EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH BORIS AND NATALYA KATZ

February 15, 2009
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Interviewer

James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT`

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Young: This is an interview on February 15, 2009, in Cambridge, with Boris and Natalya Katz. Let's start with you giving a preamble to your move to the United States.

B. Katz: Sure. Natalya and I met during the first year we were at Moscow University. That was more than 40 years ago. Our first major decision together turned out to be the most important decision of our lives: we decided to leave the Soviet Union. We did not want our children to grow up in a country where there was no respect for human rights, where we had to worry about what to tell our children so that they would not repeat it in school, and where people didn't believe what they were saying. So we made the decision.

There was a special procedure in the Soviet Union for doing it. You get a bunch of documents together and you apply in a particular government office. We did all of that, and of course the authorities said no. The rule at the time was that you had the right to appeal every six months, which we did. We appealed every six months, and they kept saying no.

Young: When was your decision made to leave the Soviet Union?

B. Katz: It was a gradual decision. It was not made overnight, because it's a major decision, especially because the consequences are major. For example, Natalya was immediately fired from her job.

Young: As soon as you applied for the visa?

N. Katz: As soon as I asked for the recommendation from work to apply for a visa, as soon as I announced.

B. Katz: One of the documents required was a letter from work. Basically it's a letter of recommendation. You go to your boss and say, "I have decided to leave the country. Write a letter for me." Then of course you get fired.

Young: That letter goes to the authorities.

B. Katz: Yes. So Natalya was fired. It was a hard decision to make because one never knew whether one would be successful, whether one's application would ever be granted. But once the Soviet authorities know that you want to leave, your life will dramatically change in Russia. We

talked about leaving the country, I imagine, even before we got married. We got married and started thinking about children. It was at that point that we realized that we didn't want our children to grow up in that environment.

The way we talked about it was that some time in a distant future my mother and my father would leave the country, and maybe after they settled, we would come join them. But it so happened that my father died in 1974, and I realized that the only way to do it was for us to go first. Then we'd have my mother and my other relatives join us. So we applied using the process that I described, but we were refused. A few months after that—in '75, I think, late in the year—my mother and younger brother also applied because they were ready to follow us. We were refused, but their application was approved and they were given permission.

Young: Why do you suppose they were given permission and you were not?

B. Katz: That is an interesting question. There are several arguments. One is that the Soviet authorities wanted to discourage the emigration by making the process and the outcome to seem random, because if you decided to leave the country, as I told you, the consequences could be pretty bad. You could lose your job and your livelihood, and the authorities wanted everybody to worry that this might happen to them. For various reasons—maybe some of them having to do with pressure from abroad—the authorities didn't want to say no to everyone. But, if they did it randomly, then it would make everybody planning to apply worried, so people would ask, "Who knows what will happen to me?"

So my mother and my younger brotherMisha [Katz] were given permission. My brother was 16 at the time, and he was a very talented mathematician. Luckily, through my friends at Moscow University, I met avisiting mathematics professor from Harvard, and I introduced him toMisha. The professor was very impressed by Misha's mathematical abilities and recommended that he apply to Harvard; he even arranged for a Harvard application to be sent to us. Misha secretly filled out the application, and with the help of a friend, we managed to send it to America. Of course we didn't send the application in the open mail.

While they were in Rome waiting for permission to go to the U.S., Misha received a cable saying that he was accepted to Harvard, so he ended up in Cambridge. My mother later followed him, and this was how our whole family eventually ended up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Natalya and I were still refused every six months. In 1976, my older brother, Victor [Katz]—he is now a professor of mathematics at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]—also applied and was given permission. Again I found it very surprising. Victor was a well-known mathematician, and they gave him permission to leave. Two of us were left in the Soviet Union.

Then in the fall of 1977 our daughter Jessica [Katz] was born; this was a very happy occasion, and everything was great. But after about three months, she developed what the doctors called malabsorption syndrome. She stopped gaining weight, she became weaker with each passing day, and eventually she was taken to a hospital. The doctors made it clear that she was doing very badly, and who knows what could have happened with her in the next several weeks?

We became desperate and we called Cambridge, called my mother and my brothers and told them, "We need to do something about it." They started getting in touch with various

organizations—Jewish organizations, human rights organizations—as well as with politicians, Congressmen, and Senators. They also wrote letters. The organizations organized public events and letter-writing campaigns.

At the same time, back in the Soviet Union I was so desperate and my daughter was in such bad shape, we started doing something that, now that I think about it, might sound almost foolish. We decided that it was time to start openly demonstrating for our rights, which, if one knows the situation in the Soviet Union, was not done. For many years people weren't even thinking of open political demonstrations or protests because everybody knew that the minute you raise a poster, you might disappear from the face of the earth.

Natalya did it first. I guess our thinking was that because she was a woman, she would not suffer consequences as harsh as I would. Eight Soviet women, I think, all refuseniks—this is the word used for those who were refused visas—went to demonstrate next to the Kremlin wall. After about a minute and a half, of course, the plainclothes police came, grabbed their posters, detained them for a few hours, and then let them go. The same group of women demonstrated one more time at a different location in Moscow.

At some point I decided that I could not just have my wife fight for us. I should do it too. I joined the group of women in the square. It was right in front of the KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti] headquarters. As soon as we unfolded our posters—ours said "Let Our Children Go!"—I noticed a camera pointing at us from one of the windows. We were filmed, of course. The authorities knew about our planned protest, but this time they decided to teach us a lesson and rough us up a bit more harshly. They staged it so that—it was plainclothes police, of course—it looked like the citizens of the Soviet Union were expressing their righteous indignation—"How could you demonstrate against the country?"—they surrounded us and started beating us up on the street.

Young: With sticks?

N. Katz: Just by kicking.

B. Katz: Then they pushed us into a police van, screaming things like, "Too bad [Adolf] Hitler didn't kill all of you." Things like that.

N. Katz: Jessica was with usin her carriage.

B. Katz: It was a little bit scary. But, I've jumped a little bit ahead. The last time I discussed Jessica, she was in the hospital, so what happened between these events?

Young: Yes.

B. Katz: I was describing her symptoms over the phone to our friends in the U.S., and they were transcribing what I said and discussing it with American doctors. One of them thought about it and said, "There is a baby formula that is predigested, and it's easy for a baby to absorb. Why don't you try that?" At that point there was nothing to lose. Then there was the issue of how they would get the formula to us. You couldn't mail it. They convinced an American professor who

was planning to go to Moscow to put it in his luggage and to come up with a story in case people on the border asked what it was. He could say that he had stomach problems or something.

So he did, and then I got a phone call. Natalya and Jessica were still in the hospital. Somebody called me up and said, "I would like to meet with you. A message from your mother." We arranged a meeting near my home. He gave me two cans of baby formula with instructions to mix in some water and try it. I don't know how long it took us to decide. It was scary. We were not supposed to let the Soviet doctors know because they would never allow that to happen. Since Natalya stayed with Jessica at the hospital, she decided to prepare the formulaat night.

Young: You were at the hospital?

B. Katz: With the baby all the time.

N. Katz: Yes.

B. Katz: Because of Jessica's condition, the doctors took pity on us and let Natalya stay nearby, in the same room. At night, when everyone left, Natalya mixed the formula in a bottle and gave it to Jessica.

Young: Who delivered it to you?

B. Katz: As I said, an Americanvisitor gave it to me, and I brought it to the hospital to give to Natalya.

Young: How much did you have?

B. Katz: We had two cans.

N. Katz: Two two-pound cans. If you feed the baby with this formula all the time, the can will probably last, like, a day and a half, two days.

Young: Oh, my goodness.

B. Katz: But we started with very little.

N. Katz: We started with a small amount because we didn't know how Jessica would react to it.

B. Katz: She didn't have the strength to eat even that much, so we started with a much smaller amount. This is the closest thing to a miracle that I have ever encountered in my life. The following day it was a different baby. In another two days she started gaining weight, she started smiling, and she started moving much more than she used to. We stopped giving her any other food. All this time, her doctors didn't know what the problem was, and they kept giving her various types of foods containing milk, which were almost like poison to her. Clearly they didn't do it on purpose, but this was all they had.

At that time, the Soviet Union did not have any non-milk formula, not even soymilk formula. In fact one achievement of the case—I'm jumping ahead—is that the authorities, I imagine, were so

embarrassed by Jessica's story that pretty soon after we explained to them what happened, they bought from, I think, Similac a couple of factories to produce soymilk formula.

Young: When did they learn about it? When did you tell them?

B. Katz: I told them a couple of months after that. All this time, I kept asking the authorities to let us leave the country, but they said, "But your daughter is okay now. What's the problem?"

N. Katz: "The Soviet doctors cured her."

B. Katz: The authorities believed that the Soviet doctors cured Jessica, but then I told them, "Look, this is what happened." Somebody in the government listened and made the decision to start producing a non-milk baby formula, and I'm glad they did. I imagine that thousands of Soviet babies were saved because of Jessica's story.

N. Katz: It was a miracle, because she was born eight-and-a-half pounds, a pretty large baby. She gained about a pound in the first two months, but then she stopped gaining weight. At six months she weighed exactly the same as she did at two months. And yet she grew in height. She weighed less than 10 pounds and was turning into a very skinny baby. We weighed her every day on the medical scale, and there was not an ounce of improvement day after day. But as soon as we gave her the formula, she started gaining a few ounces every day. It was absolutely unbelievable.

Young: When they were considering your immigration visa, did the authorities know about this situation with Jessica?

B. Katz: That she was sick? At some point, yes.

Young: But that did not move them.

B. Katz: No, that did not move them. In fact, I went to talk with the Minister of Health, and she was very sympathetic, but she said, "Everybody knows that the Soviet health system is the best in the world. What are you talking about?" For a while, when Jessica's health deteriorated badly, I think they were almost ready to change their minds, but then we started giving here the baby formula and she improved, so they said, "Okay, she's fine now, so we're not letting you go."

Young: Did you suspect what the reason was?

B. Katz: The reason for not giving us permission?

Young: Yes.

B. Katz: We started this conversation, and I got distracted. The first reason I described was their desire to make the outcome look random. Another reason was Natalya's place of work. She worked at a Meteorological Institute and several departments there required clearance; they were completely closed. I don't know for sure whether this was the case, but this is my guess. These departments were very sensitive, and without clearance nobody could get in. My guess is that they were trying to figure out ways to affect the weather. This could have been a completely

crazy idea by a Soviet general. Because Natalya worked nearby, the authorities may have decided that maybe she knew too much, and they didn't want people in the West to think that the Sovietswere working on something like this. Again, this is a pretty wild guess.

Young: So you think it was state secrets**?**

B. Katz: State secrets, yes. The official story was that Natalya had access to state secrets. She was hired as a mathematician and computer programmer and was working on some equations.

Young: But you were all right?

B. Katz: Apparently I didn't know state secrets, that's right.

Young: I see. So there were two reasons, the random and the—

B. Katz: Someone maybe wanted to keep her away.

Young: But they never specifically gave that as a reason.

N. Katz: I don't think they had to explain.

B. Katz: That's right. There was no such thing as giving a reason. They kept saying no and no. That's all they said, in addition to telling me to reapply every six months. One time I had an opportunity to speak to a colonel in charge of that office, and he told me, "Your wife had access to some state-secret information. Therefore we will not let you go."

Going back to the story. After we tried the American baby formula, we knew that it could help sustain Jessica, but we only had another couple of days' worth of supply, and we didn't know what to do. So I immediately called my mother and my friends and explained the situation, and they did something amazing. Our friends were somehow able to get in touch with almost every American who planned to travel to the Soviet Union, and they started begging them to take one or two cans of baby formula with them, and they were successful: most people agreed to help.

For a couple of months, our friends in the U.S. managed to create a bridge of life. I would get phone calls every few days—somebody from Pittsburgh, somebody from California, somebody from Chicago, somebody from Boston. They would call me up with a random story and say, "We would like to meet with you," or, "Can you come over?" When we met, they would open up their luggage and give me a couple of cans of that formula.

Young: Were these tourists?

B. Katz: Yes, some were tourists. Some had more official visits. Maybe a scientist attending a conference.

Young: What a network in this country that would have identified that.

B. Katz: That's right. The biggest push came from my mother, who spent more or less 24 hours a day calling everybody who would listen to the story until they said, "Okay, I will help you with this." She basically reminded people every day of our existence.

On the other hand, the demonstrations that I described a little bit earlier, which were happening at the same time, caused some interest in the foreign press in Moscow. All of a sudden I got visits from reporters from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. They would come to our apartment, and I would show them Jessica and her baby formula. We could not tell the reporters about our planned demonstrations because we knew that the KGB listened in on our conversations and would thus be able to interfere with our plans, but we would tell them about these protests the following day. I think there was even a picture or two. Their reporting, of course, was printed in the West, and the American people saw this story about this little baby who lived on cans of baby formula that were brought by tourists. The result was that even more people got involved in various campaigns to help our cause, such as writing more letters to Congress.

Much later, when wefinally came to the U.S., I had an opportunity to talk to many of our supporters, and quite often somebody would say, "Yes, I'm a teacher in" such and such school, "and we had a writing campaign on your behalf. Our studentssent 300 letters to Senator Kennedy's office, to the President, to Chairman [Leonid] Brezhnev, and other officials."

I am not sure exactly when Senator Kennedy learned about Jessica's case and how Jessica's name got on his list of 18. I don't know what the final strawwas, but clearly his office received thousands of letters from people all over America about this case.

Young: Did anyone from his office get in touch with you?

B. Katz: Not while we were in the Soviet Union, no. It would have been pretty hard to do so.

Young: Did somebody from Kennedy's office get in touch with a relative of yours, such as your mother?

B. Katz: Yes, they did. They had several conversations.

Young: But you don't know how he picked you.

B. Katz: That I don't know.

Young: All right. But he knew of you.

B. Katz: That's right, he knew. Our supporters were writing letters. They were in touch with his office. I knew about these efforts, but I of course didn't know what he was planning to do. But I was soon to find out. One day, I had been on a train going to work, and a friend was sitting across the aisle reading a newspaper. I looked at what she was reading, on the back, just several lines, a news story that said, "Senator Kennedy is arriving in Moscow to talk to Soviet authorities." I don't know why, I don't know how, but I knew at that second that for some reason it would affect my life. With these things, you never know. I even remember joking with the

friend, telling her, "I wish I knew where he was so that I could talk to him and describe what's going on here." She laughed and that was it. That was the end.

A few days later, I was sitting at home and a phone rang. It was from Aleksandr Lerner. He was a scientist, a mathematician, and also a refusenik in the Soviet Union. He said, "I got a phone call. An important visitor would like to talk to you. He's coming to my house later tonight. Come here."

Young: You guessed that it was Kennedy?

B. Katz: Yes, I might have.

Young: Well, you'd seen the thing in the paper.

B. Katz: That was at least a week before. I don't remember. Did we discuss that?

N. Katz: No, you didn't tell me.

B. Katz: Well, I may have guessed, but I did not—

Young: Was this a surprise to you?

B. Katz: I did not volunteer that information to Natalya if I did guess. So I went.

N. Katz: It was late at night. Lerner said, "Come at about midnight."

B. Katz: Right. I think I arrived at around 11:00 or so at his house, and there were already a number of people in the room. There was the academician [Andrei] Sakharov. He's a physicist. He created the Soviet bomb. By that time, he was already a Nobel Prize winner. With him was his wife Elena Bonner and a few other prominent dissidents and refuseniks.

Young: Was Benjamin Levich there?

B. Katz: Yes, I believe Benjamin Levich was there too.

Young: Lev David Roitburg?

Katz: Roitburg. I know the name, but I don't remember him.

Young: It was a small apartment.

B. Katz: Not that small.

Young: I'm trying to figure out how many people were there.

Katz: Oh, there were about 10 people there. They told me, "Senator Kennedy will come over soon. Let's wait for him." I think it was around midnight when a big cortege of carspulled up, with police blinkers and black limos and all of that, and he was there. This was the fifth or sixth floor. Kennedy came on the elevator with a bunch of security men. They all entered the room,

and he turned to them and said, "It's a private meeting. Could you please leave?" That was the first time in my life that I had heard anybody talk like that to the KGB. [*laughs*] And they left! They looked incredulous, but they left.

Then Dr. Lerner started introducing Kennedy to everyone in the room. Everybody gave their name and all of that. Then my turn came. He looked at me, I felt, with interest and said, "I need to talk to you," and then he said, "privately." I said sure. So we went to the kitchen. He asked how Jessica was doing and then he said, "I had a discussion with the authorities. They agreed to let you go." These events happened many years ago. I'm trying to remember now what went through my head then, what I believed and didn't believe. There were so many ups and downs. As much as I wanted to be happy and believe that this was it, that all of our suffering was over, I don't think I did.

Young: You couldn't believe it.

B. Katz: I couldn't believe it.

Young: You were there?

N. Katz: No, I was at home with Jessica. He didn't even tell me that he was going to meet someone.

Young: Why not?

B. Katz: First of all, I didn't know who that was. I told you that I was going to a meeting, but I didn't—

N. Katz: He didn't even mention his suspicions that Kennedycould be there.

B. Katz: Right.

Young: Don't get your hopes up.

N. Katz: Right, exactly for that reason.

B. Katz: Until today I've kept it all inside. We had at least an hour-long conversation about human rights in the Soviet Union, about the plight of dissidents and refuseniks. I must say, I was very impressed. The senator was well informed about the situation in the country. He knew the point of view of the authorities and their attitude towards us. He knew a lot of names. It was very impressive. All of us in the room could feel that a very prominent person was present there. After the meeting was over, we said our good-byes and left. By that time, the subway was already closed at Moscow, so I had to walk about two hours to get home. When I finally got there, Natalya was still up waiting for me. I told her what happened at the meeting. I hesitated for a second, but then decided that I must tell her what the Senator told me and I did. I don't know, maybe you remember better. At the time, how much did you believe that we were almost there, that we would be given the permission to leave the country?

N. Katz: I wouldn't have been surprised if it hadn't happened. I had a sliver of hope, but it definitely wasn't a sure thing for me at the time.

B. Katz: Of course, the problem wasn't that we didn't believe the Senator; I knew that that he was telling the truth.

N. Katz: It was the authorities.

B. Katz: He was telling us what he was told.

Young: But they would find ways to keep it from happening.

N. Katz: Right, that's what I was afraid of. They would promise you one thing and then do the other. It wouldn't be unheard of.

Young: Very emotional, so you were protecting yourself against disappointment.

B. Katz: I think that was what I was trying to do. In another day or two or maybe the morning after that, I got a phone call from a friend of mine, who was very excited. He said, "I just listened to the Voice of America, and Senator Kennedy just returned to the U.S. and was holding a press conference." He said that apparently Kennedy had given the Soviet authorities a list of 18 people and that they had granted these familiespermission to leave, including Boris and Natalya Katz, with their daughterJessica—"the littlest refusenik," they called her.

Young: So now you're hearing it on the—

B. Katz: I'm hearing yes, but in a sense, to me it was not that new because I knew the situation. I still didn't know what the Soviet side would actually do. In fact, in a day or two there was an editorial in *Pravda* that said, without mentioning any names, that there are reports in the West about an American Senator who claims that he's reached a deal with the Soviet authorities, but, *Pravda* went on saying, all this is nonsense and no such deal had ever been reached.

So I immediately telephoned my mother in Cambridge and told her about the *Pravda* editorial. She called, I think, Action for Soviet Jewry who called Kennedy's office to inform them about the situation. At least that is my recollection. Three or four days later, an American visitor came to our house and said that he was asked to tell me that Kennedy's office believed that this was part of the agreement, that I should not pay attention to the article in *Pravda*, and that the deal was still on.

Young: But was somebody trying to interfere with the deal?

N. Katz: They were trying to save face.

B. Katz: I think it was mostly face-saving. It's not clear to me if this was interference. I think the Soviets were just saying, "We are the ones who are making decisions here. We do what we want, when we want to, rather than whatever an American Senator tells us to do."

Young: You didn't know that Kennedy's conversation was with Brezhnev.

B. Katz: I knew that he must have talked to Brezhnev. I don't remember whether he used Brezhnev's name in our conversation. I knew that he meant Brezhnev, no doubt about it, and I believe he told me that he had talked with Brezhnev, but still I did not want to get my hopes up.

Young: He did talk with Brezhnev.

N. Katz: Yes. Kennedy was planning to run for President at the time, so he was treated by the Soviets as a Presidential candidate, and he had meetings with the highest authorities in Kremlin. We knew that.

B. Katz: If I were to guess why the Soviet authorities all of a sudden decided to make this gesture and allow us to leave the country, this would be my first guess. And not only mine. I remember a conversation I had with several reporters in our apartment. After Kennedy's press conference we had frequent visits by Western reporters, even though our apartment was about the size of this table. This time there were reporters from the *LA Times*, from the *Washington Post*,and from the *New York Times*, and all three were asking questions about our situation. Then they spotted an American magazine that had a story about Jessica On the cover of the magazine was a photo of Senator Kennedy's former wife.

Young: Joan [Bennett Kennedy]?

B. Katz: Joan, right. I knew absolutely nothing then about American politics, and the reporters started talking to each other about the significance of this cover. It was right before Kennedy announced that he would run, I think. Do you know when he announced?

Young: You're talking about 1978?

B. Katz: Yes.

Young: Yes. He announced in the fall. It would have been for the 1980 nomination.

B. Katz: Correct. So when did he announce?

Young: It would have been in '79.

B. Katz: If I remember correctly, our conversation occurred before he announced. But the reporters were smart people, and looking at this picture they said, "It sounds like Kennedy is starting his campaign." At least that was their interpretation, that the Kennedy people had started his political comeback for the campaign. I imagine that the Soviets were smart enough to figure these things out too, and they basically wanted the future American President to owe them something. This is one theory that I've heard. They wanted to do him a favor, thinking that he might become President.

Young: That's quite possible from the American side. Kennedy was not at all sure of getting the nomination. He was not running for President. He was announcing that he would run against President [Jimmy] Carter for the party nomination. There was a nominating convention that he was aiming for, and then came the Presidential election—

B. Katz: That I understand.

Young: —which [Ronald] Reagan won.

B. Katz: Right. But Kennedy did not get the nomination.

Young: He did not get the nomination, but it was very much in the air.

B. Katz: Right. As part of that campaign for the nomination, at least these smart reporters from three major papers thought that this was an attempt to sway public opinion or something.

Young: At the same time, President Carter was pushing the Soviet Union on human rights.

B. Katz: Yes, that's right. I certainly remember that.

Young: It wasn't just Kennedy.

B. Katz: Absolutely. But it's possible that the authorities were hedging their bets. Again, I know so little about it that I shouldn't—

Young: Maybe they knew or suspected that Reagan would win—

B. Katz: That's also possible.

Young: —and that it might get much worse.

B. Katz: I wouldn't give them that much credit, but who knows? In any case, I don't know why they agreed to let us go. I just know that we were lucky that we were there at the right time.

Young: In the conversations with Brezhnev, or even before, I think, when he agreed to make the trip, when he was planning the trip, there was an understanding. Before most of these trips Kennedy would say, "I have to accomplish something."

B. Katz: Right.

Young: And he won't go if he's going to get a no to everything.

B. Katz: Wow, that's interesting.

Young: There's always a purpose. He had dissidents. He had gone to China in 1974, and this was very soon after that. Mao [Zedong] was out of the picture, and the Deng [Xiaoping] regime had just started. He met with Deng Xiaoping, and he had a list of Chinese people he wanted to get out.

B. Katz: Do you think the Chinese agreed to release some people on the list even before he came?

Young: No. They would agree to talk about it, but nobody would—Brezhnev himself would not commit to anything, and Kennedy would not commit to giving something in return, which he always did too.

B. Katz: What's an example? What could he give back?

Young: An offer to do something. Usually it was something about a step that could be taken to better Soviet-American relations.

B. Katz: I see. Yes, interesting.

Young: Before he went on these trips, Kennedy was always briefed by the State Department or by the security staff of the White House or the President. So they always coordinated. It was never a mission that was kept secret from everybody. This was, "What should I try to do that can move things forward?" He was always trying something that would thaw relations.

B. Katz: Right, which they were looking for, yes.

Young: And he was the back channel for Reagan when they opened up on chemical weapons, when Reagan and the Soviets weren't talking to each other.

B. Katz: I see. Now it's clear. It goes both ways now.

Young: He had an agenda, and people knew what the agenda was. He also knew what the Soviet agenda was, but at that time it was mostly, "No, but this is a possibility." So he spent two hours with Brezhnev.

B. Katz: In '78?

Young: Yes.

B. Katz: Amazing.

Young: That was quite a conversation. Maybe he didn't spend the whole two hours with him because Brezhnev was not well at that time. He had met Brezhnev before, in '74, and there's a fascinating account of the meeting between the two, but he did go.

B. Katz: He told you that or it's—

Young: I didn't talk to him about it, but somebody with him talked to me about it.

B. Katz: I see, interesting.

Young: I can't say too much because I've seen the documents about it. They were privileged, so I can't talk about that.

B. Katz: Have you talked to Kennedy about his foreign trips yet?

Young: No, I haven't, but I've talked with people who were with him on his foreign trips. I've talked with him in general about his foreign trips. There was always a purpose to his going. He wasn't just a tourist.

B. Katz: That's right.

Young: I wish I knew how the list of 18 was drawn up. I don't know.

B. Katz: Yes, there were several organizations involved. In this case some of them were Jewish organizations, and I'm sure they were adding people to the list. I think there were at least one or two Ukrainians on that list. I imagine that Kennedy's office received names of many people and then they narrowed the list down to maybe the ones they—

Young: Yes, and they found out about the facts of the case. They knew about Jessica and the problems.

B. Katz: Yes, they certainly did.

Young: How did he strike you as a person? Was he a very large person?

B. Katz: He was a large person in every sense of the word.

Young: Was he nervous at this meeting?

B. Katz: No, he wasn't. After I saw him sending away the KGB people, at that point I knew he had the power to do anything he wanted. As I said, I'd never witnessed anything like that. No, he was confident. I felt he took Jessica's story to heart. He asked me about her condition, and it was out of a genuine human interest and desire to help. In fact we had a number of meetings after that, and he would always tell me, "This girl is always in my heart." I don't know whether he also had any political considerations, but he clearly wanted to help.

Just a few days after we came to the U.S., at the end of November'78, I got a phone call from a large software company whose president apparently knew Kennedy quite well. The person on the phoneoffered help in finding me a job. Apparently, Kennedy asked his friend to assist me. This was not something the media would ever know. This was clearly an attempt to help, and I found that absolutely amazing. I ended up going to MIT. I didn't take the job I was offered, but the fact that such a powerful person with so many time commitments would take the time to think of that, to call up a friend and say, "There is this Boris somewhere in Cambridge. Call him and see if you can help him with a job," that is incredible.

Young: He does that. He likes to help people and make a difference in their lives. He gets a great deal of satisfaction from that.

B. Katz: I just realized that there is a picture here. This is at Logan.

Young: Oh, yes.

B. Katz: The day we arrived.

Young: He's frowning. Something about the photographer. Isn't that great.

B. Katz: There were a lot of media people there.

Young: I don't see you in this picture.

B. Katz: Well, Natalya had just given birth.

N. Katz: I had just given birth to another child.

B. Katz: Gabriella , our second daughter,was only nine days old when we came to this country—so Natalya was pretty busy.

Young: You could have come earlier but for that.

B. Katz: Yes, because Gabriella was born, we had to postpone our departureby a week.

Young: Before you met Kennedy, what did you know of him in the Soviet Union? What did you think of him?

B. Katz: Many people in the Soviet Union, myself included, certainly considered him a hero. I knew about the family, because of President John Kennedy, so the name was very well known, certainly to all the people I knew. We knew about the tragedies, and we knew that the younger brother is a Senator. In the Soviet Union quite a few people listened to the Voice of America, so we knew. We certainly knew that he is a powerful American Senator.

Young: And a possible future President.

B. Katz: That's right.

N. Katz: Yes, but we also knew that he was a Senator from Massachusetts, where Boris' mother and two brothers lived. That was another connection.

B. Katz: But I don't think I knew any details about his policies.

Young: How much was known about Kennedy?

B. Katz: Again, mostly the relationship to President Kennedy and the fact that he's a Senator.

Young: How did you learn from the Soviet authorities that your visa was being granted?

B. Katz: That was not exciting at all. Two and a half weeks after the article in *Pravda* appeared which denied that any agreement had been reached in our case, I found a postcard in my mailbox that said, "Come to this office and pick up your visa." It was very anticlimactic. [*laughs*]

N. Katz: Before that, we had to apply every six months, and every time we'd get a little card containing a short formulaic statement: "At this time, it's not considered possible to grant you a visa to leave the country." A really strange formula, but we all knew what it meant.

B. Katz: In fact, our mailbox was not solid, so I could see through it a little bit, and I knew there was a card. I said, "That's just another one of those cards that will tell us to apply in another six months." Of course, when I picked it up, it turned out to be a different card!

N. Katz: It didn't say that they would allow us to leave the country. It just said to come visit their office again.

B. Katz: It was clear that this card was different. At that point, I was becoming more optimistic. That is certainly true.

The rest happened quite fast. I bought the plane tickets for the three of us to go, and we were all packed. I remember that was the 19th of November. Elena Bonner [the wife of the academician Andrei Sakharov] came to visit us; she asked us to carry something to her daughter, Tatiana Yankelevich, who lives in Boston. She spent a few minutes in our apartment, and then she looked at Natalya and said, "You're not going anywhere. You are about to have a baby." She happened to be a doctor. And she was right. That night, I had to take Natalya to the hospital. Our second child Gabriella was born, and we had to postpone the trip by a few days and get new plane tickets.

Then, there were some unpleasant events at the airport, where the customs officials confiscated Jessica's baby formula. They wouldn't let us take the predigested milk, the few leftover cans that the American visitors brought into the country. They wouldn't let us take them with us on the plane.

But this event also showed me is how acts of common people in the country started to diverge from what was expected of them by the authorities. A woman who was searching our luggage and who found the cans of formula was ordered, "Take it out!" But when her boss turned around and left, she put one can back into our luggage. I've never seen such disobedience by an official in the Soviet Union. She must have been taken by Jessica's story. I told her, "This is the only food she eats. How can you do this to us?" When her boss looked the other way, she put one of the cans back, so we were able to feed Jessicain Vienna.

N. Katz: We didn't know how long it would take us to get to the United States, because normally people who were leaving the Soviet Union had to spend a week in Vienna and then three or four months in Rome. We knew that we eventually would get the formula, but we were not sure what we would feed Jessica the next morning. We didn't get any other food until we arrived in the United States.

B. Katz: Talking about Kennedy's attention to detail. After we received permission to leave the country, one would have thought that he was done, that he had achieved his goal, but in fact his office—I don't know how much he personally participated—made sure that we got all the right papers in order so that we could go to the U.S. immediately, rather than going the standard Vienna-Rome route. It was a very unusual arrangement, which I'm sure required a lot of coordination, but again, he and his office made that possible.

Young: Did you get U.S. visas?

B. Katz: Yes.

Young: They were issued to you in Vienna?

B. Katz: No, they were issued in the Austrian Embassy in Moscow, and I learned about it, like, two days before we left.

Young: He would have had somebody on the staff follow up in order to make sure.

B. Katz: Absolutely. And I told you that his advisor, Jan Kalicki, came to Zurich and helped us.

Young: It probably was Kalicki.

B. Katz: He was absolutely wonderful, helping with the kids. I have two kids. It was an unreal situation. There was a huge Boeing or some other airplane. We had never seen anything like that. Jessica was one year old. She looked like she was five months old.

N. Katz: She was 13 months old, so she had just learned to walk, and she was running around.

B. Katz: [*pointing at a photograph*]That's our first day in America, so that would have been the day before. She was running around the airplane. In the old days, they would give all passengers a newspaper, so people were reading the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and all of the papers had Jessica's picture. [*laughter*] It was too much.

Young: She looks healthy there.

B. Katz: That was about, what, five months after the crisis?

N. Katz: We got the first can of formula on, probably, April 2, and it was the end of November.

B. Katz: This was November, so it was six months later.

N. Katz: By that time she had been eating formula for six or seven months.

B. Katz: When we came to this country, the trick was to gradually introduce new foods, which worked quite nicely,luckily.

Young: [*pointing at a photograph*]Whose dog is this?

B. Katz: This was the dog of one of the reporters who was following us at the time.

Young: And this was taken where?

N. Katz: In Boston somewhere.

B. Katz: The first day in America.

Young: It's wonderful. People who worked with Kennedy on these matters, I think, were expected to make sure that everything went right once they had been started. I think they would have been made uncomfortable if they hadn't, if something had gone wrong. Kennedy's staff is very alert to make sure that nothing goes wrong once he has opened the way.

B. Katz: That I understand, but still, I don't think it was in anybody's job description to help me find a job.

Young: Oh no, that was him. That was Kennedy. But to see that you had all the papers was probably—

B. Katz: They were quite good, yes. I imagined they would be.

Young: Kennedy didn't have to tell anybody to do that.

B. Katz: I remember a strange situation at the Austrian Embassy. I knocked at the door. Some guard looked at me and said, "Get out of here." I said, "I just spoke to the Ambassador on the phone, and he told me to come." He looked at me as if to say, "The Ambassador doesn't talk to you guys." I said, "I just talked to the Ambassador. Please go tell him." It took him five minutes to find somebody who would talk to somebody. Then the Ambassador came running and immediately shook my hand. This guy looked at me, and he almost fainted. He couldn't believe it. Clearly Kennedy, or at least some very senior people, was involved in talking to the Ambassadors and to all of these people. That was a lot of attention to detail.

Young: Who was the American Ambassador at that time?

B. Katz: I don't remember who the American Ambassador was. I was talking to the Austrian Ambassador.

N. Katz: Austrian Ambassador to the Soviet Union?

B. Katz: Yes. He had to give me the visa. I don't think I went to the American Embassy.

N. Katz: No, we didn't.

B. Katz: I wonder why. I don't remember. Maybe I did. It was a while ago. For some reason the required documents were at the Austrian Embassy. I don't know why.

N. Katz: Because the Austrian Embassy was a representative of Israel.

B. Katz: I see. That's right. It was a complicated story because the way the Soviets were planning the game, they wanted to make sure that common Russians didn't think that there was such a thing as emigration from the Soviet Union, so the following game was played. The official line was, "The only exception is family reunification." They knew that because of the war, a lot of people ended up in Israelafter the Holocaust. Therefore the only exception to the rule was that sometimes people with Jewish origin were allowed to go to Israel. So we applied to leave for Israel. I had an aunt in Israel who sent me an invitation, and our official visa was to Israel. Austria represented the interests of Israel in the Soviet Union because there was no Israeli Embassy at the time. Then, I guess, the Austrian Embassy had to change things, and instead of giving us papers to go to Israel, they gave us papers to go to the U.S. That, I think, is how it happened.

Young: That was Kennedy's doingto come directly to the United States?

B. Katz: That's right.

Young: That would have been his personal intervention.

B. Katz: Yes, this was very unusual. In fact, when my mother and my brothers declared in Austria that they didn't want to go to Israel, and instead wanted to go to the U.S., they were sent to Rome. They would spend three or four months in Rome waiting for the American visa. Kennedy's office arranged for us to go the U.S. immediately.

Young: I'm sure he would have arranged that personally. You mentioned that you met with him or had occasion to be with him several times after you arrived. Could you talk about those occasions?

B. Katz: When we arrived—you saw the photograph here—that was pretty overwhelming. There were hundreds of people at the airport. Of course I knew almost none of them. They were the people who wrote us letters and called us and helped us. I knew some of them by name, and some of them were visitors, so at least I had met them in Moscow. But I didn't knowmost of them, and yet they made it all happen. The final push was, of course, Senator Kennedy's, but if not for the efforts of normal American housewives and working people and others, that never would have happened.

There are so many people in the Soviet Union. Why would Senator Kennedy pick this particular case? He did it because the case became known to him, and it became known to him because these people let it be known to him. That was a very unusual—to me at least—way to see how things get done, how all of a sudden if enough people want something, it happens. It doesn't alwayshappen, but as I said, we certainly were lucky that it happened to us.

He was there at the airport, all smiles. He was very happy to see us, and we were very happy to see him. Jan Kalicki was there as well, of course, because we had arrived on the same plane.

Young: He met you in Vienna?

B. Katz: I think it was Zurich.

N. Katz: In Zurich. We flew to Zurich from Vienna, and then we changed planes and went straight to Boston, where Kennedy met us at the airport.

B. Katz: My daughter recently found a tape from, I forget, ABC [American Broadcasting Company] or somebody, showing our arrival and it contained my alleged speech at the airport. I barely spoke English, I was so overwhelmed. I don't know what I said. I think I asked people to remember that while I was here now, most of my friends were still there, waiting for permission to leave the country; something like that. Then Senator Kennedy said a few words. I saw my mother and two of my brothers for the first time in four years.

Young: Somewhat overwhelming, wasn't it?

B. Katz: It was quite overwhelming.

Young: So after this occasion—

B. Katz: After that there were a few meetings and events that I was invited to and asked to give a speech, for example, at Kennedy's 25th anniversary in the Senate or during a particularly toughreelection campaign. What year would that have been?

Young: Nineteen ninety-four.

B. Katz: Right. He had a pretty strong opponent at that time.

Young: Yes, he was running against [Mitt] Romney.

B. Katz: Romney, that's right. Maybe also in '88. Who was running against him in '88? I think our kids were younger at the time.

Young: I know you appeared in the 1994 campaign.

B. Katz: Did I? Okay, that's right.

Young: That I know. Nineteen eighty-eight was not a challenge for him.

B. Katz: We also did some commercials for the campaign, which I never saw. In fact I should call up the office. I'm sure they have the tapes. At the time, we lived around Harvard Square, and our kids grew up there. Do you know Cambridge?

Young: A little bit.

B. Katz: We were at the playground at the Cambridge Commons. I think they taped a commercial of us walking or doing something. They ran the commercials quite often. I was at work all the time, so I never saw them. Natalya saw the commercials. Then there was another, but I think it was a different campaign. I forgot what year it was when Jessica went to McGill. I was asked to give a speech at a campaign appearance. When would that have been?

N. Katz: It was in '94.

B. Katz: Ninety-four, okay, but the commercial must have been six years earlier. These were two different campaigns.

N. Katz: The commercial was earlier, but we also participated when Kennedy debated somebody other than Romney.

B. Katz: That's right. It was not Romney. It was a debate somewhere in Boston, I think—at Boston College maybe.He was debating a challenger for the Senate seat. Was it in '88?

Young: It would have been 1988, because it's a six-year term.

B. Katz: Yes, that's right. It was 1988, and it was a very nice setup. We went there. You were there too, right? We both came in, and we were put in particular seats. They knew where to put us. Then the debate started, and the opponent—unfortunately I don't remember his name—

accused the Senator of being too soft on the Soviets. He asked Kennedy, "What did you do to help the Soviet people?" The Senator's turn came and he immediatelysaid—this was a wonderful comeback—"Here are Boris and Natalya Katz sitting right there, and this is what I did." All the cameras turned to us, so it was great. It was a great show, and everyone started applauding, and it was a nice thing to do.

Then several human rights organizations, including the Action for Soviet Jewry, gave Kennedy an award, a human rights award. Jessica was old enough, so she was asked to present the award to him, which was very sweet. We have a picture somewhere. Another time we were invited to a dinner when [Eduard] Shevardnadze, the Georgian President, came to visit.

N. Katz: That was at the library.

B. Katz: At John F. Kennedy's library in Boston. Yes, that's right. I also talked to him for a few minutes there. Again, he was always wonderful and charming and smiling, and each time I saw him, he asked how Jessica was doing.

A few weeks ago a reporter from the Boston *Globe* came here to interview us about Senator Kennedy, and Jessica happened to be in town. He asked us a question. Both Jessica and I answered at the same time, and we said the same thing without ever having discussed it, that we considered Kennedy part of our family. That was very nice for me to hear that Jessica believed that. That was wonderful to hear.

Young: She would have seen him there. He may have spoken to her or had something to do when you arrived.

B. Katz: Oh, to Jessica. Well, she was one.

Young: I know, one year old, so she didn't—

B. Katz: Yes, I'm sure he said something.

Young: Yes, but she doesn't remember him at that ceremony. Does she remember that occasion at all?

B. Katz: I don't think so. Well, she has seen so many pictures. Maybe she has an image of herself at that time. She was 13 monthsold. I don't think kids remember much from that time.

N. Katz: She was about 10 when she gave him the award. That she remembers well.

B. Katz: This is one of those events in life. I truly think that the Senator's interference saved all of our lives, not just Jessica's life.

The Soviets had a choice at that time, when we started going to demonstrations. They could either send us west, to America, which is basically what happened, thanks to the Senator, or send us east, to exile in Siberia, to a prison, which happened to several of my friends , and which could have been the end of my life. I don't know how many people have a chance to say, "Somebody saved my life," but I believe that is the case with our family.

Young: But you also made a choice when you chose to demonstrate.

B. Katz: Yes. As I told you, that was a very tough choice, and I knew that yes, I could gain something, but I could lose so badly that it would have been terrible. Yet when I started, Jessica was in such bad shape, she was so ill that I felt I had absolutely no choice.

Young: It was the combination, probably, of Kennedy and the other hundreds of people.

B. Katz: Absolutely. It started with a combination of courage and insistence from my mother, who with very little English was able to go to *Good Morning America* and give a speech about Jessica. She talked to [Michael] Dukakis, who was the Massachusetts Governor at the time. She asked everybody to write letters and for him to give speeches. With very little English, she stirred the audiences by saying, "Please help my son and his daughter." With that the American people helped. The final push, of course, was the Senator's interference.

Young: He made it happen, I guess.

B. Katz: He made it happen. That's right. I'm not imagining it. I don't know any of these names, but Anatoly [Natan] Sharansky ended up spending more than 10 years in the Gulag. Our friend Ida Nudel, who was trying to help us—

N. Katz: Who participated in the very first demonstration.

B. Katz: The first two demonstrations. Natalya was with Ida. She was one of the eight women who were there, and she ended up in Siberia for three years. There were a few other people like that. It was scary. We were playing with fire, but the fate helped us out.

Young: How did you know the other women at the demonstration?

N. Katz: I don't know how all the refuseniks—

B. Katz: Well, this particular demonstration—

N. Katz: No, but how, in general, did we find each other?

B. Katz: In general refuseniks were isolated in Moscow, and when we first applied for an exit visa, we didn't know other refuseniks, but then we started meeting in government offices. Every several months we went to visit an official responsible for our case. While waiting in the office, you would see somebody else, another refusenik, who was there for the same reason, and you would meet them and get to know them. Then when they had visitors from abroad, they would invite you to come. So when Aleksandr Lerner called me that night about Senator Kennedy's visit, it didn't seem unusual. Many people from the West came to visit. Often, a scientist would come and would want to give a seminar to a group of refuseniks, and you would go listen to it, or another tourist would want to see several people to give them messages from relatives or friends. Eventually people would start discussing their problems.

For instance, Ida Nudel tried to help us with strategies for convincing the authorities that Jessica had a medical problem that required urgent attention. She suggested that we send cables to

particular Soviet officials to make them feel personally responsible for her condition. She had a good intuition of what worked and what didn't. At some point several women got together and decided, "Let's try public demonstrations. This hasn't been done for maybe 20, 30 years in the Soviet Union. Let's be the first. Maybe it will help us." They invited Natalya to go with them because at that point our case was well known. So Natalya joined them. At other times, people would get together to study languages. Some studied English. Some studied Hebrew. There was a complicated network of people and friends who had the same goal. There was no Internet and no e-mail then.

N. Katz: And most of the people didn't have working telephones. The lines were disconnected by the authorities.

B. Katz: Yes. That's one of the ways the authorities tried to prevent things from happening. Even if you had a phone before that, after you became active, they would just turn off your phone and it would stop working. They wanted to prevent this kind of communication. So, when needed, our friends would just knock at the door.

Also, we had people following us. This was such foolishness. Why would such a powerful country care about sending two or three KGB agents to follow me to a store? What would they gain from it? What would they want? I don't have an answer to that. That was a strange country.

Young: You have never wanted to go back?

B. Katz: I went once, in '88, I think. I was asked by an organization of scientists to participate in a semi-underground conference in Moscow and to give a scientific presentation. I do research in artificial intelligence, so I was asked to give a talk. I went in '88 and met a lot of refuseniks who were not, at the time, as lucky as we were, and were still waiting for an exit visa.

A funny story happened at this conference. Soon after we came to the U.S. and I started working, Natalya took it upon herself to help the refuseniks in the Soviet Union who were still waiting for permission to leave the country. She started making little packages with clothing and other items, and I would take them to the post office for mailing; people would usually get them in a couple of months. Altogether, I think we sent several thousand packages to various refuseniks in the Soviet Union.

Back to the conference, when my turn came to give a talk. I told my audience, "Most likely you don't know me and I'll give my technical talk in a minute, but chances are you know my wife, Natalya Katz, who I believe sent many of you packages." Suddenly. they all jumped on their feet and started showing sweaters and coats from the packages that Natalya sent them, so it was pandemonium for a few minutes. It was wonderful to see how much they appreciated her efforts. And it was very interesting for me to meet all these people in Moscow.

Perestroika was just beginning. For many years I couldn't go back, but when perestroika started, the authorities let me go. But it was just the beginning, and I didn't like it. Now, of course, with [Vladimir] Putin and [Dmitry] Medvedev in charge, the situation with human rights seems to be getting much worse with every passing day, although there was news today, I think, in the *Times* saying that Medvedev gave a speech saying that the economic situation is so badnow, he is interested in paying more attention to human rights. He wants people to like him again. When

Russia had all the money from exporting gas and oil, the authorities didn't care about what people wanted. Now they do, so we'll see what happens. Maybe the situation will change, but I doubt it.

Young: Are there other things you would like to say?

B. Katz: This morning I made some notes. You were very good at asking all these questions, so I don't think I need to use my notes. I think we covered pretty much everything. Natalya, do you have anything?

N. Katz: No.

Young: So we'll end the interview now.Thank you very much.