I am Russian and I do not know much English. She was very surprised. All Russian, Chinese, Spanish and Italian were sitting in class with sign: “English as second language”.

Many American students used to stop by and make friends with us. It was wonderful and I thought that Russian Newspaper is propaganda, American are good people. I remembered to call my uncle in Moscow and told him that I am doing well and that I am still very much alive. That Americans are good people and I made some friends. Our Pastor helped my family a lot. He show to us how to get to the store and explain to us how to do shopping, brought us to the doctor's appointment helped my father and brothers to get driving test and thought me how to drive. He found a job for my father and brothers. It was very different jobs from the job they have in Moscow. My father was an engineer my oldest brother worked in Russian museum of history and my other brother worked with Russian hockey team. My father and my brother thought they get lucky to get a job with no English or a little English. They all got a job at Furniture Company doing some labor work. Finally we were ready to live on our own. My family moved to the house in West Springfield. Soon our neighbors learned who we are and brought some pies, and other American food. My father and brothers still remember this "big, long sandwich (that how we renamed it), which took them two days to eat. Everything was so different around us: the food, people and language, even squirrels. I never saw so many squirrels. I used to feed them and watched them. Skunk is other beautiful American animal Russian teenagers of 90s put their eyes on, till we find out how smelly it could be. First three month in the USA was wonderful when we were just learning, adjusting and introducing to society. My father and my brothers were working very hard for a little money, but they were lucky to have a job with just a little English. During the summer break I decided to get a job and support myself and helped my dad with extra money. My first job in the USA was to work on tobacco fields in Southwick. The owner of this factory was very nice man. He used to come

on the school bus to pick all Russian teens that wanted to work. We all wanted. We worked so hard that when I came back home I was so tired that I slept first on the couch and then was taking a shower. My father was proud of me and also sad that I have to work so hard. He already saw the reality, which came to me many years later. After six month living in the USA I started to miss my relatives, friends, Russian pop music, and my hobbies. One day after talking on the phone to my relatives in Russia I hang up and got very emotional. I was sitting in my room and crying. I did not want my father to know what was bothering me. He wanted what is best for me. My brother heard me, he walked into my room and I told him about my feeling. He told me this is nostalgia and that he feels the same for a whole. He invited me to go with him to New York City on Brighton Beach and checked it out as he heard it is very large population of Russian people who immigrate in 70s. The trip was great, we spent whole Saturday there and I did not want to go back to West Springfield. We bought Russian food, books, newspapers, magazines, video tapes and tapes. My dad was so happy to see Russian News papers and books, and especially we enjoyed the food. Next time my dad and my other brother went with us and we all had a good time. At that time we couldn't think of that five years later is going to be a little Russia right here on Union Street in West Springfield, and we will have books, movies, newspapers and of course food. It was time to go back to school and I was happy to go back to school. It's kept me busy. Another year past by very fast and graduation day came. I was dressed for my graduation day that made my father laugh. He never saw anything like it before. Especially he liked the hat. I told him that is American culture. He told my brother to take pictures of me and send it to all my relatives in Russia to show them a little bit of American culture. In Russia we did not have special dress for graduation day. We

were same uniform, which is brown dress with white liners and black apron, on graduation day, we wear white color apron. Later on my father called and talked to my grandfather and explained him why I was dressed like that. I find job very fast. My second job in the USA was working at dentist office as his assistant. I helped him out with little things and he was very generous. Together with his wife and another assistant he thought me not only my job, but also introduced me to American food, culture, expressions. Unfortunately he passed away and I was on my first unemployment looking for a job. I guess I get lucky as I find a job about two month later. I started work at the factory as a decorator. It was very interesting job, but less pay. Besides me, on this factory was working another four Russian people and we became a very good friends. The life became same and simple, until that company closed down which was exactly two year later since I got this job. That time was very difficult to find a job. No one wanted me, as I did not have enough education and had heavy Russian accent. The company I worked for gave me some money and I decided to go to business school. I took Office Technology program learned how to type, make a copy answer on the phone calls. It was 10-month program and it was successful. I still in school and already had a job. To be a good student I graduated few weeks earlier. Three things happen at that time my certification of Office Technology, job and I became an American citizen. I remember on my swearing day, one of the teachers from the business school took school bus and came to the court house in Springfield with some students and my friends to congratulated me with my citizenship. My father was crying he was happy for me and proud. I started work for German company and feel a little bit uncomfortable at the beginning as the most of people wear Germans and I am Russian. I did not know how they will treat me since Russian won the war in 1945. Everyone was good to me and treated me

well. My boss had a heavy German accent that made me feel ok, that I am not only one who has an accent. I became a good friend with other German people and I like to work there. Unfortunately, that company closed down four years later, and here I am looking for a job again. That time I find a job and was working second shift for pharmacy. I worked there about two month and find another job through the temp agency. It was first time I left the job on my own. I worked for insurance company with claims and it was good job as well. I get lucky again as my contract with the temp agency was ending at the end of the week, and I already had another job I find myself working as a caseworker at Lutheran Social Services and help new Russian refugees with their first month in the USA. It was great, as I knew so many things about America by that time, language, culture and was ready to do this job. It was very busy and stressful job, but I like it very much. The year was 1999; it was the year of “perestroika” in Russia. It was so my refugees from all former Soviet Union: Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. One hundred and over hundred people were arriving every month to Springfield area. The families were large from six to twelve people. I feel up application for children to go to school, made appointment to the doctors, find houses, sign people up for ESL classes, translate their mail for them and take them for shopping. I was busy and did not have a time to have my lunch, but I had a great feeling to help my people. Working for this agency for seven years, I decided to go to work overseas. I applied and was accepted to work in Bangladesh as Peace Corps Volunteer. It was very sad for my dad to let me go, and here I am all over again: new culture, language, people, food and monsoon. I was in situation as never before. I was walking for six miles a day. I did not have air conditioner, no TV and no refrigerator. There were few people who spoke English and none of them spoke Russian. I got adjusted quickly. I stay with Bangladeshi

family for a month and then the War between USA and Iraq begin and I got evacuated to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. It was March, 2003. I felt bad that I have to go back to the USA. I did not want to go back yet. I wanted to stay longer and do more things. Our Peace Volunteer Director told that he will do everything to keep us (Peace Corps Volunteers) in Dhaka until gets better. It was nice relaxing time to be in Dhaka. In Dhaka, most of the time I spent in American Club by the pool, or tennis court. I wore European style clothes and had a pizza almost every night; it was wonderful after three month eating only rice with my right hand, as left was unclean hand. After two month spending in Dhaka, was sent to different village called Shukulpatty district of Natore. I lived with another Bangladeshi family for about two month and moved out to be on my own as I was ready for that. I like to live on my own a lot. I could cook whatever I pleased, read or sleep right on the couch if I want. I loved my job, I like to work with my co-workers, and every one wanted me in their house, if I would not come, they will upset. Very soon people get use to have me around and I was invited for any kind of celebrations, weddings and important meetings. Everyone in village knew where I live, and if other Peace Corps Volunteer was visiting me, they will show the way how to find me. Unfortunately I was evacuated again and came back to the USA it was a week after Christmas. It was very cold and I was shaking standing at the airport only in my Shari. I find a job at Carson Center for Adults and Families as a relief staff, and later on at Social Security Administration full time position. Here my problems began. I worked with extremely rude and mean people. They swear and did even care, how other people around feel about that. It seemed like it was part of their conversation or speech, and it make me felt duty. There I saw big different. I thought the Federal employees should be a good example to everyone, but not in that place.

They were rude even to people who came to Social Security Administration because they have some sort of problem, or did not understand something, or just have some questions. I am not American and not Hispanic and was biting emotionally from both sides. My supervisor yielded at me, right at the window, around all people who was there in waiting area at that time, and she yield for nothing. Our boss knew it and said no word to her. Both them were Spanish. There I find out what discrimination means. Stragglng and tried not to give up, I came to office every day and do my job. After one year and six month they laid me off. Struggling and desperate looking for a job I remember my dads words about discrimination and unfair. I thought there is no way for me to survive with out education. I admitted to STCC and working on my certificate. I am planning to get my degree. I have part-time job as evening receptionist. I have some financial problems, but I am fighting with it. I don't want to give up. I will do my best to survive. I know my dad want me to.