

## **Anastasiya Lyudkevich Interview Transcription**

**Key: K:** Kayla Speaking

**A:** Anastasiya Speaking

### **Introduction:**

Anastasiya was able to let me in on key concepts of the immigration process and experience that I was previously unaware. She immigrated to this country when she was eight, with her mom and her one brother, and even with her coming so young she has been able to really hold on to her Russian customs and traditions. She expresses her need to maintain her “Russianness” and how she is able to do so while being in America and now with an American man, and having a new American family that she is around so often. The major traditions of Russia, the language, and even expectations are so instilled in her, and she makes it a point to keep this as part of her identity. All of this is explained throughout the interview, which is very culturally-based, political differences and struggles of neither Russia nor the United States were discussed, which could possibly be a topic for further interview.

**K:** Kayla interviewing Anastasiya Lyudkevich

**K:** So what is the most distinct memory you have of Russia?

**A:** (Long Pause) um, so I just remember going to, going to my grandmother’s house a lot because my mother worked often, but all the kids were outside and we just, I just played outside all the time. I mean even like 5, 6, 7 years old we were running around outside by ourselves and it was ok and then when it would get dark, I’d come in.

**K:** So was Kaluga like a small town, would you describe it as like a small town, or like how was it? Like or in comparison to even like Baltimore County areas?<sup>1</sup>

**A:** Um, I would probably say it’s smaller, the city’s a lot smaller, but the county was pretty big

**K:** So, um, who did you come to America with?

**A:** My mom and my brother.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaluga is a smaller city right outside of the capital of Russia, Moscow. Only about a 3 hour drive.

**K:** And do you know why your mom decided to come?

**A:** She, my mom um got married and then her husband came here and then he invited us over here.<sup>2</sup>

**K:** And, um, did you ever, like did you stay with her husband like at all when you got here?

**A:** Yeah we all lived together.

**K:** And then what happened?

**A:** And then they ended up getting divorced and we just stayed, we just continued to stay here.

**K:** Was your husband American, I mean was her husband American?

**A:** Uh no he was, he was Russian.

**K:** So what made him come?

**A:** He had a brother that lived here.

**K:** So did they come like for work or..?

**A:** I don't know why his brother came here, but once his brother was here he invited my mother's husband over here and then once my mother's husband was over here, he invited us over here.

**K:** So did he have to come and get like a work visa or you don't really know.

**A:** Actually I think that, I think that his brother, my mother's husband's brother came here as a refugee because he was Jewish.

**K:** So, what at the time made him a refugee because he was Jewish?

**A:** Just Russia was, I don't know, you, you could come here as a refugee if you were Jewish.<sup>3</sup>

**K:** Um, But you don't know how your mother's husband came?

**A:** Once you have a family member that lives here, you can send out an invitation for more family to come here.

**K:** That was something like legally through...?

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<sup>2</sup> In order to receive a visa a lawful US citizen can send a letter to he or she's relative, inviting them to come to the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1880, there were several waves of anti-Judaism pogroms continuing into the 1900s; between 1880 and 1920 2 million Jewish Russians fled. Under the Soviet Union the antisemitism only worsened, leading more than half of the Jewish population to flee Russia, although most to Israel.

**A:** Yeah mhm.

Pause

**K:** Ok, so when you came over from Russia, where did you live?

**A:** We came here and went into an apartment complex, we lived in an apartment, because my step, my stepdad, my mom's husband was already living here so we came and we went right into the apartment that he was living in.

**K:** Ok so were you in the same apartment with him?

**A:** Yeah.

**K:** So all of you were in one apartment?

**A:** My stepdad, my mom and my brother, and me were in one apartment, yes, he already had his own apartment.

**K:** So you were in the same apartment complex, but not in the same apartment?

**A:** No we lived in one apartment.

(Pause)

**K:** So did your mom like find a job as soon as she came here?

**A:** Yes.

**K:** Where did she work?

**A:** Um, she worked at the Russian store.<sup>4</sup>

**K:** Oh that's cool, so what was the biggest adjustment for you, coming?

**A:** The biggest adjustment for me was, um, just learning how to talk to other kids, in their, in English.

**K:** And so how did you learn English, just with school or?

**A:** I, when I went to school I had to take ESOL classes from like 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but that's not what helped me, what helped me was just running around with kids that spoke only English.

**K:** So um what do you think was the biggest difference between where you came from and Baltimore County?

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly Brewington of the Baltimore Sun explains that, "Many of Baltimore's Russian immigrants began life in the United States as cab drivers, manicurists, and grocery owners selling the familiar tastes of home." Hence her mother working in a Russian grocery store.

**A:** Um.

**K:** Aside from language obviously.

**A:** Well like in Russia, people did a lot of walking and bus taking and here it's more like you kinda need a car to get places comfortably, um, and in Russia it was just normal not to have a car and just, ya know, take the bus and public transportation. Um, and the food was really different. I mean the food, I mean the food that my mom cooked that we ate at home was the same, but, um, ya know obviously out the food was different.

**K:** Did you like it better here or no? The food?

**A:** Um, I don't remember disliking it, it just seemed very umm like it umm like it seemed very like a special occasion type of thing. Like oh these people, oh Americans eat special occasion food all the time. Like a pizza is special occasion for a Russian family, or chicken nuggets.

**K:** Did you eat pizza?

**A:** I didn't eat pizza in Russia, but after I came here I ate when I went back to visit and you eat it with a fork and a knife.

**K:** I was gonna say is it different.

**A:** Yeah.

**K:** Is it made different, or made the same?

**A:** Um it's, it's, um no I mean it's made the same. But it's a bigger piece, and it's got more toppings on it and it's a little bit, um, like you can't pick it up with your hand. I mean you can but it's really loose and you just eat it with a fork and a knife.

**K:** Also what is a Russian store?

**A:** It's, um, it's like a produce store. Like it's got, it's just a store and it's got delis...

**K:** Russian food?

**A:** Yeah Russian food and, um, Russian breads.

**K:** How did your, um, mom learn English? Just from like talking to people?

**A:** My mom went to, um, community college and took English as a second language, ESOL, and then just from me talking to her.<sup>5</sup>

**K:** So like you helped her like learn?

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<sup>5</sup> ESOL stands for English for Speakers of Other Languages: a program for foreign people in the United States who do not yet know how to speak English.

**A:** Yeah just like me talking to her helped her.

**K:** Um, alright so, um, what family do you still have in Russia?

**A:** I have my aunts and my cousins. My, um, my niece, my nephew, umm like 5 or 6 cousins, I would have to count. Um Aunts and my umm grandmother's sisters live there, so yeah that's about it.

**K:** Do you talk to them at all still?

**A:** I don't talk to them but my grandma calls there all the time and my aunts will come here to visit.

**K:** And what, and who do you have living here?

**A:** Here I have living, um, my mom, my two brothers, um, 2 aunts, or I'm sorry 3 aunts, an uncle, a cousin, and my uncles two nephews.

**K:** So how did they come to America?

**A:** So my aunts, so I have my aunt and her son, which is my cousin, and then I have my aunt and her husband, and they both came here by playing the green card lottery.<sup>6</sup>

**K:** Oh, I didn't even know that that was a thing. (laughs)

**A:** Yeah, so you win a green card and then you can come here.

**K:** How do you do that? Like how does that, do you know how that works?

**A:** You fill out some sort of application. And um like they were asking my mom to fill the application out because like they always said like she's got like a lucky hand and they both won.

**K:** So when you came over um... well how did you um become citizens when you and your mom and your brother came?

**A:** So because um my stepdad was um... I don't know, he became a citizen because once you come here and you're a legal resident for two years, you can apply for citizenship. So he, ok so he got citizenship and then...ok so I said that because I thought that my mom got citizenship through being married to him, but that's not what happened. Um she, once you live here for two years with permanent residence, which is the green card, once you do that, or um in my mom's case she came here and lived um with my stepdad, um anyway so what you do is you, you apply for citizenship and then they send you um like they send you, I think it took, I think it took like somewhere between 5 or 6 years for them to say "Hey come and get your citizenship", like from when we applied to, um, to once they said come on and take your citizenship. Which is like you

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<sup>6</sup> The Green Card Lottery is a program that gives 55,000 immigrant visas out per year to people from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S. (via [London.usembassy.gov](http://London.usembassy.gov))

come in, and you take a vow, and you say the pledge of allegiance or whatever it is that you say and you um you pass some tests that have to do with, um I don't know, the laws or the amendments, something like that.

**K:** Government questions.

**A:** Yeah government questions. So how I got my citizenship...I was, I was um 16, I was 16 or 17 when um when my mom finally went in to get, anyway so I was under 18 when my mom got the citizenship, so since I was under 18 I automatically got citizenship, so I didn't have to do any of that.

**K:** Well that's what I was going to say, did you get it cause your mom did?

**A:** Yeah, I got because my mom.

**K:** Ok, so do you have any contact with your biological father?

**A:** I do not.

**K:** And what um (laugh) and what, um, ok so why is it that you don't have contact with him?

**A:** So my dad is, he's not Russian, he's Georgian um and I, he was like never really in my life. I mean I met him a few times, but it was just me and my mom um until she um remarried. So I don't have contact with him because he doesn't live in Russia where we came from, he lives in a totally different country and it's just, you know he has his own life and we have our own life.<sup>7</sup>

**K:** Ok so um, you have two older brothers right? So what about their father, or like do they have the same father?

**A:** Yeah so my um my two brothers are 10 and 12 years older than me, and they have a different father, and he, he um he died, after we came to America already. Um from alcoholism, which is like alcoholism is, drinking is a big part of the culture um and a lot of people ya know have the disease of alcoholism and a lot of people die from it or they just, yeah they die from it. So yeah that was, that was what happened with my brothers' father.

**K:** Um is that common in Russia to have like different fathers of your children?

**A:** Um no it's, not really. I mean you know, you, in Russia it's, um ya know here I feel, here I feel like, there's a lot more like co-habiting, co-whatever that word is, cohabiting... where you're not married, but in Russia it's...it's just something that you do. Like if you move in with somebody and you're together, then like that's just what you do, you get married, so um...

**K:** So then was your mom married to your brothers' father?

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<sup>7</sup> Russia and the country of Georgia have a very long, and complicated political history, including broken agreements and most recently broken diplomatic ties, causing a strain on the relationships between citizens of each country.

**A:** My mom was married to my brothers' father and then um they separated before I was born obvio—they separated actually my mother told me when um when my middle brother was like two years old, so um so they separated because um because ya know cause he, he was drinking and um and then my mom remarried to my father and then divorced, had a divorce with him.

**K:** What was the, do you know why they got divorced?

**A:** Um, I asked her and she just said that they just separated, yeah it just didn't work out.

**K:** What's your um Russian connection like in the United States, like now?

**A:** I go visit sometimes, I go visit sometimes um and there's a lot of Russian people here, um where I live, like around Pikesville. There's just a lot of Russian people in the Baltimore area, so that's how, that's how I stay connected with Russian people. Um, there's Russian stores, there's Russian restaurants, there's Russian concerts, um, my grandma watches ya know Russian stuff on, on her TV. I mean when I'm in the house, in my mom's house, it's like we're Russian (laughs).

**K:** So what about in your own home do they keep you connected? What's the culture like in Russia?

**A:** So it's not that different, um it's not that different uh because you know you work, you go to school and stuff like that so um I guess I would say, I guess I would say...so in Russia, it's...one of the big—one of the biggest cultural differences that I saw, that I see here is, um, really the amount that, that people drink. You, like in Russia it's so normal to, and you know I'm sure it's normal here in some places, but in Russia it's so normal to get together, sit at the table, and drink, like that's what you do and I used to be really connected with that because ya know that's um like once I became 21, that's what you did, ya know you got together with your friends and you drank, but now I don't do that and a lot of the Russian community does do that so it kinda has gotten me um away from that and then also as far as holidays, like here New Year's isn't a big deal, but in Russia it's like the biggest holiday, ya know you dress up, you do something, you go out, but mostly it's like a family holiday. You do things with your family, and it's a whole, it's like a whole thing where you look up the color that represents that year, in the Chinese New Year, um you stay up, up until like 12 you're saying goodbye to the old year, it's like a whole tradition, and then after 12 o'clock you're like welcoming the new year. So I stay connected to that through my, my um, through my aunts and my mom, but because I have an American family, it's, it's not that big of a deal so, that is, that's like a really, that's kinda like weird for me cause I'm like what do you mean, New Year's is like huge.

**K:** What's the drinking age in Russia?

**A:** Um, I'm not exactly sure, but I know that, you, it's like as soon as you can handle your alcohol you drink. Like when you're not a little kid anymore.

**K:** So there's like no real drinking age? It's not like people are, or like young kids would get arrested for drinking?

**A:** Umm, I know that, I know that...yeah I don't think you're gonna get arrested for like drinking in a park. I mean I did that, when I went back to visit we sat there and we drank on the benches and ya know we sat at the playgrounds and drank because they had benches there. I know that they're really, really strict with you absolutely cannot, I mean I know that they're strict here like you can't drive drunk, but there it's like severe, like you're gonna get in a lot of trouble, ya know it's, it's um, it's pretty bad. Um but yeah drinking is just so, it's *so* part of the culture there, ya know like you uh (laughs) like when I went back and I said I don't drink, they said, and they tried to give me, like my family tried to give me a shot glass with vodka in it, I said no I don't drink, they said oh you don't drink, here's some wine. I'm like no, no, no, not at all, no alcohol. (laughs) It's just really weird for them. So um that... and uh...just holidays. I mean really...you know you, the food really keeps the culture, so my mom helps with that.

**K:** Ok so back to when you kinda first got here, so you went, you lived in an apartment with your mom, and brothers, and um her husband, so then after that, what was it like?

**A:** After that, um ya know, we, we moved to a townhouse, like a row house, all of us, and then—

**K:** And with her husband?

**A:** Yeah, just to get out of an apartment and get a bigger place, and then there um my mom and her husband separated, so my mom had to ya know figure out where she was going to live and how she was going to take care of me and my brother so we ended up getting an apartment um and by then my mom was, so my mom was a nurse in Russia, and to become a nurse here in America she would've had to pass an English test and so the English test, it's not that she doesn't know English, it's that it's really, it's ya know it's a lot of grammar, and I've heard American people say that it would be hard for them to pass it, so my mom who doesn't have any, ya know she just knows how to speak the language, she doesn't have grammar and all that stuff—

**K:** It's like an English class, like we would have trouble.

**A:** Right, exactly so it was hard for her to pass, so she had to, ya know instead of being a nurse, she had to do something where you didn't have to pass the English test, so she became a CNA, certified nursing assistant, and my mom just worked a lot. I mean my mom always worked a lot and um so when we lived in that apartment, she...ya know saved up and wasn't in debt and worked a lot, and she bought a townhouse and that was like her first home that she ever—

**K:** And this was after she was not with your stepdad?

**A:** Yeah.

**K:** What did your stepdad [do?] when he got here?

**A:** He delivered pizza...yeah. So he delivered pizza for Papa Johns for forever, actually the whole time I knew him he delivered pizza.



**K:** And then, ok so then after, did she stay as a CNA or what does she do now?

**A:** Yeah she's still a CNA, so she still, she still works, actually, um, I remember my stepdad having, uh, like a little side business, while he was still delivering pizza he was selling cassettes and CDs to Russian people, it was just like Russian music. He would order a whole bunch of them and resell them so to supplement, but yeah my mom is still a CNA.

**K:** And then um what about your brothers, how do they like I guess keep their connection to Russia? Or like would you say they have like a stronger connection because they were like older..?

**A:** Yeah so my middle brother, he, he went back to Russia multiple times. I've been back twice, he's been back a few times, he actually went to Russia and um married his high school sweetheart and then he came back here and things just didn't work out because she didn't want to come here and he didn't want to stay there, so they just couldn't compromise. Um but yeah my brother, now he is with, the girl that he's with, she's Russian and they have a son and ya know I feel like I speak more English because I'm with an American speaking man, an English speaking man, but um my brother and his family, ya know they're still involved in the Russian community [be]cause you know they go to the Russian store and they speak Russian, and they know other Russian people and they get together for the holidays which is something that I've kind of stepped away from. And my oldest brother, he came here after we came and he's had a really hard time transitioning because he just can't seem to catch on the language and, um, ya know he, he has even told me that he feels some resentment that he hasn't learned English yet and it's just not catching on and he has, ya know he's been really limited with like getting jobs, and um he can only work where he doesn't have to use his English, so that's, I think he's had the hardest transition. Oh! And my grandma also lives here, I forgot to mention that. Yeah, my grandma had a great transition. She just enjoys, she just enjoys it. She doesn't miss Russia, she ya know, my grandma worked all her life and now that she's here, she's just relaxing, she watches my nephew and...

**K:** So when did she, when did she come here?

**A:** She came here in like 2005.

**K:** Um so you said that your older brother had like some resentment towards you, has you being with an American man like caused any strains on any other relationships or like being able to speak English, like being more Americanized than the rest of your family?

**A:** Yeah, not really, I mean [I?] feel like if I was with a Russian guy...it would, I would be more involved in, I would be more involved with my family occasions because sometimes, because if my partner was Russian, we would, you know for example, for Passover we would go and do the whole church thing, ya know in Russia it's really extensive. You go there at midnight and then at 2 am you walk around the church three times holding a candle, like they have this whole, you know Russian Orthodox, they have this whole thing going on, and then you fast. And when I was dating a Russian guy we did all those things together, and we celebrated New

Years and it was a big deal, um but yeah being with an American guy has definitely um Americanized me a little bit more.

**K:** And how accepting do you feel Andy is of your Russian culture and language?

**A:** Uh, I think he's very accepting, I mean ya know he's very interested in trying food and he ya know there's definitely a language barrier because when we go to family events I can see that he'll like go and sit on the couch and get on his phone. Ya know I've asked him if it makes him feel uncomfortable and he says ya know (laughs) he says I kinda like it cause I don't have to talk to anybody, but um I mean he'll still, ya know, still communicate, he'll, ya know my aunts and my uncle know how to speak English, so yeah he's pretty accepting of it.

**K:** So um how like with your kids I guess do you try to, do you try to keep them connected somewhat to the Russian culture or Russia?

**A:** Yeah I try.

**K:** --growing up in America.

**A:** Um I try really just with the language and the food and umm one of, just really talking to them because they're gonna, I feel with my experience with other, with like watching people that lived here for a while, it doesn't matter if you've spoken purely Russian until you were 8, or until you were, or until you start going to school. Once you start going to school and hearing just English, um inevitably you become, it's going to be more comfortable for you to speak in English. Um I know, I have friends my age who speak really poor Russian um and I think what saved my Russian was the fact that even though, even, I think what saved my Russian was the fact that I had a lot of Russian friends that spoke Russian. So if I, if I just would've um, if the only people that I heard speaking Russian was in my household then it would've been hard for me to remember the language. So with my kids yeah I take them to my mom's house and they speak in Russian there, ya know especially around my grandma and my brother who don't know any English and have to talk to them in Russian. Um I would like to speak to them only in Russian so that they know it much better, but ya know it's difficult because I live with um English speaking, or American speaking—

**K:** Because of us (laughs).

**A:** Yeah (laughs) so it's harder for me because it's just ya know you get into a groove of a language and it's just easier to speak English, um but my whole theory is, is like um hopefully they just turn out to be good people no matter what language they speak. (laughs)

**K:** Yeah (laughs) so when you came here you said you had a lot of Russian friends, so how did you connect with like all of these Russian people? Especially [be]cause you came so young, like how did you connect with like...

**A:** Um, I think that it's just a normal thing. Like you go to school and you see people that speak your language and you just start hanging out with them and that's just what happens, I just um

when I first came here, when I first, I came to third grade and I didn't know any English, so I had a friend, she spoke Russian and we, we talked in Russian, and then I went on to middle school and met more Russian people, then went on to high school, met more Russian people, and ya know we just kinda all hung out together. All the Russian people knew all the other Russian people and um ya know we just kinda stuck together. I mean ya know at one point I didn't have any American speaking, English speaking friends. So it wasn't hard, it was, ya know we all just kinda stuck together. Not, not, not out of, not ya know not because we didn't want to be friends with American people but it was just easier, ya know we ate the same food, we spoke the same language, listened to the same music.<sup>8</sup>

**K:** So do you think that made your transition easier? Like you easier to adjust?

**A:** I think that, yeah I think having met Russian speaking people at school made it a lot easier.<sup>9</sup>

**K:** Ok so um when you like, when your mom told you that you were coming to America like what were your expectations? Like what were your views of America as a child? Like did you watch movies and ...

**A:** Yeah I thought that um as a kid I thought that coming to America I was just gonna have all the toys um ya know all the, all the movies. I thought it was gonna be ya know um ya know you just would have everything, like there wasn't gonna be no you can't have that. Like I thought that you could just have everything and I ya know told, ya know I was 8 so I didn't really know much, but I told all my friends that ya know "hey I'm going to America, what do you ya know what do you want me to bring back for you and ya know what kind of stuffed animal do you want. It was, it was like ya know somebody's going to America, like they have everything there ya know and you can get whatever you want and it's not a problem um yeah so that's, that's how I...

**K:** So then when you came to America what were your, like your expectations vs reality? Like how was it for you...

**A:** So we came here um October 31, we came here October 31, oh no I'm sorry September 31 and, um, I remember on New—so in Russia you don't give, in the Russian culture you don't give presents on Christmas, they don't even actually have a December 25<sup>th</sup> holiday, it's you give presents on New Year's um.. and I thought ya know I went to sleep, and in Russia what you do is ya know for, for a few days, I think it's like seven days until January 6<sup>th</sup> where you celebrate um, um a Russian Orthodox holiday, for those seven days between New Years and um January 6<sup>th</sup> um you get a present when you wake up in the morning under the, under the Christmas tree, or

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<sup>8</sup> According to Baltimore Sun, "Russians have made Baltimore a destination for more than a century...They [Jewish refugees] began arriving as refugees in the early 1980s, turning places such as the Millbrook Park Apartments in Pikesville into Little Moscows." Anastasiya settled in Reisterstown, only a few miles from Pikesville.

<sup>9</sup> 2000 U.S. Census found 10,477 Russians in the Baltimore region, which is 7.2% of the region's foreign-born population. Many people of the Russian community think this number is far too low however, according to the Baltimore Sun. (via [articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-08-23/news/0508230175\\_1\\_russian-community-baltimore-county-baltimore-region](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-08-23/news/0508230175_1_russian-community-baltimore-county-baltimore-region))

under the tree um and it's usually like a bag full of candy or some tangerines um or like something little. So here I thought that on New Year's day I was gonna wake up and there was gonna be ALL these stuffed toys and ALL these toys and ALL these, just everything that I could ever imagine because now I'm in America and I'm gonna get everything and I was sooo disappointed when I woke up and I saw a little bag (laughs) under the tree and I opened it and it was pajamas (laughs). And now realizing, you know back then I thought ya know what happened, what did Santa Claus, what did Father Winter not bring me! Ya know but like looking back now I know that we came here and we didn't really have ya know we were paying for the apartment and ya know we didn't have to pay for all this stuff, so I got what they could, what they could afford um so looking back I'm sure that my mom wanted to give me a lot more, but that's just what happened.

**K:** So um yeah so when your mom came here it seems like she um, so when you came, um, here did you think like, like for your expectations of like the culture, I don't know if you thought this in depth when you were 8, but like the culture, like of what everyone else had like was that what you were expecting when you came or when you were in Russia?

**A:** Um, when I was in Russia I thought that it was going to be mansions and, and vacations and nice things and when I came here um it wasn't like that, like we lived in the apartment and I saw all the toys in the stores, ya know I keep saying toys because I was 8, but I saw these things at the stores, and I saw all the, all the chips and the candy at the store, but to me it didn't matter because we didn't buy those things.

Um, so uh, ya know I think a really big cultural difference that I saw was um, um the way people go food shopping. Um ya know in Russia because you, we didn't have a car, and a lot of people didn't have a car, what you do is, you go, ya know, up the street to a store and you get what you needed for the next few nights, and, and you carried it and here, you fill up these big shopping carts full of food and it was always like so mind boggling to me, like "Woah". And I remember my mom talking on the phone to ya know my family in Russia saying how yeah we don't go shopping every few days, we go like once a week and we just get everything we need for that week, and it was, that was a big, that was a big change.

Um and then also, eating out. Like you, it's, eating out in Russia is... I'm sure it's different now, but back then um it was ya know like a special occasion, ya know, I don't, I don't think I ever remember eating out in Russia. So here ya know that you can, you go up to the McDonalds and get food that's ready was, it just seemed um, it seemed, how do I say it, like um, it just seemed really odd and I'm still, I still kind of get like that where I'm like why would we eat out if we could just make the food and I think that that's just something that's like instilled in me. Um my mom still doesn't go out to eat. She says "why, why go out"—I remember one time um even as a kid I asked her about a burger, I said "Can we go, ya know can we go get a burger?" and she's like "why? We can make one at home" I'm like "No but", she's like "I can make a better burger than McDonalds" I'm like "No but I want to go and get one ready." She's like "No, let's, let's just go home and I'll make you a burger." And she made me a burger and it was nothing like McDonalds, but in my mom's eyes it was better than McDonalds and why would you go to

McDonalds and spend the money, when I can make you a burger. So, um, yeah that's how it was.

**K:** So was there fast food in Russia that you remember?

**A:** Um, there, when I was, when I was younger I don't remember going out to eat and I mean I'm sure we did, but going back, like when I did go back to Russia um uhh, ya know I, there was, there was a mall, um and at the mall is where we stopped by at the food court um and we, that's where we got a pizza that you ate with a fork and that was like, I think that was, that might have been the first time I remember going out to eat in Russia. Um you can order beer, you can order beer, at the mall in Russia, so you can ya know, you can order beer at McDonalds in Russia! So you can get a Big Mac and a beer um...uh but yeah now that, after we went back, and ya know I went in the city more and I was able to explore more than just what my mom was showing me when I was a kid I saw that yeah there's like food places that we stopped in and got like doughnuts and drank tea um and bought a lot of beer. I mean you can really buy beer anywhere, it's just, and people are walking around drinking beer, it's totally normal.

**K:** Do you think that's because you were young and not exposed to it...

**A:** Yeah.

**K:** Or because it actually changed since when you were there?

**A:** Um, both. Both, I mean probably mostly because I wasn't exposed to it, but going back like I know that mall wasn't there um ya know and another thing is, another thing is, um in Russia, yes you can walk ya know into a store and use their bathroom, but that's rare, but like at a park, they'll have restrooms and you actually have to pay like you have to put change in to go into the restroom, so it's like a public restroom. It is a public restroom, but you have to pay to go in and use it.

Um and then the other thing was um here, even in really rural areas, it's still pretty modernized, like with running water and all that stuff, where as in Russia at my grandmother's house and my grandmother's sister's house, like we lived, we lived in an apartment, we lived in a five-story building, and we lived on the fifth floor and we had running water, um but my grandma and her sisters who lived not right in the city didn't have running water. We had to, um ya know she had an outhouse um if you wanted to shower you had to go like in her garden and there was a wooden stall and you took some um ya know pots and pans with you and that's how you washed yourself um, uh, and, um, yeah so like if you wanted to brush your teeth or wash your face, there was this um, there was this uh like metal container that hung up on my grandmother's wall, above a sink, above an actual sink, and you had to tap it so water would come out because you'd pour water in there and that's how you'd brush your teeth and wash your face, but there was no running water. Um ya know where as here it's like even if you go out in the total country, I still have not saw anywhere where you had to use an outhouse.

Um and at one point, um we had to walk a ways from, from where my grandmother lived to pump the water out of the well and bring it back in buckets, so if my grandma had to wash a lot

of bottles or like a lot of mason jars from pickling, she did a lot of pickling, that was like totally normal in Russia, she had to take all those bottles to that well pump and wash all the bottles there. Eventually they had built a well pump, or however they got it, it just so happened to be right in front of my grandmother's house, which was really convenient. Um so yeah that's, that's a big difference too whereas like here you can go to the bathroom anywhere and there you had to pay and stuff.

**K:** Do you think that that made you appreciate um like America more when you came here or like?

**A:** Um, it, again it was like bizarre because in Russia at my grandma's we had an outhouse and no running water and then I'd never seen two bathrooms and even going back I've never seen two bathrooms in one place in Russia and another um difference with that is in Russia you have a bath Room, where it's just the toilet, the toilet room, and then you have a separate room where you have the sink and the bathtub um...and...so yeah, so you have the sink and the bathtub in one room and you have the um, and you have the toilet in the other room and here ya know even in our first apartment we had two full baths and it was, I remember ya know we bought pink shower curtains for one and pink rugs for one and blue shower curtains for the other one and blue rugs for the other one and I just thought it was like the greatest thing ever. Like look at our two bathrooms one's blue, one pink, this is the best! Um but again like in my mind it was like, I never, I never, I never didn't appreciate it, but in my mind I was like this is cool because it's a lot. So it's cool because it's a lot, so it's kind of unnecessary but if this is how it's done, if this is how it's done here, then cool, like let's roll with it. (laughs)

**K:** So now that you're an adult do you, can you maybe make a connection between maybe not wanting as much, or not expecting as much as far as like what you aspire to have? Do you know what I'm saying?

**A:** Um...

**K:** Like are you content do you think with less, with less?

**A:** Yeah I feel like I am definitely content with less. Um ya know I still want running water and a comfortable house, but I'm not going to go into debt, but I'm not going to go into debt getting those things um ya know I, I'm ok with, with not eating out all the time um uh I'm ok with if we get a house and don't have two bathrooms like I'm totally ok with that because although those things are nice, like they definitely aren't necessary and um like I'm not going to feel like I have less than because like I have just one bathroom, ya know which was like that big difference when I came over here from Russia.

**K:** So um have you noticed at all, or like what have you noticed about like the Russian work ethic like versus American work ethic, like when you came or even just like with adults you know, or like your mom?

**A:** Well my mom works a lot, she rarely calls out, um my aunt, both of my aunts work a lot, so they have multiple jobs um and ya know from what I, from what I notice with my, from my family, and other um and other Russian speaking people around here is that, ya know you work and you, you work so that, you work so that you don't have to struggle, um and I say that because like ya know when I wasn't doing well in school, my mom would say to me, um ya know "People, people come here so that they can have what they want, um and this is like, like go to school, like you have the opportunity to go to school, um ya know if you have a opportunity to go to work, go to work, um and ya know work for a life, like get what, ya know get what you want um ya know work to get what you want" and um for me I think that I definitely, I had that instilled, even like, even like an expectation to live up to um where here it's like, you come over here and it's like your parents, ya know people who were doctors in Russia come over here and aren't doctors because they can't pass an English test or people who are uh ya know English professors, can't, ya know have to work delivering pizza, my, my um my step-father was actually a teacher at a University, but he ended up delivering pizza here because he didn't know any English. Um so here it's like ya know my mom or a lot of other Russian parents are like ya know be a doctor or a lawyer, be a doctor or a lawyer, so ya know it's like at one point I said to my friend's family that I was going to go to school for social work and, and she kind of looked at me, my friend's mother and said, my Russian friend's mother and said, "Social work? Isn't that, what, what is that? What about like a lawyer or a doctor?" So it's just like, not only did I get like I have to work and you know don't call out of work and go to work when you're supposed to but also like there's an expectation, like you can't just, like if you tell a Russian family who came here and worked for what they have you're gonna, ya know, be a uh ya know, ya know you're gonna be a singer or ya know a performer, they're gonna say "What? That, that, ya know a doctor or a lawyer!" Like that's there only, ya know, doctor or a lawyer, doctor or a lawyer, or pharmacist, doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, ya know doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, veterinarian, ya know it's never just do whatever you want, it's who cares what you want, like this is your opportunity, take it.

**K:** So, um what are you, like what are you going to do, like has that, have you tried to fit that mold?

**A:** Well, yeah. Yeah. I definitely... I think that, like earlier in my, in school, once I realized that I wasn't the best student, I kind of, I kind of started to rebel against the whole like you need to be a doctor or a lawyer because I just didn't, back then I didn't have the capacity to even think that I could be a doctor or a lawyer, but also um I didn't like school, so I thought ok I'm not gonna be a doctor or a lawyer so I'm ya know screwed because I'm not gonna fit that mold, but ya know now that I, I do have enough patience to sit down and learn something, I chose nursing because ya know I don't wanna be a doctor, but I feel like nursing is somewhere in that range, and you know a lot of it has to do with, ya know yes that's what I wanna do, but there's still a big part that's like well why not if I can. Like ya know um like why not do it if the opportunity is there which is a really, ya know like when you come from Russia, it's like well take what, ya know what's your opportunity? Ya know what I mean? Like some people can't pass an English test so

they can't be nurses or ya know so um, yeah a lot of it, a lot of my choosing to be a nurse definitely has to do with, well it's somewhere in that range of, of uh acceptability.<sup>10</sup>

**K:** So when you were feeling like you were rebelling, you never in your mind thought there was any other option to go in a different route or do something different? It was either like I'm going to do nothing or I'm going to do this?

**A:** I thought, I thought that, that, yeah basically. I basically thought that like because I was so limited, ya know my mom was never like "Oh! Be whatever you wanna be, ya know whatever makes your heart happy." It was like go to school, become a lawyer, you're good at arguing, become a lawyer. Ya know or ya know I always got the whole be a lawyer thing, I never got the be a doctor thing, but um so once, once I, once I eliminated that from myself, yeah I didn't think there were other options, I just kind of didn't think about anything, ya know until, until I got out of the early 20s crap show and then decided, well ok maybe I wanna do nursing.

**K:** So even though your mother came here and took on some of the American culture, she still had that same Russian mindset of like there is no other choice in what--?

**A:** Right, it, here it's, I don't think I've ever heard a Russian parent say, I don't think I've ever heard a Russian parent say, ya know do whatever makes you happy.

**K:** So that's my other question, what is the relationship like with your mother and how does that like tie into like the Russian culture, as far as like it being common in the Russian culture or how is maybe it different since you came here? Like do you have a common Russian mother-daughter relationship?

**A:** So as far as my relationship with my mother that's something that I see um ya know that I don't see a lot of difference with, um uh with the cultures um my aunts, my aunts are really warm and loving to their kids, ya know when they're doing great and ya know they're cold and distant when they're ya know not doing the right things in life, which is ya know same thing with me and my mom. Ya know when I was in school and I couldn't, ya know I wasn't, I wasn't going to be a lawyer, and I wasn't doing good in school ya know there was some friction between me and my mother, um and ya know now that I'm, I'm doing good and um I'm more open with her, our relationship is a lot better, but ya know I think that, I don't, ya know I don't think that the mother-daughter relationship is a cultural thing. Um in my experience, I've met a lot of, I've met a lot of people from different cultures and it didn't alter their relationship with their mother.

**K:** Ok, so overall would you say that your experience of moving to America was a good one um like or a positive one, like would you ever consider going back to Russia, or would you ever want to move back to Russia or would you just stick to visiting?

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<sup>10</sup> "Parents often put intense pressure on their children to succeed in the United States, which many see as a land of opportunity compared to the country they left behind.", as told by Princeton Professor Alejandro Portes. He also explains the negative impacts that this pressure has on children's achievements, self-esteem, and family life.



**A:** Um, I think that uh that it was, it was positive, um but I don't think that it would've been negative had we stayed in Russia, it's just, it's just the way, it was just the choice that I was a part of, ya know it wasn't my choice, my mother made the choice to move here, she, ya know I've asked her before, why did you move here? And she said she moved here for me and my brother, so that we could have a better life. Um, I don't think, see how we would've had a worse life in Russia, maybe, because I wouldn't have known any different, but in Russia it's, it's uh, ya know, like here doctors get paid a lot, in Russia they don't, um who gets paid a lot is businessmen and politicians, so unless I had my own business, I probably wouldn't have been that successful, um ya know like materialistically wise, um ya know I probably would've never had a big house or a nice car unless I had my own business, and um the way that, ya know the way that I know me today, I'm not the type to open up a business, so I would probably just have to um ya know um, even, even like ya know, you, you would like to think that if you're passionate about something and you, and you find a career in it that you would be successful, um and live comfortably, but in Russia it's like ok well if I did become a nurse it's not like it would pay much, it's not a big paying job, being a doctor is not a big paying job. So yeah moving here um definitely opened up more opportunities, definitely um I can open up a catalog for a college and say oh this looks interesting, or that looks interesting, and you know I can gauge that I'm going to get paid a lot if I go to school for a long time, mostly. Um, so yeah I'm glad that we came here because now I have two cultures in me, instead of just one and you know I'm grateful for that. Um so yeah I definitely would say it's an overall positive experience.

**K:** And um why do they push you to be a doctor if they don't, if they don't even pay that much, like just because ...

**A:** No, no in Russia they don't push you to be a doctor, in Russia they...

**K:** Oh you meant here, like in the United States?

**A:** Yeah, in Russia they say get an education and be a businessman.

**K:** Oh ok.

**A:** But here they push for that because it does pay a lot and it's a big, ya know up there in the hierarchy of jobs, but in Russia if you're a doctor you can be assured that it's because you wanted to be a doctor and not because of money.

**K:** So would you even consider going back to Russia?

**A:** Forever?

**K:** Yeah.

**A:** Um, mm, it's uh, I would definitely, I don't know if I would go back there for forever, but what I do want to do, I want to have the opportunity to take my kids while they're young and go back there for, for several months, maybe 6 months to a year, and just live there and expose them

to the culture and really immerse them in it um so that they can come back and um, um ya know, know what it's like and if they decide to go back they can go back um...

**K:** And it will help them learn the language.

**A:** It'll help them, it'll help them yeah, perfect their language a little more. So yeah I don't know if I would go back forever, but I definitely have, one of my dreams is to be able to go back there and live for ya know 6 months to a year.

**K:** So then like your kids can actually go back and experience like some of the traditions that you were talking about, that they don't really get to experience here in America.

**A:** Yeah, ya know here, again with the holidays and um, and with the holidays and stuff like here they can only experience it if we do it within our house, but in Russia they could see that it's not just the choice that we make as a family to celebrate this way, they can see that it's an entire country that decides to do it like that and just um ya know here we can try to do things the Russian way, but I feel like if I take my kids back they can see that it's not just a different way of doing things, they can see that it is a way of doing things and an entire culture does it. Um and you know they can appreciate their heritage.

**K:** So obviously like the Russian culture is still very important to you and like very much instilled in you.

**A:** Yes, it's very important to me um I, even though ya know there's parts of me where, where I'm like I do things this way now because I'm American, but really, but really like there's a piece of me that dies whenever I decide that because I'm, because really it's more convenient to do them the American way, but yeah it's still very much a part of me and ya know I hope that it's a part of my kids too because ya know it's not that, for me, ya know it's always gonna be inside of me, even if I don't practice it, but it's important for me to, to decide to practice it, anyway because it's something that I want to instill in my kids so that they have the opportunity if they wanted to, to instill it in their kids, so that's yeah.

**K:** Ok, well that's about it, I guess we're out of time, so thank you for the interview (laughs).

**A:** You're welcome.

## **Conclusion:**

Overall, the interview experience with Anastasiya was a good one because she was pretty open to talking to me and giving extensive answers to whatever I asked. I think that the problem came in really with my own fears and preparation. Her account of her immigration experience I think was very similar to that of many immigrant children, where her parents worked very hard to get to America, facing her with pretty harsh pressures of success and specific expectations. She works hard to maintain her Russian identity and even try to instill it in her children who are still young and have obviously never even been to Russia. She maintains the language and tries

very hard to keep up with the traditions. What I am most impressed with I think is her balance between her Russian and American identity. It really is the closest thing I have seen to a 50/50 balance. She does many things the American way for convenience sake, but still does a lot in Russian fashion and holds on to her Russian ties very tight.