

Passages

winter 2005 } The Magazine of HIAS, The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society



A Good Home in Charlotte
Portraits of a multinational refugee community

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passages

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THE HIAS MISSION

Derived from the teaching *Kol Yisrael Arevim Ze ba Ze* (all Jews are responsible, one for the other), the primary mission of HIAS is to assist Jews and others whose lives and freedom are in danger. HIAS helps people escaping persecution and poverty; assures resettlement assistance to refugees and migrants through cooperation with a network of agencies throughout the United States; and works to assure that the United States provides generous, humanitarian policies to those in peril. HIAS also advocates on behalf of refugees and migrants on the international, national and community levels.

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Cover: *The many faces of HIAS immigrants in Charlotte, N.C.* Photos by Sasha Bezzubov.



America's Security and Values can Coexist

It has now been three years since the September 11 terrorist attacks.

For us, as leaders of a Jewish agency that has served refugees and immigrants for 123 years, these have been very trying times. Clearly, we recognize the enormity of the attacks on that horrible day as well as the ongoing danger to the United States from terrorists dedicated to killing Americans.

But we also have seen firsthand the upheaval these events have wreaked on the whole American immigration process. For instance, over the last three years, 210,000 refugees were slotted to be granted admission to America, but a lack of coordination of security procedures has meant that only a little more than half that number actually made it to these shores.

The post-9/11 world poses unprecedented challenges for our nation's immigration policies and practices. On the one hand, immigration enforcement in this new world must be effective enough to prevent terrorists or criminals from abroad from obtaining admission to America and threatening our citizenry.

On the other hand, our country was founded as a safe haven for those unwelcome in the lands of their birth or unable to realize their full potential in freedom. To abandon or retreat from this heritage out of fear would be to surrender to terrorism.

The question then, is whether we can craft immigration policies that fulfill these two seemingly incompatible imperatives. Can we find a balance that will keep us safe from terror while still welcoming immigrants, refugees and visitors to our shores? We believe we can.

Central to creating effective enforcement policy is a commitment not to shy away from security ideas simply because they may cause emotional discomfort. To secure the United States, we may need to undertake programs that are more intrusive to personal privacy, involve longer periods of detention prior to hearings, and force visitors to wait longer while their visa applications are screened. While we may wish these actions were not necessary, the reality is that today's world is full of dangerous threats, and so some compromises will have to be made.

However, both for security and values reasons, we cannot endorse a view that any and all security programs that are proposed are automatically acceptable. *Proportionality* of response requires that the government and people of the United States act to ensure that the actual benefits of a given proposal justify its costs to individuals and society. Any program needs to be considered in light of the harm it inflicts on individual visitors, core American values, the economy, and our relationship with our allies abroad, whose help is essential to the war on terrorism. This balancing process is difficult, but necessary to develop appropriate policies that treat immigrants

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FIRST PERSON } **A New Citizen :** Against all odds Yakov Yavno becomes an American.

REUNION } **Hail to the Chiefs :** The Presidents in HIAS archives.

News Briefs

Senate Gives Family New Hope for Residency

Strenuous efforts of the organized Jewish community, led by HIAS, have paid off once again: In October 2004 the Senate approved a bill (HR 867) that will allow green cards for the wife and daughters of Waqar Hasan, a Pakistani immigrant who was murdered in a post-9/11 hate crime.

For three years the surviving members of the Hasan family were in a state of residency-status limbo, not knowing whether they'd be forced to leave the United States after the murder of the family breadwinner, Waqar. Senate passage of this special bill means that the family needs only receive the final stamp of approval from the president, which HIAS is strongly urging.

"HIAS and the Jewish Community responded with energy and compassion to the plight of the Hasan family," says Leonard Glickman, president and CEO of HIAS. "Because our community's experience as victims of ethnically motivated violence. Mr. Hasan was killed, not because of his actions, but because of his ethnic and religious identity."

Shortly after HR 867 was introduced by Congressman Rush Holt (D-N.J.), HIAS joined a coalition of community and faith-based groups supporting the legislation. HIAS helped strategize on how to build support for the bill and educated colleagues in the

Jewish community about this compelling humanitarian case.

The response from the Jewish community was strong and included national Jewish agencies, community relations organizations, local Jewish federations, and religious bodies. Among the groups that have signed statements and letters of support over the past year and a half are: *Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith International, Community Relations Committee of UJC MetroWest N.J., HIAS and Council Migration Services of Philadelphia, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Dallas, Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County, Jewish Federation of Greater Monmouth County, Jewish Labor Committee, NA'AMAT USA, National Council of Jewish Women, New York Association for New Americans, Inc., UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring.*

The Jewish federation of Greater Middlesex County, the local Jewish community representing the area where the Hasan family lives, was particularly supportive. In addition to signing statements and letters, the Federation also collected signatures on the Hasan family's behalf at a local "Salute to Israel" event.



HIAS' rescue and resettlement work around the world has helped people on every continent.

National Refugee Arrival Numbers Up

Officials at HIAS are encouraged by a final U.S. tally of more than 50,000 refugee arrivals in fiscal year 2004, which ended Sept. 30, 2004 — even though that number is short of the country's goal of 70,000.

The White House's Presidential Determination for fiscal year 2005 was the same as the past three years: 70,000. In fiscal year 2004 (October to September), 52,875 people arrived in America. For the same period the year before, only 28,000

of the proposed 70,000 refugees entered the U.S.

HIAS would like to see the U.S. government set a refugee admissions goal of 90,000 for fiscal year 2006; include sufficient funding requests in its next budget to meet these goals; and target the program to protect victims of religious persecution, vulnerable women at risk and unaccompanied children and refugees who have spent extended periods in desperate conditions in refugee camps and other dangerous environments.

"We are pleased that

America's Refugee Program will continue to be able to help Jews and other religious minorities from the former Soviet Union and Iran, as well as vulnerable refugees from Colombia, Sudan, Burma and other refugee producing countries around the world," says Leonard Glickman, HIAS president and CEO.

Here's how the 70,000 projected refugee arrivals would be made up: 20,000 are to come from Africa; 13,000 from East Asia; 9,500 from Europe and Central Asia; 5,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean; 2,500 from the Near East and South Asia; and 20,000 on unallocated reserve.

2,305 Resettled by HIAS in '04

During the fiscal year 2004, HIAS assisted 2,305 refugees with their migration to the United States. In the previous year, 2,568 refugees received HIAS' aid; in 2002, HIAS assisted 3,229 refugees. Of the total, 1,339 came from the Former Soviet Union; 302 from Iran; five from Bosnia; 94 from Southeast Asia; and 565 from Africa.

Apply Now for HIAS Scholarship

Students are invited to apply for a 2005 HIAS Scholarship. HIAS-assisted refugees who immigrated to the United States after Jan. 1, 1992 are eligible to apply.

"A HIAS scholarship recognizes your achievements and inspires you to reach your dreams," says Alla Paskovaty, a former recipient. "Receiving this scholarship for me was so



HIAS assisted 2,305 refugees

special, because it recognized my achievements as a member of this special group – Jewish immigrants. It reinforced the idea that despite the challenges you may encounter, you can succeed and be surrounded by people who will stand up for you and cheer as you become successful."

HIAS Scholarship Awards are intended for high school seniors (12th graders) planning to pursue higher education or students who are currently enrolled in college, university or graduate school programs who will continue school the following year. Engineering, nursing, information technology and other trade programs are all acceptable. All applicants must demonstrate at least one year's attendance in a school in the U.S. Recipients are selected on the basis of academic excellence, financial

need, and Jewish communal involvement.

Students should apply directly online. Further eligibility requirements and the online application form can be found at: www.hias.org/

Scholarships/usinfo.html The online application must be submitted no later than midnight EST of March 15, 2005. Information about the contest in Israel is also available on the HIAS website.

HIAS scholarship ceremony, 2004.



Washington Update

By Gideon Aronoff, Vice President for Government Relations and Public Policy; Emily Spero Smith, Assistant Director, HIAS Washington, DC

FISCAL YEAR 2005 REFUGEE FUNDING

Following the presidential election, Congress returned for a “lame-duck” session, to address several outstanding legislative matters, including the annual appropriations process. Because Congress had only passed one of the 13 spending bills at the end of FY 2004, the government was functioning on 2004 funding levels until final legislation could be enacted.

The remaining bills were rolled into a single piece of legislation for collective consideration. This omnibus bill (H.R. 4818) was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate and signed into law late last year. To meet overall funding goals, the bill was subject to a .83 percent across-the-board cut, which is reflected in the numbers below.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provides for refugees once they have arrived in the U.S., including for the care of unaccompanied alien children, torture victims, and trafficking victims. For FY 2005, ORR was appropriated \$484.28 million, with up to \$9.92 million reserved for trafficking victims. This was less than the amount recommended by HIAS and other organizations – \$650 million – but more than the president’s

proposed \$473 million.

The Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account is the State Department’s principal refugee budget line. For FY 2005, MRA has received \$763.61 million, an increase over the president’s request of \$730 million. However, this funding is not sufficient to permit 70,000 refugee admissions, the target for FY 2005. HIAS has received assurances from the White House and the State Department that they are trying to address the funding shortfall. Refugee Council USA had recommended funding MRA at \$927 million, which would allow for the resettlement of 90,000 refugees. The Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account has been appropriated \$29.75 million, nearly \$10 million more than the president’s request, but still almost \$20 million less than recommended.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROVISIONS IN 9/11 LEGISLATION

In recent months, both the House and Senate were active in designing legislation purporting to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. The centerpiece of each bill was the creation of a new National Intelligence Director and a National Intelligence Center to coordinate this crucial area of govern-

ment activity. On Oct. 6 the Senate passed 9/11 legislation and on Oct. 8 the House of Representatives passed its version of this bill. On many key issues – including budget authority – the two pieces of legislation were quite different.

Among the most contentious issues was the vastly different approach taken in the two bills to immigration and asylum policy. The Senate version (S. 2845) focused on the intelligence reform issues and does not include unrelated measures on immigration. The House bill (H.R. 10), however, went far beyond reorganizing the intelligence functions and included many provisions that would threaten civil liberties, due process for immigrants, asylum seekers, and persons fearing torture.

For two months, House and Senate conferees, led by Representatives Peter Hoekstra (R-Minn.) and Jane Harman (D-Calif.) and Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) negotiated over the various differing provisions, appearing to reach an agreement several times, only to be thwarted by dissenting voices from House leadership. During this debate, HIAS worked actively with asylum and immigration coalitions to encourage conferees to protect vulnerable migrants in the final draft of this intelligence legislation. On Dec. 7, in efforts aided by the White House, members were able to reach compromise on the legislation. The bill included several important border security provisions, which HIAS was pleased to see as effective border security measures are an important part of a generous immigration system. HIAS was also extremely pleased that the vast majority of harmful immigration provisions were not included in the bill. While this marks a tremendous victory for refugees and immigrants, it is very likely that a number of these negative and unjustified provisions will resurface early during the next session of Congress.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME FOR REFUGEES

The 1996 welfare law imposed severe restrictions on legal immigrants' access to public benefits, including the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI, a need-based program that provides a basic monthly income to people who are 65 or older, disabled or blind, was made available for refugees only for their first seven years in the U.S. Since 2003, significant numbers of refugees have lost eligibility for these benefits. Without legislative action more than 20,000 refugees will lose SSI benefits by 2010. Of these, about 8,000 are expected to be from the former Soviet Union.

HIAS has long advocated for the restoration of public benefits for refugees and other immigrants. This year HIAS worked with a coalition of organizations to urge the administration and members of Congress to support an extension of eligibility for benefits to refugees and asylees. In response, legislation was introduced by Representatives Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and Amo Houghton (R-N.Y.) and Senators Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), which provided for a two-year extension of eligibility, as well as a provision to cover those who lost benefits prior to enactment of the legislation. While the bill was not passed before final adjournment, advocates are hopeful that it will be advanced in the next session of Congress.

UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILD PROTECTION ACT

On Oct. 11, the Senate passed the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act (S.1129). The bill provides greater protections for unaccompanied migrant children, by allowing for the appointment of guardians ad litem. While the House companion bill has not advanced, the passage of legislation in the Senate is a success for refugee advocates.



LETTER } continued from inside cover

America's Security and Values can Coexist

and visitors in a reasonable manner even as we guard against terror.

Another aspect of proportionality is to ensure that opportunities for redress are included in all new security programs. Watch lists, no-fly lists, nationality-neutral registration programs, and expanded use of secure biometric documents are all critical aspects of security policy. While this is true, our fundamental American values demand that we protect the privacy of our citizens, immigrants and visitors alike to the greatest extent possible, and that we assure individuals who are falsely identified as threats that they will be given a fair chance to demonstrate their innocence.

In a post-9/11 world, we don't have the luxury of chasing undocumented busboys and migrant grape-pickers. By undertaking comprehensive reform of our immigration laws and procedures to address those immigration issues not necessarily related to terrorism, such as the problem of undocumented migration to the United States, we can focus our enforcement resources on the greatest threats and realize those two key tenets of sound policy: effectiveness and proportionality.

We can also meet this daunting but essential challenge by investing in improved human intelligence, providing sufficient financial and human resources for our federal immigration enforcement agencies to get the job done, and conducting the necessary research and development so that technology can best facilitate the identification of threats while simultaneously facilitating legitimate travel to the United States.

Of course creating sound immigration policies is no small task. That is why we

recommend that President Bush create a special commission on immigration and national security. This panel membership should include people from a wide variety of fields, from policy experts and professionals who work on immigration issues to representatives of industries that rely on foreign visitors (such as universities and tourism) and immigrants themselves. The commissioners should be appointed by the Republican and Democratic leaderships of the House and Senate, in recognition of Congress' constitutional authority over immigration policy, as well as by the president.

The panel could advance the national discussion on immigration, play a key role in finding answers to the difficult questions we now face, and serve as a unified voice for reform. One need only look at the example of the 9/11 Commission, whose recommendations are already having significant influence on Washington.

All of us have important contributions to make in this critical discussion of how to move forward on immigration policy. More important: We all have a stake in a successful outcome.

Jerome Teller

Chair of the Board

Leonard Glickman

President and CEO



PHOTOS BY: Nikolai Komisarov

A NEW CITIZEN, YAKOV YAVNO

is an internationally renowned Russian-born singer-actor with deep roots in the world Jewish community. With a following around the world, Yavno sings in several languages, including Russian, Yiddish, English and Hebrew. In this First Person for Passages, he tells of his experiences along the way to becoming an American citizen.

Growing up in Russia, I often heard things like, "kike" and "dirty Jew," but I didn't know why. Why? Nobody could explain this to me. It was a hard time for all Jews in Russia. I grew up in Minsk, and at age 15 I left for Moscow and I studied there. By the time I finished the music academy there, I began working someplace I had not imagined possible — the Jewish theater.

In 1977 the Jewish theater was reopened. It was very different for me; it was strange; not familiar, but very challenging. Only my grandmother knew Yiddish; she sang Jewish songs in Yiddish, so I had only a limited understanding of my Jewish culture. I grew up like other Russians speaking Russian. But working with the Jewish theatre was

a way to get some of that inside me.

I came to America in 1987 and performed in New York City at Symphony Space. It didn't enter my head at that time to stay here. But I did notice that in many ways it was like the same world, but also a very, very different world. Of course when I went back to Russia, I thought maybe, maybe one day I would return to America to perform again.

And so it happened. In 1990 Corin Redgrave, the brother of Vanessa Redgrave, invited me to perform on Broadway, at the Marriott Marquis theater. I performed with him, Raul Julia, Christopher Reeve, and other stars from Broadway and Hollywood. I didn't know anything at the time about Vanessa Redgrave and her relationship with



At home in New York, Yakov Yavno

Jewish people and Palestinians, because when we lived in Russia, we didn't know anything about the outside world. It was a time when the door was closed. Even as a leading actor in Jewish theater in Russia, with a special award from the government, I didn't know a lot of things that were going on outside the country. >>

NO ONE KNEW WHO I WAS.



When it became allowed, I started to travel outside of Russia to other countries on tour and began to discover that the world was indeed very colorful, not like Russia. In Russia they always told us we were the best country, the best system, the best of everything, and that what was going on around us was very poor, very dark and very negative. And of course some people believed it and some people, like me, didn't believe it.

After my 1990 trip, I stayed in the country after the performance. That year, my parents came to America to join me. Tragically, one day in Brooklyn, my mother was robbed on the street. When she couldn't open her bag fast enough, the robber attacked her and pushed her to the ground. Both her legs were broken. She was in the hospital eight months. It was a horrible tragedy. Of course, since I made the decision to stay here, it was a nightmare for me to have this happen to my mother, who came because of me. It

was a real challenge for me to stay here. It was not any more the America I saw in 1987 from my tour, not the America from the Big Screen, not the America I saw in magazines. In the real America, I learned, you need work very hard to survive.

Imagine: I couldn't speak English, I didn't know many things about this place; my mentality was very different; not like Americans. America and Russia are two different worlds. Two different systems.

When I made the decision to stay here it became a real torture because among Russians I didn't find real support and Americans didn't know about my problems. **No one knew who I was.**
I'm an actor – "Who cares?"

One day around three or four o'clock in the morning, I was having a very hard time sleeping. I got up and thought, "My God, why did I move here to this world? Why stay here? What for? What can I do?" Wow.

Soon after that, I saw in a Russian

newspaper an advertisement inviting musically-trained Russians to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary and Torah School. So I went there. They welcomed me, but didn't know that I was illegally in the country. It was a year after my tourist visa had expired. But, it was a miracle: they liked my voice and they found a sponsor for me.

It was still a very hard time for me. I couldn't leave the country; couldn't go to another country. One day it was recommended that I try to apply for "extraordinary talent" admission status to the country. But that would require me to get a lawyer to do the paperwork. I had heard it would cost me between \$5,000 and \$8,000. I didn't have this money.

But I didn't give up. Eventually, I found my way to HIAS, and they helped me to create my case. Over time, I received a green card, which gave me the freedom to travel; to go to Russia, to



I'M AN ACTOR *Who cares?*

Europe, to Israel, to perform in different places. For some people, living and working in one place isn't a problem. But for creative people, it is very hard to be confined, especially when it is a situation like being a foreigner in a country where you don't speak the language. So, it was so much easier for me as a creative person, when the world was finally open again to me.

When I finished school, I made the decision to continue to pursue acting, of course. I went to work with one of the Barry Sisters (the famous Yiddish Swing duo from the '50s and '60s). Slowly, I started to do here what I was doing in Russia — traveling to other countries, but based in New York. I thought that America had a lot of Jewish people because New York had a lot of Jewish people, but learned that Jews were only a small portion of the whole America. It was my mistaken conception.

In 2001 I was honored to perform at

the 120th anniversary celebration of HIAS. HIAS has made enormous contributions to the world. Gene Borsh at HIAS helped me incredibly; he helped every step along the way to becoming a citizen; he managed every detail of what the INS needed for my case. When they called me for the citizenship interview in 2002, I answered all the questions. The person there said everything was okay; but I would have to wait for an invitation for the citizenship oath ceremony. I imagined that that would not be long. Gene helped me push for the oath, because it was taking so long. The waiting was very frustrating. Unfortunately, nothing happened for two years.

Finally, in the summer of 2004, I received the invitation. I became a United States citizen on Aug. 11, 2004. When you travel with only a green card, it's not like you're not legitimate yet; it's not enough. You still get stopped, questioned, treated like you are a foreigner. When I

became a citizen that all changed.

Today, to be from the United States, I am proud. Before I was a citizen, I went to other countries with my Russian passport. As I entered Israel, for example, they asked me, "Why are you coming to Israel? Do you have relatives here? Do you intend to stay here?" But this year for the first time, when I traveled to Israel, no one questioned me. My American passport made all that unnecessary. I finally felt the power of American citizenship.



PHOTOS BY: Sasha Bezzubov

a good home in PART I Charlotte

* *Portraits of a Multinational Refugee Community*
by Margarita Zilberman

Early summer in Charlotte, N.C. is steamy; rains coming and going, leaving a mist over the Briarcliff apartment complex a few miles north of Downtown. The residential development ~ a *community*, really ~ is a study in contrasts: two Somali Bantu women gather by the outdoor mailboxes, the cold steel backing off from the bright oranges, reds and blues of their dresses.

In a courtyard framed by small, attached apartment buildings, a few lone cars fill the parking slots while a teenage Somali Bantu boy kicks around a soccer ball with two Montagnard men from the Central Highlands of Vietnam. In an apartment-turned-classroom across from the property's management office, Russian-speakers join Montagnards and Somali Bantus in an English class, reaching over each other's shoulders to help with assignments. Laughter dominates the room to ease the difficulty of learning.

Welcome to HIAS North Carolina.

A small agency office is tucked into a converted bedroom behind the English classroom; it is mostly a meeting room for HIAS' employment counselor, a place for Briarcliff residents to use the Internet. Most work is done at clients' homes or around the Charlotte city limits, as the »



This community is ripping apart boundaries. People who earlier couldn't imagine each other's native lifestyles and culture are now helping each other – learning through diversity, watching each other's backs.

staff helps clients navigate such basics as healthcare, government benefits and employment. The true HIAS "office" has become a pageant of nationalities that takes the stage at Briarcliff (one resident calls it a mini-United Nations).

This home for newcomers is very different from anything I experienced as a new refugee in 1980, arriving with my family from Moldova (in the former Soviet Union) as a young girl. We were also helped by HIAS and local resettlement agencies, encountering other Russian-speaking immigrants in a growing community. But we fit the traditional vision of a refugee family, a somewhat lone unit – receiving assistance, flocking to its own cultural community replanted in the U.S. – and very much leaning on itself while struggling to integrate into the strange surrounding world. Like so many others, we got by, but we seemed more isolated than the many refugee families that have made their home at Briarcliff.

This community is ripping apart boundaries. People who earlier couldn't imagine each other's native lifestyles and culture are now helping each other – learning through diversity, watching each other's backs. Where once the refugee family unit was a nuclear or extended family, now the family unit extends

throughout the apartment complex to other refugees from different parts of the world – ultimately including HIAS and Briarcliff staff and volunteers – along with local community members – to create an even larger community of peers, companions and caretakers.

Ellen Dubin, director of HIAS North Carolina, has seen this community grow since 1996, when she first began working with the office. She reports that in the 2004 fiscal year, HIAS' North Carolina office has resettled 103 people, more than any previous year. This includes Montagnards, Armenians, Jews and others from the former Soviet Union, Somali Bantus, Sudanese, Liberians, Congolese, Iranian Baha'i, Hmong and a Bosnian, keeping the office extremely busy.

In June, some of Charlotte's most recent refugee arrivals included a young Liberian family who had languished for years in Ivory Coast refugee camps. At age 28, Johnson Doe's voice is strong and eloquent, revealing wisdom beyond his years. It also reveals a great advantage – he speaks fluent English in addition to French – which has helped him immensely since the family's arrival three weeks earlier.

The family's modest one-bedroom apartment at Briarcliff shows very little



of their previous life and African culture – instead, there's a donated couch and coffee table, a school desk where John son's wife, 24-year-old Victoria quietly sits, and a "Pound Puppy" toy for their five-year-old boy, affectionately named J. Doe (short for Johnson Doe Jr.). J. Doe is full of wild energy and charm, communicating with big eyes that seem not to remember any earlier struggles.

His family's journey to Charlotte was indeed arduous. In 1989, Liberia, the West African country founded by freed American slaves, was launched into a civil war that created 500,000 refugees and one million internally displaced people. Johnson's family fled in 1990: "To prevent the rebels from capturing our town, my father decided to move our family to the Southeast," Johnson calmly explains. "But my father and two of my brothers were killed at a roadblock by some government soldiers." Johnson and his siblings were then taken in by a man who claimed them as his own until they passed the roadblock; the young children were able to join their mother at Liberia's southeastern border.

Yet their destination had ultimately been captured by rebels and the family fled to Ivory Coast. Since then, Johnson and his family became caught up in



Ivory Coast's internal conflict. Liberians were accused of allying themselves with Ivory Coast rebel groups and became the victims of frequent attacks and forced military recruitment. "The same people that were forced into war were killed for taking part in the war," says Johnson. Their property was taken, access to education was extremely limited, and refugees were not eligible to work. "They say you could go no further with education – just remain where you are."

"We were not working," he says, "but [the locals in Ivory Coast] wanted us to pay school fees. When the monthly food rations came, we would sell a cut to pay for the children's school." There was barely enough to eat, with food rations eventually coming to a complete halt. "Things became very bad," says Johnson.

"Our sisters have to go to men for survival, to prostitution," he continues. "The girls had to do that to sustain their family at home."

Like Johnson and his family, many Liberian refugees ended up in the Abidjan refugee camp in Ivory Coast after their homes elsewhere in the country had

been demolished. With the help of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), they were able to flee to more permanent homes in the U.S.

Johnson carried a small photo album with him to the U.S. He lays the photos out on his coffee table, pausing at photos of his mother, sisters and brothers, explaining that most of them remain in the Ivory Coast camp. He hopes for HIAS' help in getting them out to the U.S: "I want for them to have something to eat on a daily basis," says Johnson.

Work is very important to Johnson. He was lucky to work in the camps toward the end of their stay, doing his own electrical contract work after attending a technical school organized by UNHCR. He was still enthusiastically looking in June.

Although Johnson's wife, Victoria, has limited English skills (she speaks only a pidgin English), HIAS was quickly able to find her a job braiding hair. Since my June visit, Johnson has found work in the banquet area of the Westin Hotel,

where the management is very pleased with him. He also earned his driver's license and was able to purchase a car. Victoria is working in the housekeeping department at the Westin. She and Johnson work opposite shifts, with a Liberian teen watching J.Doe after school until his mother comes home.

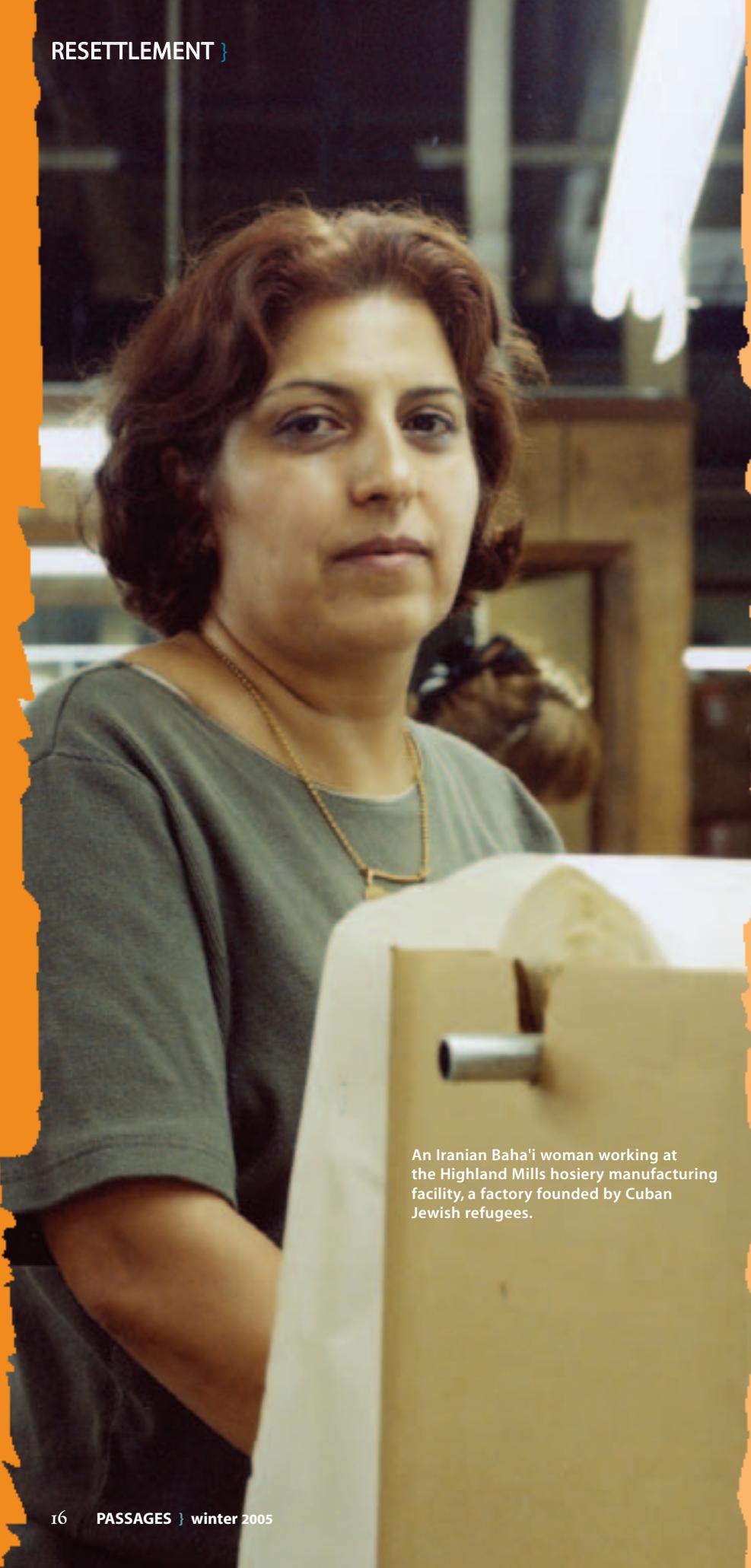
"I like this place, but you know, it's just about being in a new life – everything's strange," relates Johnson about his new home. So far, the family has encountered only small problems – adjusting to food, the difficulties of transportation, and the way their new city is built. "Nevertheless, we are coping," says Johnson. "Things are going to be fine."

The Legacy of Work

Every HIAS client I spoke with underscored the value of work – they want a good job and they want to do well.

They are fortunate to have Paul Porcelli, HIAS North Carolina's employment counselor, working incessantly to help them do so. "It's been really interesting," says Paul. "The entire journey that I'm on right now is to rethink in a different light what I thought I knew before."

Paul looks at each person >



An Iranian Baha'i woman working at the Highland Mills hosiery manufacturing facility, a factory founded by Cuban Jewish refugees.

individually and extracts what their skill bases are: "And when you're dealing with refugees that fled their villages and lived in refugee camps, that don't speak any English or read or write in their own languages, you're really reaching hard to find those skills, but they're there."

"When you sit and talk to people," continues Paul, "you find out, for instance, that one Bantu woman did the cooking for her village. She and her parents did the meat – how do you relate that to employment? The more you talk to her, you see: she can count and she can weigh things. She's got intuitive basic knowledge. That's the type of thing I'm looking for."

In October, Paul was able to find temporary jobs for more than a dozen clients – including Somali Bantu men and women, newly-arrived Montagnards, several Liberians and woman from the former Soviet Union. They are performing light assembly work at a factory and some may be hired as full-time, permanent employees in January.

Other clients have found work at local hotels or manufacturing facilities, or with local business owners that make it a point to support these newcomers. Rod Worthington has hired a recently-arrived Somali Bantu man, Abbas Osman, and a Montagnard man, Y'Ma Nai, at his pool construction company. They are supervised by another Montagnard man who has been in Charlotte for 17 years and mentors the new recruits. Rod commends the men for being diligent, reliable workers.

Mark Wojnowich has also hired many HIAS clients over the years at his family's sheer hosiery manufacturing facility, Highland Mills. HIAS assisted his family in the early 1960s, when the Cuban Jews fled to the U.S. (the family originally escaped Poland circa 1939 and settled in Cuba, where the extended family prospered). Since HIAS once helped his refugee family, Mark feels good about supporting HIAS' work today. Highland



Mills first started working with HIAS clients in the early 1990s and find the refugee and immigrant population good, stable workers. Currently, several Montagnard and Iranian Baha'i clients are employed there.

Paul speaks of various challenges, like helping clients – particularly the Somali Bantus – overcome the embarrassment of speaking English or interacting with their new culture: "Sometimes it's an accomplishment for us even to get [the refugees] into an interview process and have them fill out an application. We want to get them into the mainstream."

Taking Care of Each Other

Shamsi Damani had been in Charlotte only one month when I talked to her. She came with a group of fellow Somali Bantus fleeing an untenable life in Africa. She speaks matter-of-factly, with great warmth despite a hardened gaze. Her son Omar, 14, sits next to her on their makeshift sofa, while her much younger daughters, Fatuma and Rehema take turns fidgeting on Shamsi's lap.

The Bantu refugees have been a marginalized and persecuted minority group in Somalia since their arrival there as slaves in the 1800s. This legacy, as well as distinct physical, cultural and linguistic characteristics, deemed the Bantu second-class citizens in Somalia. They were deprived of basic political representation and education (most Bantu are illiterate), and lived subsistence lives, treated as foreigners in a land they have lived in for centuries. Their circumstances worsened during the anarchic Somali civil war of the 1990s, when Bantu were robbed of their lands, raped and murdered. Many joined an exodus to neighboring Kenya, which still did not provide for adequate

A Montagnard man working at the factory.

security and a sustainable living.

"Since we have arrived here in Charlotte, we've been welcomed with open arms," says Shamsi, with the aid of HIAS' part-time interpreter, Abdi Karim Sidow (who speaks

Shamsi's native language, a regional variant of the Somali language called Maay Maay). "We've been given food; our apartment's been furnished and ready. We're living in a good home."

"This is a big difference from where we came from," says Shamsi. "Our culture is different, how we dress how we talk. so we are learning right now."

When asked her age, Shamsi says she is 26, though this is inconsistent with other dates and ages she's given. Her interpreter, Abdi Karim, explains that the dates she gives are not reliable – Somali Bantu typically do not remember exact dates; they do not have documentation and have to guess.

Still, Shamsi talks about first arriving in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya in 1992. "It was very difficult life over there," she says. "My kids were hungry; were not provided with sufficient food. Even if they did eat, my kids would get sick because the food was not clean."

"There was no safety – village people used to come to our house and take whatever food we had."

Shamsi tells of having little options in trying to keep her family safe. She would sometimes take a loan to buy some food from nearby stores. She speaks of faith in God where there was no other protection: "Life was messed up over there and we really had some tragic things happening. We thank God that we arrive here."

Shamsi, along with her sisters, their children and Omar, then two years old, left Somalia and walked for 15 days to

get to Nairobi, Kenya's capital. "It was a tough journey during that time," says Shamsi. "Coming to Nairobi, there was a lot of militia that used to come and take whatever we had."

The family left a homeland where there was no security, scarcely enough food for survival. "The military used to come and take our property. If we don't give them the food or other things, they would kill us," Shamsi says. Indeed, her brother and father – among many others – were killed. Regarding this horror, Shamsi says only, "I used to be scared all the days. That's why I flee the country and come to Kenya."

Her hope is to find "a place of peace" in this country where she can get a job and provide her children with good schooling, clothing, a daily shower, no more hunger – a future.

At 14, Shamsi's son Omar is the man of his family. "I want to know English," he proudly says, already with very little accent. He is doing very well in the seventh grade, rapidly making friends; he likes to study and wants to be a teacher when he grows up.

Shamsi's apartment is clustered near those of other Somali Bantu residents, mostly women and children, in a far corner of the apartment complex, near the pool. They go to school together, study together and help raise each other's children. "We take care of each other," says Shamsi, making clear there is no other choice.

To be continued in the next issue of *Passages*. >>

one VOTER'S STORY

By Steven Bibb



PHOTOS BY: Steven Bibb

**Sure, she had voted before, back in the Ukraine,
where she had lived for 70 years.
But today was different.**

Wearing a jaunty grey beret, Polina Khutoryan could have been any other 78 year-old Brooklyn grandmother, but on this day, Election Day 2004, Polina Khutoryan was voting for the first time.

Sure, she had voted before, back in the Ukraine, where she had lived for 70 years. But today was different. "This is my first time really voting," she said. "In Ukraine you put the votes in a box. Everybody must vote. There is no choice, we had to vote. Everybody had to vote for one and the same man."

Polina was one of thousands of first-time voters who registered to vote with the help of The Civic and Voter Education Initiative (CVEI). The program, a joint venture of LOREO (Local Russian-speaking Emigrant Organization) and the World Congress of Russian Jewry, was founded with one goal in mind: to inform and help Russian-speaking citizens get the information they need to be able to vote.

Within the last decade, the Russian-speaking refugee community in the United States has grown to over half a million people, making it one of the largest refugee populations in the country.



Opposite: Polina Khutoryan on Election Day 2004. Above: Voter registration drive, Brighton Beach, Brooklyn.

Despite these large numbers, studies have shown that the majority of this community lacks the necessary awareness to participate in the American democratic process, thought to come, in large part, from the Russian-speaking community's negative political experiences in the former Soviet Union.

One of the major goals of the pro-

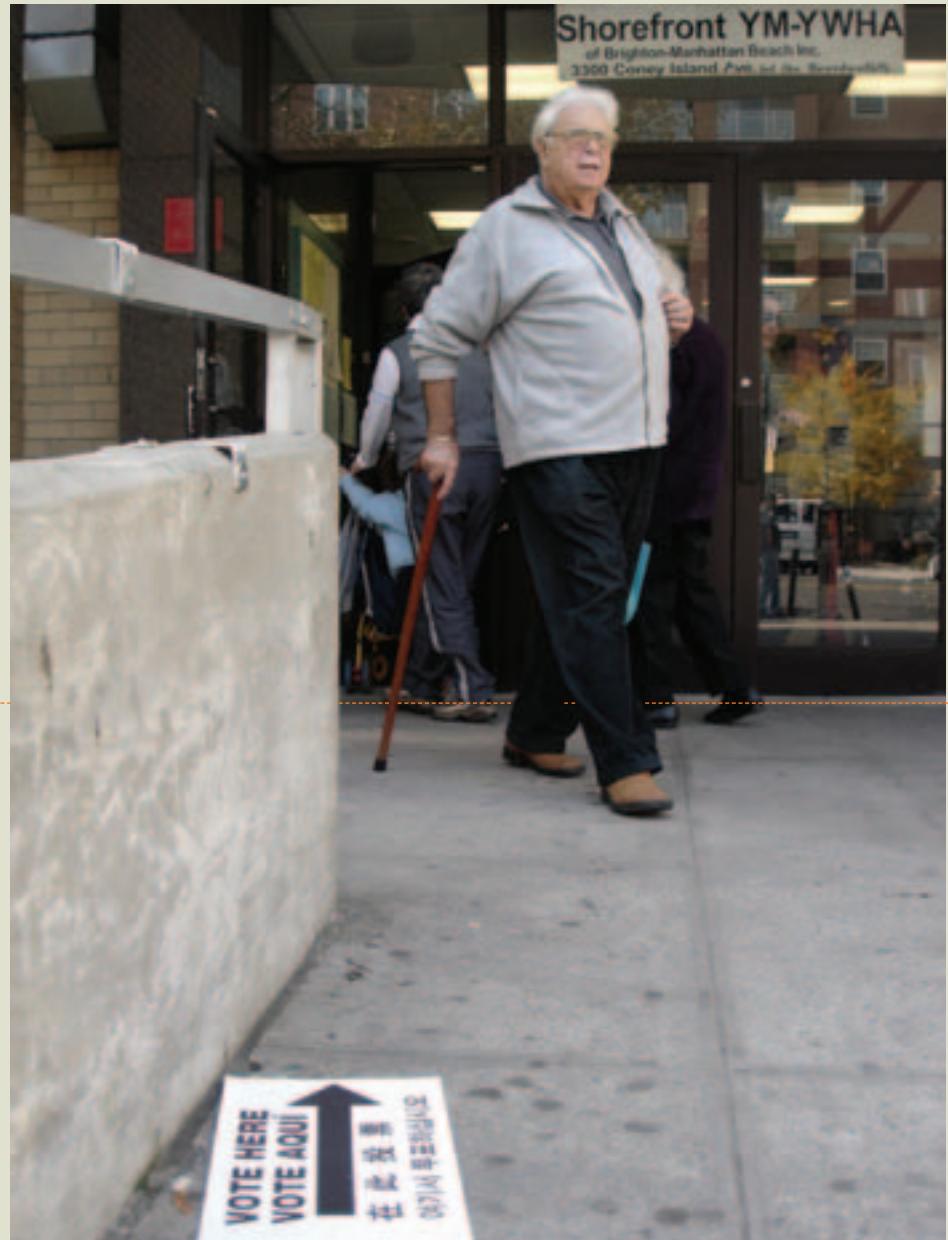
gram was to engage the Russian-speaking community into the American social and civic life and to help them take their place as a strong political voice. The program was designed to give its participants a better knowledge and understanding of local government, political and civic institutions and to help them maximize their community's

active participation in the democratic process of voting.

During the eight months prior to the 2004 elections, CVEI held nearly 100 civic and voter education events citywide at which almost 32,000 people attended. Additionally, almost 40 voter registration drives were held at locations throughout New York City and elsewhere. It was at once such event, a summer 2004 voter registration drive at a park in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, that Polina registered to vote. In total CVEI registered over 4,200 Russian-Americans to vote in the months prior to the election.

It is estimated that nationally only 59 percent of eligible Russian voters voted in the last election. This is partially due to several factors, among them a mistrust of government, the complexity of the election system in the United States, and difficulty in understanding the process of democracy. Another factor that has been frequently cited has been the lack of materials on the election process that has been available in the Russian language.

With these reasons in mind HIAS/LOREO working with New York City Council Member Michael Nelson helped to form The Civic and Voter Education Initiative. Over 30 other Russian-speaking organizations also joined forces and helped to launch the national program.



Another vote cast in Brighton Beach.



One of the highlights of the program was a handbook entitled "We Vote." This free booklet was designed to provide all the basic information that a new citizen needs in one easy source. The booklet addressed primary elections, general elections, the voter registration process, absentee balloting, problems that might occur on Election Day and important contact information for elected officials in all 50 states.

Marina Belotserkovsky, HIAS' director of Russian Communications and Out-

reach, said at the booklet's September 2004 launch, "Russian speakers are all united by their language. Our goal is to empower the Russian community and give them the skills to vote. On these 20 pages is all the information one needs to know to participate in elections – for the first time in Russian!"

In conjunction with the guide there was also a website, www.wevote.us, which covered the voting process in all 50 states. Since its launch, the website has received over 15,000 hits and over 450 voter registration forms were downloaded.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg lauded the work of CVEI

Our goal is to empower the Russian community and give them the skills to vote.

calling it “a wonderful resource for the Russian-American community,” and urging citizens to “take advantage of the wealth of information it has to offer.”

“LOREO has been very helpful,” said Polina, clutching her yellow board of elections card, which informed her to vote at the Shore Front YMCA in Brighton Beach. “I feel my vote counts,” she said.

When the process of voting was explained to her, she looked confused, saying “In Ukraine, all we did was drop ballots in the box. They would give us a list of candidates and we crossed out the names we don’t like. This is all new to me.”

Polina, a HIAS immigrant, had immigrated to the United States in 1993 with her husband. “I came because I was not free. No right to go to synagogue, no right to know my Jewish language. My eldest son was here in America. My granddaughter, my daughter-in-law were here. I wanted to join them.”

Before entering the booth to vote, Polina paused to put on her oversized glasses, then stepped through the curtain. A few seconds later she poked her head out. The levers wouldn’t turn. She tried again. They were stuck. She turned around and shrugged her shoulders. “So much work,” she said. A supervisor came and reset the booth, so that her votes would register.

Gene Borsh, director of LOREO, who was at the Brighton Beach YMCA to oversee the voting process, assisted Polina out of the building. Once outside, Borsh pointed to various people headed for the YMCA to place their vote. As they passed him he would acknowledge them, having seen them at various CVEI events around the city. “We helped them,” he said.

Some of those helped, an elderly couple, paused to remark to Borsh, in Russian; “We are here to vote for the first time for our president,” they said as they entered the building.



Polina registers to vote.

hail *to the* *chiefs*

A GLIMPSE INTO HIAS' ARCHIVES
by Steven Bibb

With President George W. Bush beginning his second term in the White House this January, we decided to take a look back at HIAS and its relationships with various U.S. presidents over the decades. These photos, all from HIAS' archives, illustrate how we have worked closely with government officials to promote immigration issues.





A President Harry S. Truman is presented with a portrait plaque by Protestant, Catholic and Jewish agencies on Dec. 22, 1949. It was presented for Truman's work on behalf of Europe's displaced persons. Edwin Rosenberg, president of the United Service for New America is at left.

B Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt conducts a speech at New York's Commodore Hotel, early 1950's. Upon her death in 1962, HIAS released the following statement "With the largeness of her heart and the breadth of her vision, she took an active interest in the problems and needs of the uprooted and oppressed who sought refuge through migration."

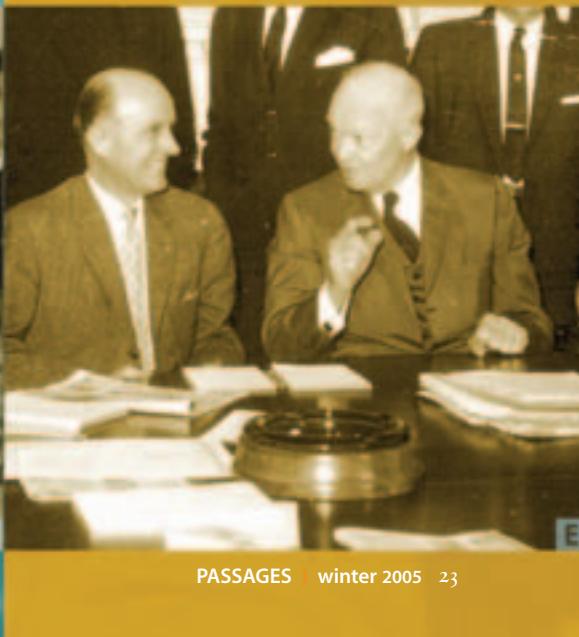
C President Clinton presents HIAS board member Rabbi Arthur Schneider with the Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001. Clinton said "I thank you for all the many things you have done here with me the last eight years to promote religious liberty around the world."

D Vice President Richard Nixon greets Hungarian refugees in Camp Kilmer, N.J. on Dec. 27, 1965. Nixon visited the camp as a member of the newly formed Hungarian refugee Relief Committee, of which HIAS was a member.

E President Eisenhower meets with Immigration officials at the White House, mid 1950's.

F President Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson arrive at Liberty Island on Oct. 3, 1965 to sign a new immigration bill. The bill raised the ceiling to 170,000 immigrants who may enter the country in any given year.

G Senator John F. Kennedy speaks at a HIAS event in Boston in 1951. He later went on to become the 35th president.



"Walk into my parlor,"
- said the spider to the fly.
Mary Howitt



A visit to the spider

{ This story started when I received this letter from Nikolay Mokin, a resident of Kiev, Ukraine. }

For about 20 years I have been looking for my brother Fred, who might live in the U.S.A. His last name may be Mocking after his father or some other, after his mother (his mother was Jewish).

Fred, if he is alive, must be between 70 and 75. His father, John Mocking, went to the U.S.S.R. in 1931-1932 as a technical specialist. He graduated from the university and knew several foreign languages. In Russia he met my mother and married her. I was born in 1934. In 1936 my father went to Moscow to get in touch with the American Embassy and apply for the doc-

uments which would allow him and his new family to come to the United States. He could not accomplish his intention because NKVD (the Communist secret police) killed him to prevent departure of the foreign specialists, who were disappointed in the regime.

John Mocking was born in Poland in 1890 and immigrated to the U.S. circa 1908-1914.

I was incredibly interested in this letter, although the scarcity of the information left almost nothing to start a search.

To my surprise, there were only three Mockings in all 50 American states – Fred himself, his son Bruce and his daughter Barbara.

The brothers were overwhelmed by the subsequent reunion. Fred was 81 years old, a retired engineer. He knew that his father went to Russia looking for a job after he was laid off; he also knew that he died there, but he did not know that he had a Russian brother, nor did he know anything about how his father died.

When I spoke with Nikolay, he told me what he heard from his mother – he was only two years old when his father died. He also sent me a picture of his father – the only one he had. All other pictures and letters had been burned. In Soviet Russia it was not safe to have a foreigner for a husband or a father.

Nikolay told me that John became disappointed with the Bolsheviks very soon after his arrival. Their fanaticism, rudeness, and complete disregard for basic human rights annoyed John, who had a habit of expressing his opinions without fear. He disliked the almost intolerable living conditions – especially

~ by Valery Bazarov ~

in those deepest corners of Siberia and Central Asia, where he was sent to work. John decided to come back to America. When Nikolay was born in 1934, John said to his wife Sofia, "I dream of returning. I want Fred and Nikolay to know each other and become real brothers."

So, as the story ran, her husband used his vacation and, in early March 1936, went from Balkhash with his friend, a Slovak national, to Moscow. He wanted to visit an American Embassy. The next day, after they had arrived in Moscow and checked into a hotel, two men in civilian clothes knocked on their door. They said that they had come to pick up comrade Mocking and bring him to the Ministry. John was surprised, as he did not tell anybody of his destination or intentions. However he went with these two men. That was the last time he had been seen alive. John's friend waited for him for two days. On the third day he received a telephone call. Somebody asked him to come to the hospital. They showed him to a ward, where the dead body of John Mocking lay on a bed. When John's friend returned to the hotel, somebody called him and said that the same thing would happen to him or anybody else from the group of the foreign specialists who attempted to leave the U.S.S.R.

The scared Slovak came back and told John's wife what happened. All her timid efforts to find what happened to her husband, or where he had been buried, were to no avail. Soon she was told, unofficially, of course, that the best she could do was to leave this story behind and get on with her life. It was enough to stop her from asking questions for the rest of her life. It was 1936. That very year the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. approved the Constitution of the Soviet Union – "the most democratic constitution in the world," as the media glorified it. The great purges staged and directed by Stalin were about to begin.

When I heard this story from



John Mocking in Russia.

John's Russian son.

Nikolay, I was filled with compassion for the tragic figure of his father, ruthlessly obliterated from this world, leaving behind two children separated by an ocean – not only literally – but also by an ocean of brewing history, where the fate of nations was at stake, and where the individual lives were just pebbles the waves rumbled over and over endlessly mixing them with each other. How to trace one of these pebbles among millions of others? How to bring John Mocking back from oblivion?

I told Nikolay I would find out what happened to his father; that I would find the path to his father's grave for him.

First, I tried to summarize what was known about John Mocking's arrival to the United States. According to Nikolay's story, John Mocking arrived in the United States between 1908 and 1914 as a member of a crew. Nikolay even remembered a story, which could be taken from the pages written by Jack London or Joseph Conrad. John was recruited as a stoker on a ship bound from Europe to the United States. Somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, when John was tremendously tired, he fell asleep during his shift. The pressure in the boiler was already at the dangerous level, when the captain's first mate found him fast asleep. The captain

was so mad with John that he ordered him thrown overboard. Only the interference of the boatswain, also Russian, stopped the execution.

Next, I thought about John's departure from the United States to Russia. Here I knew the exact year: 1932. To leave the U.S., he would need a passport. We tried to trace his passport in the State Department archives, but failed. In general, my hopes were with Russia, where John Mocking spent the last five years of his life. If John Mocking was killed, as his Russian son insisted, I thought there should be some trace in the police department. Not that they would find the murderers, in case NKVD staged the murder, but at least there would be some kind of formal inquest. But who would investigate the whole thing for me? Despite all the changes in Russia, I understood that direct dealing with the Ministry of Interior would be absolutely futile. Somebody who lived in Moscow and had access to that sort of thing should be doing this. So I asked a reporter, Naomi Zubkova, who worked for a Moscow newspaper *Inostranets (The Foreigner)* to do some investigation for me. She enthusiastically agreed to help me.

Two months elapsed, but still I did not have an answer from Moscow. A couple of times I tried to speak with

 She read it again and again until she was sure that she was not hallucinating. The title of the article was “To Moscow for Death” by Sergei Zhuravlev, who has a PhD in history. It was about Americans who died in Russia in the 1930s. Among a few listed names of American citizens whose death seemed suspicious was the name of John Mocking.


Naomi, but she rather sourly recommended that I have some patience.

Then suddenly I found a brief message from Naomi on my answer machine: “Call immediately.”

So I did.

First of all, Naomi told me that all her attempts to get in touch with police records were to no avail. Apparently, she did not have enough connections to get through the red tape. She almost lost hope, when this evening she was at home reading the late edition of her own newspaper. Suddenly a familiar name attracted her attention. Her glance focused on the passage and she read with disbelief the name of – John Mocking.

 She read it again and again until she was sure that she was not hallucinating. The title of the article was *To Moscow for Death* by Sergei Zhuravlev, who has a PhD in history. It was about Americans who died in Russia in the 1930s. Among a few listed names of American citizens whose death seemed suspicious was the name of John Mocking.

“No fewer questions raise the death in Moscow of a draftsman John Mocking, 45, who died on March 12, 1936. An official reason of the death was a carbuncle on the back and sepsis (Death Certificate No. 758 from April 4, 1936, Vital Records Office of the Kirov district

in Moscow). Mocking arrived in the U.S.S.R. in 1932 on tourist visa, found a job and decided to stay, and even brought his wife and two children to Moscow.”

Despite some inconsistencies, it was definitely the John Mocking we were looking for. Thanks to Internet wizardry I was able to get in touch with Dr. Zhuravlev the next day. He was delighted to share with me the source of the information about John Mocking – the National Archives, Washington, D.C. The circle closed.

On my advice, Fred Mocking got in touch with the archive and soon we received six pages of the file related to the death of John Mocking. It started from a cover letter from the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to the American Embassy in Moscow:

The People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs has the honor to transmit herewith to the American Embassy a National certificate No. 16 and a certificate of death No. 758 of the American citizen, John Mocking, who died on March 12, 1936.

According to the information received from the appropriate organs of the Union of S.S.R. the estate which was left by the deceased is under the custody of the wife and two children, who resided with the citizen J. Mocking.

Although John Mocking is called in

this letter an American citizen, he was definitely not one. The National certificate turned out to be just an Affidavit To be Used In Lieu of Passport, which not only gave us a lot of information about John Mocking, including the exact date of his departure from the U.S. to Russia – Feb. 15, 1932 – but also stated that he “did not become a citizen of the United States.” Was it a mistake due to the language barrier or was Mocking called a citizen deliberately?

If Mocking was not an American citizen, he technically was considered a Russian subject (in 1890 he was born in Poland, which was part of the Russian empire) and his death may not be reported to the American Embassy. As we know from Dr. Zhuravlev’s article, this was the line the Soviet authorities chose in many other similar cases. Why would they advise the Embassy in this particular case? Why bother?

My answer: because they wanted this case closed quietly, with no further questions and investigation. The Russian wife was not a problem, they could handle her easily (and they did), but the American ex-wife and son might ask some inconvenient questions, if they did not know what happened to John. So, the Soviets preferred not to see an absolutely clear statement that John



The mass grave in Donskoi cemetery, the victims of the Stalin purges.

Mocking was not an American citizen and reported his death from "natural cause" to the Embassy.

The reaction from the Embassy was exactly what the Soviets counted on. They certainly noticed that John Mocking was not a citizen – that is why they did not send a notification of his death to the State Department, but they accepted the information with no comments "not to prejudice the Soviets against such information in the future." They even did not pay attention to the outright lie about "the estate of the deceased being in the custody of the wife and two children, who resided with the citizen J. Mocking." There was no wife with two children! There was one ex-wife with a son in America and a wife with a son in Russia. Nothing of the personal belongings of John Mocking had ever been sent to either of them.

I have to mention that Nikolay Mokin managed to get a copy of the death certificate of his father from the Office of Vital Records in Moscow. It took effort and persistence, but finally he got it. When I compared this version with the version given to the American Embassy, it turned out that the Russian copy does not even include the cause of death – just a bare fact, John Mocking died on March 12, 1936. But Russians,

unlike Americans, can read between the lines. Nikolay Mokin also received a copy of the file from his father's place of employment – Balkhash Mining Plant. From this file we found out that Ivan Mokin was fired on March 26, 1936 – two weeks after his death – with no reason given, a fact absolutely irregular in highly bureaucratic and rigid labor regulations.

By this time I was asking myself how John Mocking was going to return to the U.S. if he were not an American citizen. On the other hand, if he attempted to come back, he probably had some official status in the U.S. before he went to Russia. In this case information could be found in the Immigration and Naturalization Service archive in Washington. I asked Marian Smith, a historian for the INS, to help me, and in a month or so I found a package in my mailbox. Marian Smith was able to find John's case file. Now we had a biography of John N. Mocking, not without some significant gaps, but complete enough to recreate all stages of his life, especially his life in the United States.

Finally we found out the date of his arrival to America – Oct. 27, 1913. He arrived to Boston on board of the SS *Menonee* as a stoker (you remember his story of the incident on the high seas)

and just did not return from a shore leave. He was 23 at that time and he stated his social status as "laborer," which means that he was not an educated person. However, four years later, John Mocking becomes a member of American Engineering Association, even before he graduated from Valparaiso University in Indiana. Jack London could write his Martin Eden from this self-made personality. His friends stated that John was a "well read and educated man;" he knew several foreign languages. At the university, John met a girl eight years his junior and married her. His son Fred was born in 1921. The couple settled in Chicago where John worked as a structural engineer.

Managers of all companies he worked for gave him very positive references as "a capable and very conscientious" worker. But the '30s were coming and the Great Depression came with them. John Mocking lost his job. Alas, non-citizens were the first to lose positions. And John decided to legalize his status after being 17 years in the country illegally. At that time Amtorg stepped in. Amtorg was a company organized in 1924 in the United States by the Soviet Union to serve as the buying and selling organization of the Soviet Union in trade between the two countries. A contract for

The brothers finally meet:
Nikolai Mocking and
Fred Mocking.

organization of the Soviet Union in trade between the two countries. A contract for a year with an excellent salary sounded like a wonderful solution, and who would decline such an offer? Now when he was granted a status of a permanent resident, John applied for and was granted a return permit, which would allow him to come back to the United States. This permit expired a year later, when John Mocking met Sophia, a woman he fell in love with, and decided to stay. How it all ended we already know.

Now only one thing was left to find out – what happened to the body of John Mocking. Neither his divorced wife in America, nor his wife in Russia ever found out where he was buried. Many times I discussed this matter with Nikolay, and once he suggested that his father's body could have been cremated. But there was only one crematorium in Moscow in the 1930s – the Donskoy crematorium. Its opening created a sort of sensation in Moscow public life, but for the authorities it became a convenient place to dump an ever growing number of the victims of political purges.

On my request Dr. Zhuravlev checked our guess. Here is his letter:



Dear Valery,

As I promised I have managed to get info about John Mocking from Donskoi crematorium. According to the official records at the Alphabetical Book of the cremated persons, page 62 – 83, for March of 1936, his body was cremated under No. 68932. As long as the relatives had not claimed the urn with ashes, it was buried in the mass grave No. 1 of the Donskoi cemetery. I recently visited this grave and left some flowers. I can take pictures also, if you wish. It might be a good idea to make a plaque with Mr. Mocking's name and place it in the wall near the grave, like many others already did. Most of the buried here are the victims of the great purges.

This was the final touch. The life and death of John Mocking ceased to be a mystery for his children.

Highlighting the History

The fate of John Mocking was not unique. Nobody purposely concealed the fact that thousands of Americans were killed in Soviet Russia and many more spent years in the Gulag, but this gruesome fact stayed outside of the focus of the American historians.

Two events, or rather processes, were known to take place at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s that had a great impact on the whole world in general and on the life of John Mocking in particular. It was the industrialization in the Soviet Union and the Great Depression in the United States. In this period many thousands of highly-skilled but unemployed engineers and workers went from the U.S. to Russia bringing technology and know-how to its construction sites unknown there before. Russia denied its dependence on capitalism and America did not wish to boast of its contribution to the establishment of Soviet industrial power.

All who went to Russia were employed. And practically all of them understood very soon that they had made a grave mistake. Even because of their foreign status and skill level, they had access to better food and housing than the natives, these were usually far below American standards. Besides, the Americans felt that their skills and work habits were seldom properly used. Actually, it was the typical situation of the Yankee in King Arthur's court, as natives and local management were reluctant to throw off the bonds of feudal serfdom.

The progress was slow and costly. However, the Americans did make a difference. New manufacturing facilities were established, and new ways of working were slowly diffused into the Soviet workforce and bureaucracy. And many of the facilities the Americans helped establish could serve both a civilian and a military purpose. Thus, the factories that American industry and American labor helped establish gave the young Soviet state the ability to mass-produce the weapons of modern warfare. This

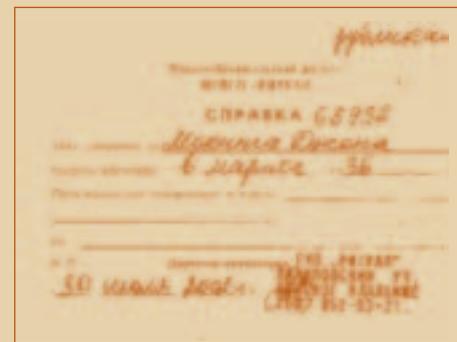
manufacturing base, safe behind the Urals played an important role in the Soviet ability to withstand the German onslaught, and eventually turn the tide during the World War II. At the same time we should not forget the role the Soviet Union played in supplying Hitler with the strategic material from the same facilities – but the history of mankind contains plenty of similar contradictions.

It is true that many Americans went to the Soviet Union, worked productively for a term, usually one to three years, and then returned to the United States. That was what the workers expected when they had signed on with Amtorg. However, grim reality in the form of the brutal purges that swept the country and affected both citizens and foreign nationals, was what many Americans faced in the Soviet Union.

In 1937 all Americans were ordered to leave the country on 48 hours' notice, unless they were willing to give up their citizenship on the spot. Considering the size of the country, only a minuscule number of the Americans could use the chance to flee from hell. Those who exchanged their passports – many of them had Russian spouses and children – became an easy prey for the NKVD. After World War II began, hardly any American managed to leave the Soviet Union. Only a few lucky Americans managed to survive in the Soviet Union until the war ended, and fewer still made it home after the war. Many Americans – nobody knows how many – who became Russian citizens because they did not want to abandon their families, fought against the German invaders and heroically died with arms in their hands.

There are absolutely no reliable figures regarding how many Americans went to Russia, how many returned and how many fell victims to the ruthless regime. In any case we are talking about thousands, thousands and thousands.

Valery Bazarov is director of the HIAS Location and Family History Service.



Certificate No. 68932 stating that the body of the deceased John Mocking was cremated in March of 1936 (Duplicate, issued July 30, 2002).



I Lucky Everything:

The Story of a Real "Miss Saigon"





Opposite: Linh says she's been lucky in America. Above: The author, Sonia Pressman Fuentes (r) with Linh.

The nail salon I frequent is owned and staffed by Vietnamese immigrants. When I arrived, I was greeted warmly by the owner and hugged by my manicurist, Linh.

Linh was born in October 1952 in Saigon and came to the United States in February 1998. She is a pretty, slim woman, always tastefully dressed. As she began to soak my fingers in a small bowl, she also began to talk in her strongly accented English. I'd been in Florida for the winter, and she said that she had missed me.

Linh has been in the United States with her husband, a bakery worker, for about six years. Her older son preceded the couple to the United States, arriving more than 20 years ago to live with an uncle. Linh's son graduated from college, got a job as a computer engineer and then sponsored his parents' move. He bought the town house where they all live together.

At the time Linh's two other children, a 13-year-old daughter and a 19-year-old son, remained with Linh's mother in Vietnam. Linh, who visits Vietnam whenever she can afford it, often had spoken to me about bringing these two children to the States, but as of last December that hadn't happened.

On this morning, as Linh began to file my nails, she told me that she had good news. Her two children had joined her and now were living with the family. She said they loved the United States. Her

daughter was attending public school, and her son would be attending Montgomery College and work part time.

Then Linh said she had more good news. She had bought a secondhand car even though her oldest son had refused to help her buy it. He feared for her safety and told her he would drive her wherever she needed to go. But because he worked, this was "not convenient," Linh said. A client had told her where to find a good used car, and she got "a good deal."

At first she was uncomfortable at the wheel, but after two months of driving, she was more confident. **Summing up all these developments, Linh said, "I lucky everything"**

Now Linh wants to take a day off from work and volunteer somewhere. Linh is studying along with her daughter to improve her English.

She is thankful to the United States for her life here and wants to give something back. But the shop owner told Linh she can't spare her yet. Linh also wants to bring her mother to the United States but isn't sure that she can afford to pay an 81-year-old's health insurance. Linh says, "I want to enjoy life, be happy" – but not now. Now is the time to work and support her children, so she works six days a week at this nail shop and a seventh day at another.

While I listened to Linh, I had tears in my eyes, thinking about what this lovely woman, with her scant knowledge

By Sonia Pressman Fuentes

On May 1, 2002, Pat Buchanan, erstwhile presidential candidate, was on the Today Show talking about Jean-Marie La Pen, the extreme right-wing French leader who captured 17 percent of the vote in the first round of France's presidential election.

Buchanan opined that Le Pen did so well because of his contention that immigrants were destroying the French identity and culture. Buchanan took much the same stance in his book, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization*.

I turned off Buchanan and his exclusionary views and went to keep my 10:00 a.m. appointment for a manicure.

had accomplished in a few short years in this country. As an immigrant myself, I was glad to be reminded of how revitalizing the flow of immigrants continues to be for this country.

When my manicure was finished, Linh and I hugged goodbye. As I left the shop, I found myself thinking about Pat Buchanan, and I wondered: Is Linh the kind of person he believes is imperiling our country and civilization by coming to live in the United States?

UPDATE: August 2004 — It's now over two years since I wrote my article about Linh. Since that time, she has continued to pursue the American dream – although she's probably never heard that expression. Less than six months after my article was published in the *Washington Post*, Linh left her position as a manicurist in the nail salon and, with a loan from a cousin, became the owner and manager of a beauty shop. In addition, she works as a manicurist at the shop, seven days a week, for as many as fourteen hours a day. "I very happy when I busy," she says. For Mother's Day this year, her two sons got her a treadmill, so now she has to get up even earlier in the morning to walk on the treadmill. Her two younger children help her out in the shop when their schedules permit.

When I returned to the shop in April 2004, after having spent four months at my winter residence in Sarasota, Fla., Linh's younger son came running to me with two documents in his hand: one was her citizenship paper and the other was a letter from the President congratulating her on becoming a citizen of this country. Linh said that becoming a U.S. citizen was one of her proudest moments.

She continues to help support her mother in Vietnam and pays for her mother's visits to her for months at a

time in the U.S. Her younger son, following her example, also sends his maternal grandmother money monthly. Her older son, who now works with computer systems, no longer lives with the family. He bought a second house for himself and will get married next summer. Her daughter is wearing braces, at a discounted price provided by a dentist whose wife is one of Linh's customers. Her younger son is studying electrical engineering at Montgomery College. Her daughter, who is in high school, wants to be a doctor and Linh's two sons will help Linh finance her medical school education.

Linh is at times overwhelmed by her financial obligations. She has to make payments on the loan to her cousin, pay rent to the owner of the building that houses the beauty shop, pay rent on her house, pay for her children's health insurance, pay the expenses of an attorney who is assisting her younger son in securing a green card that will make him a lawful permanent U.S. resident, and handle all the other myriad expenses of day-to-day family living. Recently, her husband fell, was out of work for several weeks, and Linh worried as to how she would meet her expenses. But her husband returned to work – and Linh soldiers on.

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A member of the HIAS Hall of Fame, Sonia Pressman Fuentes is a founder of the National Organization for Women. Other versions of this article were published first in *The Washington Post*, and in *The Times-Gazette* of Hillsboro, Ohio.



Linh at work in her salon.



Cast members; Leonard Glickman, President and CEO; Jerry Teller, Board Chair and Jay Kholos, Producer.



Left to Right: Jay Kholos, Norman J. Resnicow, Charles Kramer, Philip M. Schlussel, Barbara Julius (Co-Chair) Bobbie Abrams, Evelyn Seelig (Co-Chair) Allan J. Rodolitz, Rysia de Ravel, Jeffrey Loewy, David Portman, Marc Silberberg, W. Stewart Cahn. Not pictured: Donald J. Fleishaker, Lynn Kramer, Carl Glick, Daniel Kampel.

A NIGHT on the STOOP

On Oct. 19, 2004, HIAS supporters, lay leaders and staff gathered at the Joseph and Ceil Mazer Theater on the Lower East Side for HIAS' Theater Benefit presenting "A Stoop on Orchard Street" by Jay Kholos. The evening offered a glimpse into immigrant life in that historic neighborhood at the turn of the century – highlighting HIAS' role in helping Jewish refugees find freedom from persecution. It was especially meaningful for one HIAS board and benefit committee member, Bobbie Abrams, who brought several generations of the family to the event, some of whom are also board members of the Joseph and Ceil Mazer Fund; the theater and fund were named for her uncle and aunt.

WE RECOGNIZE THE FOLLOWING DONORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THIS EVENT:

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Leonard Glickman, Alexander Mil-Man (Israeli ambassador to Russia), Sanford Mozes (HIAS Board member), and Leonard Terlitsky, (HIAS' country head for FSU).

Assessing the FSU Situation

HIAS President Leonard Glickman was joined by HIAS Board Member Sanford Mozes on a mission to assess the country conditions for the Former Soviet Union. There they met with Leonard Terlitsky, HIAS country director for the FSU, as well as with the Israeli ambassador to Russia. They also met with representatives of the International Organization for Migration, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as with human rights activists.



SEATED (from l to r): Jerome S. Teller, HIAS board chair; Elliott Benjamin, HIAS board member; Leonard Glickman, HIAS president and CEO. STANDING: HIAS Young Leaders of LA, ceremony organizers.

2004 HIAS West Coast Scholarship Ceremony

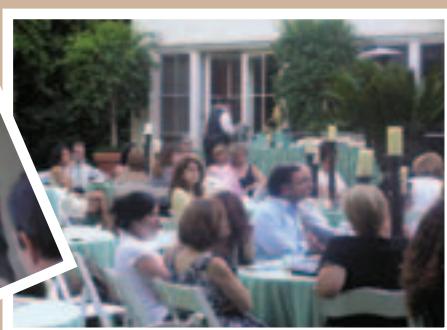
On Sept. 9, 2004 HIAS held its first scholarship ceremony on the West Coast at the Skirball Center in Los Angeles. The ceremony, honoring 32 scholarship recipients, was made possible by a generous grant from the Laura and David Merage Foundation. The students, all of whom were helped by HIAS, were awarded \$1,500 scholarships to recognize their academic achievements, financial need and community involvement.

From Moscow to Manhattan

Over 100 young professionals from the former Soviet Union mingled at this HIAS Young Leaders cocktail party at the Grant Gallery in the Soho neighborhood of New York. Guests viewed the work of Vasily Kafanov, a former HIAS client, and listened to the live jazz of world-renowned musicians Valerie Panomorov and Alex Nakhimovsky. Those in attendance were interested in giving back to HIAS through the Young Leaders program.



Margarita Levitt (l) and Yulia Ovetssy (r), HIAS Young Leaders event chairs



LEFT PHOTO: Manijeh Nehorai, social worker, Jewish Family Services (l) and Reuben Zadeh, HIAS Young Leaders of LA (r)
RIGHT PHOTO: Guests at the Gift of Hope

Gift of Hope

In July 2004, HIAS Young Leaders of LA organized Gift of Hope, a benefit for over 100 guests aimed at raising funds to alleviate the plight of Iranian religious minorities. The event was held at the Beverly Hills home of Mr. and Mrs. Behruz Gabbai. Many of the attendees were former HIAS clients who had fled persecution in Iran and the Former Soviet Union with HIAS' help. Over \$13,000 was raised to support HIAS' important work with this population.

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