"Researching Russian Roots with ‘Ma Bell’ in Moscow"

The phone books from six Soviet cities enabled Miriam Weiner to "reach out and touch someone" and locate far-flung kin in the Soviet Union from Central Asia to Siberia. Miriam Weiner began her search into her family roots fifteen years ago when she went to visit relatives in New York City and her mother suggested she look up some "cousins." As a result of the meetings with these new "cousins," she began constructing a family tree, delving into the history of her family and their origins in the Ukraine while becoming a pioneer in the development of professionals in Jewish Genealogy. The pursuit of her Jewish roots has fulfilled a sense of family and historical continuity and awakened a resurgence of pride in her Jewish heritage.

Since the phenomenon of Alex Haley's Roots, millions of Americans have begun the search for their own origins. We are motivated for different reasons. For some, there is an inborn need to go back and find out where our ancestors came from—not just the name of the country, which they probably already know, but the exact place in that country—the name of the "shtetl." They want to know what they did, how they earned a living, and why they left.

No one can predict how far back one's search will lead, as so much depends on the information available within each family and on the records still available in the "old country." The frustration of researching family roots in the Soviet Union is shared by many Jewish Genealogists and in an attempt to bridge that gap Weiner wrote to the Library of Congress requesting a search for her grandmother's family name through their collection of Russian telephone books. She received a reply which included photo copies of the pages with the name she requested. She had a letter written in Russian to all twelve, carefully explaining how she obtained their name and then waited anxiously for a reply. A long year passed with no response.

Meanwhile, she located a member of this same family who had emigrated from the Ukraine in the 1960's. He now lives in Holland and invited her to visit immediately in order to interview his mother who was old and in failing health. Within a few weeks, Weiner was on a plane and while in Holland was able to accomplish something far beyond her expectations. For three days, Weiner and her cousin

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