

Local News

# Success story

## Ukrainian Jewish immigrants thrive here after difficult adjustment

By Jacqueline Ross  
Staff Writer

Just seven years. That's all it has taken for one Ukrainian Jewish family to go from living in fear of anti-Semitism and Chernobyl's nuclear fallout, through a wrenching adjustment to American life and to arrive at the American dream — home and business ownership — in the Kansas City area.

With faith, hard work and some help from local volunteers and Jewish agency professionals, Arkady Zigelboym, Ina Grodzinsky, their daughter Susana and Ina's mother Sofia Grodzinsky have come a long way from their home in Lviv, formerly known as Lvov when Ukraine was a Soviet republic.

In 1985, when Susana was born and Ukraine was still a part of the Soviet Union, Zigelboym managed a department store which he and his brother-in-law owned. Grodzinsky taught piano. As a family, they were happy. As Jews living in Russia, things weren't so great.

"They always hate Jewish people there," said Grodzinsky. "That's for sure."

Grodzinsky remembers being afraid since childhood.



Jacqueline Ross

Arkady Zigelboym "makes teeth" at his dental studio in Brookside. Zigelboym, his wife, Ina Grodzinsky, and their family moved to Overland Park from the Ukraine in 1990.

"I saw my grandmother praying and hiding at the same time," she said. Going to synagogue was danger-

ous. "We were afraid the police would come and get some of us."

When Zigelboym and Grodzinsky married, she kept her name because it was Polish, not Jewish. "That's how we hide our nationality," she said.

"That time was kind of bad for Jews," said Zigelboym. "We got very desperate at that time, because they closed my store."

Zigelboym and his brother-in-law had been in business for two years when local authorities closed it.

"All the sudden," he said, "everything just goes apart."

In 1986, just before the store closed, a nuclear disaster occurred in Chernobyl, about 400 miles from Lviv.

"My friend called us from New York and asked us what happened there," said Grodzinsky. "And we did not even know about it."

The lack of information became an even bigger threat when Susana became ill. There was fear her illness was caused by Chernobyl's radioactive fallout. As it turned out, she had an infection caused by a virus mutated from radiation.

Health care in Russia was frustrating. "The doctors said 'Oh, you're still young. You can have another kid,'" said Zigelboym.

It was at that time the family decided to leave, for Susana's sake.

Ina, Arkady, Susana and Ina's mother, Sofia, applied to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow for a visa.

"Leaving the country was the most horrible experience in my life," said Grodzinsky. No one knew if the U.S. would take them or if Russia would allow them to leave.

With no family in America, a sponsor was needed. Grodzinsky's brother was in Italy at the time, going to the

U.S. through a circuitous, older route. He would eventually go to Columbia, Mo., and then Kansas City.

Finally, the community of Greater Kansas City agreed to "adopt" the Grodzinsky-Zigelboym family.

"We did not know where we were going," said Grodzinsky. "They told us, 'You're going to Kansas City.' And I looked at a map and it was in the middle. And I said, 'OK. That's where we're going.'"

There were a million little details to work out before the family left Russia in 1990. They took a newly approved route from Moscow to New York, then to Kansas City.

### Big adjustment

"Merna Solomon was the first person we met," said Zigelboym. Solomon was the social worker from Jewish Family & Children's Services assigned to their case. At first, they communicated mostly with hand signals. The family spoke little English.

America was a land of strangers.

"All of the Jews, they have relatives here. We did not," said Grodzinsky. Volunteers from the community became friends. "Basically, now they are relatives," she said.

Even with the tremendous help they received, "The first four months were terrible," said Zigelboym.

The family had no car when they moved into their two-bedroom apartment in Overland Park. "We did not understand," said Grodzinsky. "People don't walk here. They just drive."

The couple took jobs at Honey Baked Ham to buy a car, sometimes working three six-hour shifts a day.

After working 18 hours they would go home to sleep, then start again in the morning.

"My wife was crying," said Zigelboym. On his birthday, they worked from 5:30 a.m. to 1 a.m.

He remembers she said, "That's the first time we spent your birthday working." That's when he told her, "Don't worry. Life will go on."

Later, Grodzinsky took a job at Midwest Lens, cutting eye-glass lenses. As a pianist, Grodzinsky worried about damage to her hands.

"Your hands were just covered with lead and emulsion," she said. She was told she wouldn't be able to feel the glass with gloves on.

Meanwhile, Zigelboym worked at pet clinics. He had been a veterinarian before opening the department store in Russia, while learning about dental technology from his sister, a dentist, in his spare time.

He eventually decided to go back to school to become a registered respiratory therapist.

After four years of school, Zigelboym started work at Truman Med-

See Success, Page 5A

*'They always hate Jewish people there (in Russia). That's for sure.'*

—Ina Grodzinsky  
Ukrainian Immigrant

## The 1997 Maccabi Youth Games

August 10-15

### Let the Games Begin!

Join The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle as we celebrate the 1997 Maccabi Youth Games. In the Maccabi program guide, a special section of the KCJC, we will be highlighting the games and its participants.

Now is the time to take advantage of this advertising opportunity to be seen by the entire Jewish Community as well as Maccabi athletes and their families worldwide! Get in on the games by calling us today to reserve your space. Deadline for ads is July 1, 1997.

CALL 648-4620