

**Transcript for Oral History Interview**  
**Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST 428M - Spring 2020**  
**Instructor:** Dr. Anne S. Rush

**Interviewer's name:** Gabby Cohen

**Interviewee's name:** Gala Meyerovich

**Interviewee's Country of Origin:** Russia

**Interviewee's Current Residence:** Rockville, Maryland, Montgomery County

**Date of Interview:** March 7th, 2020

**Place of Interview:** Rockville, Maryland, Montgomery County, USA

**Introduction:** This interview between Gabby Cohen and Gala Meyerovich examines Gala's journey to the United States. It focuses on her experiences before her immigration from Russia, and the differences she encountered once she arrived in Rockville, Maryland. Gala speaks about how her family, especially her mother, felt about her departure. After falling in love with an old Russian classmate, Gala decided to start a new life in the U.S. with her new husband and her son. She recounts the difficulty of trying to find work without being able to speak English and how it was hard to make friends due to her Russian upbringing. Gala's interview touches further on topics such as her work-life both in her homeland and in America and her views on distinctions between the two countries' education system and the role of teachers in terms of interactions with students and parents.

**Keywords:** Russia, education, occupation, competition, family, love

**Gabby:** Hello, this is Gabby Cohen. I'm with Gala Meyerovich on—at Rockville, Maryland on [pauses] March 7th at 11:36. How are you doing today?

**Gala:** Good! How are you?

**Gabby:** I'm great! Uh, so where are we right now?

**Gala:** Uh, we are at uh my house, our house in uh Rockville.

**Gabby:** Have you always lived here?

**Gala:** Uh, no. Um, [pauses] um so originally, I'm um from Russia. Uh from city in Siberia. I moved to the States, uh to United States 22, almost 22 years ago, 20, 21 and a half. Um, so yeah, and then, and when we moved to the States, we lived uh in different house, a townhouse in

Rockville, and then we then moved to another one and this is our third house in the United States.

**Gabby:** So, when you say “we,” who does entail?

**Gala:** Oh uh, my family, my husband, kids and, uh, and my mom. My mom also lives with us.

**Gabby:** So, what ended up bringing you to the United States when you lived in Russia?

**Gala:** Hm, um [pauses] my story is like, you know, a fairytale. Um [pauses] I fell in love ah with um with actually my ah my classmate. We, um my husband and I, went to same high school together. So yeah and um uh he already uh lived here uh for I think for five years or so, uh maybe even more, uh I don't remember actually. Um and then ah he came back to um uh to his uh to—to uh to Novosibirsk, uh the city where we lived um. And I—he uh he came for visit, actually pick up his mom ah cause she was moving with him to the States. And uh we fell in love and we started writing letters to each other and he started calling me. Ah and then he came for a visit and uh he proposed. Yeah and ah, that's how we ended up here. So, it's a love story. It's uh how I moved here.

**Gabby:** So, when you moved here, who did you move here with?

**Gala:** Ah, with my husband and ah I mean ah he already had that townhouse uh here and I also um uh I moved here with my son. Uh I was divorced at the time and ah, yeah, so my son was ah six years old and um it was um him and I.

**Gabby:** So, will you walk me through the steps of your process coming here?

**Gala:** Okay.

**Gabby:** Was it a difficult process? Was it one that was very easy?

**Gala:** Uh, I think it was, um, I think it was easy for me. Of course, there was a lot of ah paperworks and like I had to get all my, um like immunizations and stuff and I, ah, I had to go to police to uh get some papers that I'm not criminal and uh um went to—actually I can barely remember now. Uh, but there was a lot of uh like going to different uh agencies uh collecting some paperwork um that um the embassy of United States required uh for me to even get into the building um for an interview. And uh I think my husband uh did a lot of work uh here. Um, he was working with a immigration lawyer uh to, you know, to—to, you know, make it easier for us and at the time we learned—he learned that it would be easier uh for me to come if, um, if I had

fiancé visa instead of getting married there and bringing um a wife. Um, so yeah, so he did a lot of work.

Um [pauses] it was—it was exciting, I was young, and um nothing seemed like, you know, obstacle really and um I was in love and it was just, you know, nothing was impossible. Um, I remember um—so I—uh we lived in Siberia and we didn't have a American embassy in—in the city or even you know um, so, the only, uh, the only embassy uh we could go to for an interview was Moscow. Uh it was four-hour flight uh from um Novosibirsk uh so I um—we—we stayed with—with my family, with my uh, um cousin who lives in—in Moscow in a—a small apartment. It's like, you know, uh it's called two-bedroom apartment, but really there are two rooms and a kitchen. Uh, so it was uh now my husband, ah my son, my mom and uh my—my cousin and her daughter [speaking quietly]: I think she was, yeah, I think yeah her daughter was, uh, was with her living with her. So we all were crowded in that small apartment. But you know it—it was very typical uh for—for the family uh living in Russia at that time.

So anyways, uh I went to—we, my—my husband and I went to um American embassy. We stayed in a long, long, long line uh to get into the building. And it was cold and uh I think it was rainy, um like it was drizzling, and a lot of people were uh in that—in that line. And uh I remember one particular um girl who was—a fam—family, they didn't have any—any warm clothes and uh they were like shivering uh in—in the line but that's—that's what I remember. And uh we were lucky, I was lucky because we didn't have to stand in that line for a long time because my—my husband was American citizen at that time, so uh we, um, we went in uh when he showed his American Passport. Um I do not remember any questions. What—what I was asked, uh but um it was interesting.

Now I remember that, ah, I just remembered the difference. Uh the person who interviewed us um was— [pauses] So all people um, the Russian citizens who—who uh worked there, I could—I could see the difference uh like in, um, in how they communicate uh with people who come there for interview or whatever. Um all Russian citizens are very strict and—and very like unfriendly. And Americans were smiling and talking like in friendly voice and, uh, um, and uh the person who interviewed us, um I don't remember the questions, but uh I, of course I was—I was very nervous, uh but it went—it went very, uh, very well and I remember then—then we went to, I don't know why, but to um like a nurse and she was as friendly as—as, you know, she was like, I—I don't know. It was—it was such a—a shock for me uh to see the difference.

Um, so yeah, um everything went fine uh we got visa and, uh like right away, and uh and we flew from Moscow to, uh, to Washington, DC um. It was—everything was done like in a few days um yeah, interview um then um we were approved, I got fiancé visa and um we flew to—Washington, uh Dulles, Washington, DC. Um and of course I was very nervous and I remember um my son was so excited. I was nervous but he was excited. Um ten-hour or eleven-hour flight um. It was— [pauses] yeah um. And the first thing I remember when we walked out of the, uh um, the plane, uh airplane, I remember the first thought was, “Oh my God! This so hot and humid!” (Gabby chuckles). Uh the air was so heavy and uh so thick. Uh it was it—it was very

unusual for me. Uh we—we came here in August and then I—I um I met uh my in-laws, my mother-in-law and father-in-law was—uh they were meeting us at the airport. And um it was yeah. What else? Oh, oh, oh yeah. I also remember (chuckling) um we were—uh before we could get out of the uh immigration or whatever area, of course we had some um—we were asked some questions, I don't remember the questions, but uh the funny thing is that um I got a working permit—permit, um because I was—because of my um, I guess, uh immigration uh status uh allowed me to work from day one uh which was awesome. Um and even my son got a working permit or something like that, some kind of ID or I—I think it was even uh it—it said it was a working permit and he was only six years old so that was funny. (Gabby laughing) So yeah, that's how we came here. And yeah.

**Gabby:** So, how did this whole process of you uh immigrating affect your family?

**Gala:** (sighs) It was, I think, first it was, of course, heart-breaking cause I never, um, I never left my uh family um. I have a—I have a brother, but um I think it was very, very hard for—for my parents, especially for my mom. Um, she, uh, she told me years later um that (laughs) she was, um, she was crying um when we left. She didn't—she didn't show any emotions, maybe just a little bit when we were saying goodbyes. But then um she—she went somewhere, so she like ran to (begins crying) find um a way to—to that area where [pauses] [speaking through tears]: uh where airplanes were taking off, and she was [pauses] trying to figure out which airplane was ours (crying). It was—it was hard on her. And ah, you know, um I think at the time they didn't realize that uh we will see each other uh pretty often uh because it was uh, uh, thank God, it was not uh during Cold War uh when people were saying goodbyes like for—for years and years and uh, uh a year and a half uh later they came, my mom and dad, for a visit.

Uh but ah, ah I think [pauses] the fact that, uh, that we—uh I moved here with my son, of course, it's a huge uh—[pauses]. I think I gave my son um opportunity to live um a better life. Honestly, sometimes I think about what—what kind of life he would have if we lived there. Um, I don't know. Um, I—I don't—I think uh I—I'm not—not even talking about the quality of life. Um, it's also um, I think culturally um a lot of people struggle there, so I think he has a lot of opportunities here and um I don't know sometimes I think uh [pauses] he could be I—I don't know, he could be an alcoholic or whatever because a lot of people, a lot of men, drink there like heavily drink, uh drinkers. My father was. Um, so yeah and um we—we helped my family uh financially for a long time. Um sending money and when my mom came, of course she was helping me, um when she came here to babysit my kids, um so yeah. And—and now my, uh, my mom lives with us and it—the quality of her life here, with health insurance and everything that we can provide her is—is just amazing. She um she always says, “Oh my God! I have never had any um—so—so many um different, I don't know, jewelry, or shoes, or whatever.” And it is—it is very rewarding, and uh it gives me such a good feeling to see her happy. And ah, you know, it's um, what's the right word? Um, to provide all of this to her and my kids, it—it's—it is very rewarding I—I cannot uh, uh find the right word right now um for it. So yeah, and um when, uh,

when things uh started going south again in Russia, uh my—my brother is struggling right now very much with his work and um financially. Um I, you know, I told him that mom now has citizenship and uh if you want to come um you have this opportunity, so yeah.

**Gabby:** With everything that you've gone through yourself and your family has gone through like your immigration process, have you taught your children the ideologies of like not taking anything for granted or being happy for like what you get since not every single person has gotten that and especially in your family?

**Gala:** Hm, I don't know if I have done that on purpose. Uh I think, yeah, we—we don't talk a lot about uh all our struggles. Uh, once in a while we probably [pauses] like, you know, in a casual conversation uh we mention something, but uh I don't think we taught them on purpose, uh purposely uh that they shouldn't be taking anything for granted. But, yeah that's actually a good question. Maybe it's uh not too late to start (chuckles).

**Gabby:** Um, so when—before you came to the United States, what were your expectations you had? What did you think the United States would be like before you arrived?

**Gala:** Huh. [pauses] I don't think I was thinking about this because it—it happened so fast. And in my—I never, never ever in my entire life uh before I moved here, I, you know, I didn't even think about moving anywhere. Uh it was not in my plans, uh it just, you know, it just happened and I don't think I, uh, I ever thought about what waits for me here and how it will go and what it will be like. No, sorry. (laughs)

**Gabby:** Were you always planning on moving to Washington, DC/Maryland area?

**Gala:** Um, [pauses] it just, uh, it just happened that uh my, uh, my husband's family was uh, uh they already lived here. Um, and yeah, we were not as I—as I said, we—usually we—I think in our culture, uh Russian culture, you just you—you stay where you are most of the time. Um, like ah yeah. Yeah, I don't think we were planning to move anywhere, we were just, you know, we are here, we are comfortable, we like it um, so yeah.

**Gabby:** So—

**Gala:** Did I answer your question?

**Gabby:** Yeah. So other than your husband and (coughs) maybe his immediate family, did you know anyone else in the United States?

**Gala:** No, no it was just, I knew only him. I didn't even know his parents. Um, I think I—I uh met his mom um once when we were in high school. We were not dating uh when we were in high school, but he was in love with me.

**Gabby:** (chuckles)

**Gala:** Um, so yeah, um so he was the only one. [pauses] Ah oh, I remember the morning when uh we came to my parents uh when um [pauses] to—to tell them that um he—um my husband proposed and—and we will move to the states. It was like you know, “I love you. I want to marry you. Uh let's move to the states.” And I was like, “Yeah!”

**Gabby:** (laughs)

**Gala:** So I was so in love, nothing was uh impossible, so I didn't—like it was not a—a question for me. I was not questioning myself. I—I was just, “Yes let's go.” And ah I remember my—my uh dad said, “But yeah you're okay you're—you're going, but uh you will—you will leave uh your son with us.” And I was like, “No.” So uh, I—I didn't wanna, um, I didn't wanna—I want my son to be with me. Um I wanted to have a family. So yeah, it was, um, it was only my husband who I knew and my son who was coming with me. Yeah.

**Gabby:** So, speaking of your son—

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** —you know I—

**Gala:** Yeah.

**Gabby:** —can go back—

**Gala:** Great.

**Gabby:** —to that question later. Um, how is the culture here compare to the one that you had back at home?

**Gala:** It is uh very different, very different. The first thing uh that comes to mind as I—as I mentioned earlier, um, it is here uh in the area where we live, people are friendly. Uh very open. Uh and—and maybe it's like, you know, uh that—people are smiling and uh they talk to each other in um elevators, or I don't know, hallways, even if they don't you. Um people are giving you compliments, and—and sometimes, you know, it really bothers me uh that I—I'm not the

same way. Like I can think that, “Oh my God, the shoes are lovely,” or you know, “I really like how this woman looks in this outfit or whatever,” or—but I, you know, I notice it and I think about it but I never—I barely say it out loud. Uh twenty years later and I still, you know, it’s all uh in me, lives in me that we don’t uh express um good things. Um I think it was uh a lot of negativity uh in people, maybe because—and probably, uh (sighs) it is understandable and you can explain because uh lifestyle in Russia is very—everyone is [pauses] surviving. And it really uh affects how people communicate with each other. Uh there’s always like competition no matter what. It doesn’t matter uh what you are talking about: uh school, um I don’t know, everywhere! Uh, school, work, um people are very, very friendly here. Um yeah, that’s—that’s probably the biggest difference.

And um, I remember my conversation with uh my friend who still who—who lives in Russia. Uh, I am almost fifty and I think our conversation was like uh ten years ago or so, and she was already considered like old. And uh the competition between like 40, 45, 50 years old and—and um ah youngsters in like their 20’s at work is—is unbelievable. Like. Older people feel like they have no place for them at work. They ah have less opportunities um, they are like, you know, sometimes they are not even considered as uh candidates uh for work. Uh, in their 40s, you know, 50s and I was like, okay, if I, uh, if I lived there, I don’t know if I had uh as many opportunities as—as here and um so yeah. But the retirement age, of course, the difference, uh I think in uh, uh Russia retirement age for woman was 55—

**Gabby:** Wow.

**Gala:** —and 64, but I might be mistaken. My—my mom uh retired when she was 50.

**Gabby:** Wow.

**Gala:** Yeah it is—she was—but she was worked at a—a chemical ah plant so yeah. Uh it was like a, you know, early retirement uh because of, uh, because of the work.

So yeah and—and here I, uh, I have lots of opportunities. I, ah, I work and I think I am very successful. Um, you know, I tell my kids I’m actually very proud of um—I’m very proud of myself uh because uh I came here with pretty much no English, um.

**Gabby:** Oh wow.

**Gala:** Yeah and um yeah I think I um, I mean work hard to, um, to get to the place where I am right now. So yeah. But—but this country, I—I always think that this country gives you so many opportunities, it’s just, you know, it’s for you to—to use or find those opportunities and don’t miss them and if—there are so many you can be successful and it is ah yeah um. [pauses] Just the other day working, I—I was talking at work about this and ah I was asked um, it was like, you know, townhall at work and we were asking uh questions, um each other questions, and one

of the questions was “what do you like about your work?” Yes, we work hard uh but it is—it is very challenging, but it is so rewarding to see the results of your work. So yeah.

**Gabby:** So, being raised in that atmosphere where it’s very competitive and that you really do need to be the best, how have you seen that impact your—your lifestyle or work in the United States?

**Gala:** Oh absolutely! Absolutely, I am very competitive. Ah I ah, I have to—and most of the time I think I compete with myself, you know what I mean. Uh, this—if I um, if I do something, if, you know, my work, I have to do my best, regardless. Uh 4 plus is not, you know, is not enough. It has to be 5 plus. Great, for whatever I do. Uh, yeah definitely, definitely. That—that definitely impacts, um and I—I think if it was not for that, I don’t think I would be where I am right now. Um. [pauses] Yeah.

**Gabby:** So, what kind of work have you done here?

**Gala:** Um I uh [pauses] I’m trying to think. My first job here was at uh a telephone company. Uh a friend of mine was uh working there already four years, so and she sent my resume. And um, telephone company, um I don’t think it exists anymore. So we had to—uh I had to answer um questions like technical questions, so, “my phone is not uh working,” or “my line is not working,” or “why did you charge me uh you know so much money?” Um and most of the time I um, I had to—I think I was hired to answer Russian speaking um customers. Um and it went—it went fine. Um I actually like working with people, even if it was virtually. Um, but um I’m not a morning person (Gabby giggles) and I had to uh start work at seven o’clock in the morning, now it’s not a problem for me, when I was 25 it was. (Gabby giggles) So, um and it was my first, uh, first job, um I could barely speak English, and um I had to get up at six o’clock and drive to work and, uh, and start working at seven. And I lost like 20 pounds in—in first two weeks because I was tired, I was nervous, I was, uh, um I could barely speak English. And, but I—most of—most of the time I was talking to my uh Russian-speaking colleagues and customers but if there was a technical question I had to go to uh tech personnel and uh I—I remember um a lady was asking me questions and I had no clue what she was asking me about. And it was—it was, uh, it was horrible. It was a good job and uh—but it just it didn’t uh click there. And then I remember my husband came from work and I was sitting in front of the TV, uh with the TV on, and I, you know, I was like a zombie. (Gabby chuckles) Um, and I could barely speak, and he was—and I—I lost like 20 pounds and he was panicking, what was going on? And then he was like, “Okay let’s—let’s do something else, let’s find out.”

And my um my education in Russia I uh I finished uh um I went to uh manufacturing technology college. Uh I um I was um like sewing and making clothes and stuff. And—and uh that was um my education. Um I was like you know um [speaking quietly]: how do you say that? Um like very related to uh like quality control and how to organize um uh like a big assembly



line for making clothes. Uh women's clothes and men's clothes or whatever. So yeah and um and there was a store, I think it still exists in Rockville, uh called "G-Street Fabrics." Um family owned, uh I think they still uh yeah, uh two brothers and a um dad. Uh, and they had um a shop um where customers came, and—and we would make clothes. So, I ah I went there, I interviewed, I showed my uh my work that I had done and uh they hired me. I think my—my first salary was \$7.00 per hour. And uh in a while, in like in three months, I don't remember, um I went and asked for raise and uh my manager gave me \$0.25 raise. So, I was making \$7.25. Uh but I was working with um women um one Russian, actually and then other one, so there was ah three Russians. Most of them were uh Iranian uh women. Beautiful, very talented, amazing, um but most of us were immigrants. I don't remember—no, actually one—there was one American uh woman who came later. So, it was—it was interesting uh interesting dynamics uh in that shop. So yeah. So that was my second job and I worked there for more than a year I think, and I am still friends with, uh, with some of them, uh some of the ladies that I worked with.

And uh then um I took some uh computer classes uh when I was working um at that shop and um uh, I hated computers. Uh, when I was, um, when I was in college, like computer class uh, was not for me. Eh that was the only class I didn't have A uh, in uh, in uh, as a grade. Uh and uh my husband and uh my father-in-law are in computers so they—they taught me, and then I was like okay uh. (sighs) Where am I going with this? Oh, um why I switched my uh clothes making job to—to what I am doing right now is I—I wanted to—to be with my family on the weekends. And um, you know, when you're working in—in customer service and clothes making uh business, you meet your uh clients and they meet in your house, or—and I had to work on Saturday and uh on Saturday's. And I—I wanted to be with my family so uh computer work was uh very popular at that time and uh there were a lot of opportunities uh at the time. And as I said, you just—my fath—my mother-in-law was saying that, "You have to be in the right place at the right time." So I think that was it. And I uh, I didn't want to miss that opportunity. I took some classes and I um, I had a few interviews and um I was actually surprised um about the results.

Um my first interview, I—I had one—my first interview with Lock—Lockheed Martin, uh it's a huge company, very prestigious company and uh I got an offer! And uh I was so excited um. And I accepted the offer and then another opportunity came! I had an interview uh be—before I started with uh Lockheed Martin. Um, I had an interview at Nasdaq Stock Market. And I got an offer from them as well. Uh, and [pauses] so yeah, I had to turn uh the offer—Lockheed Martin's offer down and I started working for, uh, for Nasdaq and I was there for um, I was a software um quality control uh software tester. Um, learned a ton. My English got so much better. Um so I was there for like 5 years and—and um [pauses], yeah, so it just, you know, [pauses] that's how my uh current uh career started. And yeah.

**Gabby:** So, I want to jump back to something you said—

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** —um why you left the fabric company.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** And it was because you wanted to be with your family more.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** And though everything you have been saying, it seems that family is really important to you as an individual and as a whole. Is that something that you believe you have because of who you are or is that something that is very prominent in the Russian culture?

**Gala:** [pauses] Hm, I think, I don't know, I think it's in everybody's culture, right? Um, [pauses] I don't know. Um, I was—my—my mom was very family oriented, actually, my—my dad too, uh it was different, uh he was different. Um, I don't know. I think it's—I guess it's in the culture, but now I'm thinking about this, I—it's in everybody's culture, I think. Family is important. Of course, there is some um [speaks inaudibly in Russian] um I cannot find the right word, sorry. Um [pauses] I don't know. Hm let me think about it. Maybe we can come back to this.

**Gabby:** Uh, so I'll go back to the idea of work and, you know, you said a friend of yours—

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** —gave your resume to your first job. Did you have past work experience in Russia?

**Gala:** Um, yeah hm but, uh my—my jobs there were like, you know, uh different. Uh hm. I—I moved here when I was 25, so I didn't have a lot of opportunities to work uh there. But I—I had some odd jobs there. Um, some of them were just to survive. Um when uh—I was very young when I—when I had my son and it was uh early 90's very, very difficult time in Russia. So my, uh, my first official job was I was washing, um I worked, officially it was like in grocery store and the reason uh I got that job cause there was like a food shortage, and we had like food stamps uh so we can get—we could get um butter or um like, I don't know, like oatmeal, or whatever, sugar um, I don't remember milk, uh like, I don't know, meat products. Um and uh and I got this job in a grocery store uh was because I—I wanted to—to get food easy—easier than uh it, you know. Um, so I was, um, I was washing um all those—the people who worked there, the salesperson, um people, they uh they wore like white um uniforms. So, every day, or every other day, I went there, picked their uniforms, I—I came home, I washed them, I ironed them, and took them back to them. And it gave—it gave me the opportunity to—to get some food easier.

Uh my other job was at a day care uh where my son went to. I was um a full-time student with a small kid. And uh um it was very hard uh those, uh, those days to find a place and a day care um for—for a kid. Uh and um the daycare was in—in my neighborhood. And uh I got a job there, I—I was [quieter]: how to say that, um like a guard there? I slept there in that building every three nights and I was also cleaning uh the area that was assigned to me, uh the area around the daycare, and I had to uh swipe? Swip, uh swip uh the floor—roads um, or whatever, the street around—around it and shovel—shovel the snow. It was—it was pretty hard, it was pretty hard uh cause you know snowing, uh it snows every day in Russia. (Gabby chuckles) And I remember um sitting in the—I was full—full time student and I remember I was sitting uh in a class and it started snowing and it is beautiful when it snows uh in Russia or anywhere. And I remember my classmates were like, “Oh my God it’s snowing!” And I was like [said in a disgruntled voice]: “Oh my God it’s snowing again. (Gabby giggles) I have to shovel the snow again.” Yeah, so that was—that was my other job, another job.

And I also worked at um, a factory um, furniture factory for a year. Probably or so. Um, my son was not even two. Um, so it was—it was so interesting uh first um probably six months. Um I—I like meeting people and talking to them and—and, you know, learning about them. So, it was—it was interesting but uh then I—then I realized that [pauses] I don’t wanna live in that culture cause it was so different. The people who worked there, they were like, they were drunks. And—and you could—you could see that uh in—that in—in their faces. Like women, they were drinking at work and—and at some point I was like, “Oh, my God, I don’t want to become one of them” if I stay there. That’s how I went to awful times in a—in a student uh um, it was like I need to get my education. [quietly]: So yeah that was another job that I had in Russia. And I also worked at um a like clothes making shop um in Russia for a—for a few months, I think, cause uh the uh director of—of that shop asked me to um to substitute for someone. [quietly]: So that was another one, but it was just yeah like odd jobs. And then I moved to the States.

**Gabby:** How does working in the United States differ from working at—in your home country?

**Gala:** Um [pauses] I think it’s less (sighs) the level of— [pauses] It is very, as I said earlier, uh very competitive in—in Russia. Um, so here [pauses] we have um, and I’m repeating myself, more opportunities and um like I really appreciate that uh, I always say that at—at work, uh that I really appreciate that uh this—my—my management or my—my colleagues, most of the time they don’t mind my uh accent. And they recognize my high work—uh my hard work. And uh I feel appreciated, appreciated most of the time. (laughs) Um so I—I guess—I guess it’s—it’s, you know, the cultural difference. And I—I don’t know, maybe I cannot answer the questions—the question fully because I—actually I did have some opportunities to work there but hm. [quietly]: What else is different? Oh, um I think in Russia when you work, your—your colleagues there like they—they become like your family. Not—not exactly like family but they’ve—they’ve—they’re into your business, like into your family stuff, they know everything about you. Um here we come, uh, come to work, we do our job and we just you know go back to our families and uh,

mind our own business here. So, it's—it's a little, yeah, the difference is there, I think. And uh, yeah, as I said um, I feel like I have long, long way to uh to go. Um and I uh I feel like I—I still can accomplish a lot of things here. Did I answer your question?

**Gabby:** Mm-hm.

**Gala:** Okay.

**Gabby:** So you said that most of the time, they don't mind that you have an accent.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** Has there been a time that being a Russian immigrant and not, like English not being your first language, or the fact that you weren't born in the United States—

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** —has impacted the way people see you at work or at life?

**Gala:** I think so. Yeah, yeah. Um yeah, a few—a few times, just a few times uh a couple of times yeah. I remember uh my first, you know, uh like Nasdaq I uh um my—one of my managers had hard time with my accent and uh, I was um [pauses] luckily I—I didn't have to interact with her all the time. Um I had someone else uh to work with, um. But my accent, I think my accent really bothered her and my—my style, how I expressed myself, really bothered her and um but, uh she said that uh I need to take classes um and—and learn how to communicate at work. Like work communication class or something like that. Uh, of course, I—I felt like offended a little. Um but then I was like, “Okay the company will be paying for my uh for the class.” And um I actually—I actually liked it. I learned—I learned a lot from that, uh, from that class um. And uh another time when I felt [pauses] like I—I was reminded that I—I was—I was an immigrant. Um I worked for a small company and uh we had a contract with one of the govern—government agencies. And uh when those—when a few people from that government agency uh came to—to visit, I—I don't know, somehow they um—I could—as soon as I walked into the room, I could feel that I'm different and I was reminded. Uh not—not verbally, but, you know, somehow, yeah um. But, you know, most of the time it's—it's not a problem and people are very patient and uh um, yeah. And I—I really appreciate when, uh, when I'm—when I'm corrected. Of course, correction can be in a different—can be done different ways. But most of the time it's—it's like, you know, I—I really think uh I'm thankful for—for that because, you know, sometimes I don't realize when I make mistakes and uh yeah. So, most of the time it's uh, it's fine. Yeah.

**Gabby:** So, I'm gonna jump back pretty far.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** Um, I know you said you moved with your son here when he six.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** Did he start into elementary school right away?

**Gala:** He did! And eh it was very interesting and as I said—as I said, my uh my story is like a fairytale. Um, my husband uh was really thinking about how to make our lives easier and um the um— [pauses] How to say that? Oh my god, the word escaping me. Um, how we would adapt, the adoption period uh would be—adoption? No, adaptation, adaptation period uh would be easier. So he found a school, private school, Montessori school uh near our house uh where we lived in Rockville, um so he went to—uh Kirill went to—went to um, uh Montessori school um, small class and uh he didn't speak English uh either, but kids learn so fast, I wish I could, if I could learn that fast. So, in three months, uh he—and the teachers were very patient with him. Uh, he didn't have homework uh and—because—because he, uh, he couldn't speak English. And uh at some point uh I was called to the school and uh and the teacher said, “You know what? Your kid is smart because he can speak English, but he was hiding it from—hiding it from (Gabby laughs) us because he realized that uh, he uh, he doesn't need to do his homework, uh if he doesn't speak English.” And the way she realized that he actually speaks English now, uh he was running in the hallway and I think he hit something, or he hit his head or forehead or whatever, and—and he said something in English, uh like the whole sentence. Uh, that made her realize that he actually now can speak.

And uh another funny story was his—his English was uh improving very quickly, but still he could—um sometimes uh he was having hard time explaining, and there was one boy in his class uh, uh I don't know he—I don't know what he—what that boy wanted from uh him and he—he was having hard time to, you know, shush him away. And he, instead of going to the teacher, that's another cultural difference, um instead of going uh to the teacher uh and telling her that this—this boy bothers him, he—he didn't want to get into physical fight like, you know, with fists uh fists and everything, um and so he bit him on the cheek (Gabby laughs) I think or I don't know. So, he was expelled for like two days and uh, I think for two days, um and sus—suspended? Suspended. Uh for two days, and I was so upset because um in Russia teacher is always right and your kid is not. Um and I was so upset that he did something wrong and my husband was like, “You know what, did you see that boy? He's—did you see his cheeks? Uh he looks chubby and yummy (Gabby laughs) I would bite himself, uh my—myself!”

So, um yeah uh so yeah that's—that's another cultural difference. In—in Russia, we teach our kids to stand up for themselves. It's a big no to go to teacher or someone to tell on—on

someone who bothers you. You have to figure out it yourself. Um verbally, physically, but if you go and—and—to someone and tell on—on your classmate or whatever, oh my God, that's a big no. You will be, I don't know. I don't know the uh—I don't know the right word, but you know what I mean. It's just like a big no. You have to—you have to stand up for yourself. And uh, yeah, and I remember um my son also was in—in school um, different Montessori, and um, you know, sometimes and—and um anyway [quieter]: no I'm not gonna uh say that. Um so he was—he made a friend and uh that friend invited him for playdate and Kirill um uh hugged him. And uh an older boy looked at him and he was like, “Ew, pervert.” And—and my son had no clue what—what that word meant, but uh from the tone, from the boy's tone uh he realized that it meant something bad so he punched him. And uh he was already in trouble um before that, so he got suspended, for I think a few days because he—he punched the boy and it's a big no here and it's completely normal for Russian (Gabby laughs) for Russia. So, and I was—I was actually on my son's uh side at the time because that boy actually provoked him, and I thought that he did the right thing. Yeah, that's another cultural difference.

**Gabby:** So, I know you spoke about certain things like the teacher's always right.

**Gala:** Mm-hm.

**Gabby:** But how is the education—what is the education like for you back home?

**Gala:** Hm. Um, Russian education is very heavy on math. Uh but I—I thought it was very balanced. Uh we read books, we um like social studies we are very um thorough, um of course we learned a lot about World War II, and then um Russian culture. There was not a lot about um uh world history. Uh, it was not in—not in um in school, um maybe in, uh, in university, in college, yeah. Um. [quieter]: Actually we didn't have any history or kind of, you know, social studies when I was in college. Uh but uh we—we had math, and physics, and uh biology and chemistry, uh like every day, pretty much every day, so uh education was very important and very well taught um. Yeah, education was very, very important in Russia. Um and yeah, I—I think it's—I think what—what education is missing here is what—uh I've heard that uh from my—my colleagues that I am very logical in my thinking. And I think—I think that comes from, uh, from education, from math and how math was taught. And we also um, we also had to learn a lot of poems uh and we uh were um—and that helps uh to—uh to memorize, right? And uh I think—I think that's important especially for uh for kid's brains. And I—I don't see a lot of that here. And um [pauses] I don't know how education is um going in Russia right now, the style, but uh I think what were um, as I said, teacher's always right for kids and—and for parents. Parents never argue with uh with teachers. Never. Um and uh I remember when I—uh when our son was in middle school, he was a class clown (Gabby laughs) and um my husband and I uh were called to school pretty often. And I remember the counselor uh called a few teachers and—and uh my husband and I were sitting in the room and we were like lectured and the counselor

like, you know, standing like that and she was looking at—at our son and—and she was like um, “If I were your parents, I would be so embarrassed.” And when I was telling my colleague about that she’s like, “And what did you say?” And I didn’t say anything (Gabby laughs) because I was embarrassed and, uh, and of course I thought that he was—he was not supposed to do what he was doing. Um he was wrong, and the teacher was right. And she was like, “What do you mean? She was not supposed to talk to your kid like that!” And—and that’s—that’s different, uh cause whatever teacher says, even if you disagree, you don’t say anything, you obey. So yeah.

**Gabby:** So, is there anything else you would like to tell me before we finish?

**Gala:** Um no, thank you for—for this opportunity. And I—I hope I didn’t bore you to death.

(Both laugh)

**Gabby:** Thank you!

**Gala:** Thank you!