

# Tatyana Kovalova

## Moldova



**Interviewer:** What is your country of origin and what does it mean to you?

**Tatyana:** I am from Moldova. Originally it was part of U.S.S.R. and I'm from the part of Moldova that is not officially independent, but it's called Transnistria. It's where my heritage is from. It's what made me who I am today. It's where my traditions come from, where food-tastes come from, and where my family comes from.

**Interviewer:** When did you come to the United States?

**Tatyana:** I came to the States about 20 years ago. My mom got married to somebody in the States and so she brought over me and my sister.

**Interviewer:** What is the meaning of 'being welcoming'?

**Tatyana:** I think it's when somebody is open to listening and actually caring about the story or anything that will be talked about.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about the immigration process and your first year in the U.S.?

**Tatyana:** It was harder because I was 18 when I first came to the States. I was taken away from my family, friends, and everything I knew and was comfortable with. So I remember it being hard emotionally and I did not know English, even though my mom tried to help me have a tutor to teach me English. I was refusing to do that. But then the immigration process was seamlessly easy. We just followed the steps of being in the country and obtaining all the documents we needed.

**Interviewer:** How did you learn English?

**Tatyana:** Well, first I went to the adult English Learning Center. They helped me there, but I think mostly I was watching a lot of TV with subtitles and just being immersed. Going to the stores and actually participating and talking to people.

**Interviewer:** What was your life like before you immigrated?

**Tatyana:** I had graduated from high school and had one year in college. I had an extensive family living near me. We had a lot of family gatherings. I started working out of high school trying to figure out what I wanted to do next.

**Interviewer:** How are you and your parents alike and different?

**Tatyana:** I think we all have the drive to achieve the most that we can in life. That's probably how we are most alike. We have the innate sense of caring for other people and being nice and helpful, that's kind of a thread throughout my whole family. I think I am different by being exposed to a different culture, and with a culture comes knowledge. With more freedom comes knowledge too. I think that I am different in the way that I want to learn more no matter what stage of life I am in. And so that desire to learn and learn and learn is probably what's different.

Plus all the differences in my culture. I am proud of my traditions. Even though I have a background from my country, I've added to it by being here for so long.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes for your community?

**Tatyana:** I hope that the community as a whole will be more accepting, more friendly, and more kind. Not just to others, but also to ourselves. That we as individuals will be taking care of ourselves more.

**Interviewer:** What is the story behind your name?

**Tatyana:** That's a good question. I haven't thought about it in a while. But I was named after my grandma who I never knew her, she passed away before I was born. But I always heard about her as being hardworking and kind. It was kind of fun knowing that I was named after my grandma. Even though I didn't know her, a little bit of her is still with me.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel when you entered the U.S.?

**Tatyana:** Scared. I have to think back on the exact feelings. But I didn't want to come because I was taken out of my home. I was 18, so I wanted to be with my friends and family and I didn't know anyone here. I was scared and uncertain of what's going to happen and what it would be like. Moldova has a mild climate. We have snow, but not as much as here. When I first came to the States, I came to Vermont. I don't know if you've been to Vermont before, but if you think that there's lots of snow here, Vermont gets ten times more. So when we came to the States, I did not have experience with that much snow. The snow was like above the house that we were in. And it was a shock.

**Interviewer:** What are you grateful for about America?

**Tatyana:** I'm grateful for the amount of opportunity that I have here. I am able to learn what I want to learn, see what I want to see, and that I have the opportunities to be who I want to be.

**Interviewer:** Who helped you come to the United States?

**Tatyana:** My mom helped me to come to the United States. She arranged all of the details. We came with her.

**Interviewer:** What has been your biggest shock with coming to the U.S.?

**Tatyana:** Well, snow, as I mentioned, was a shock. At that time, I was living in the small town of Newport, Vermont, and it's up north next to Canada. I came from a city with my family members right next door. We had lived in a 10-story building and a couple of the apartments were just my family. And now I didn't have anybody next to me- no friends, no family. That was the biggest probably.

**Interviewer:** Can you explain how you became a U.S. citizen?

**Tatyana:** I came to the U.S. with my mom, who married a U.S. citizen, I had to wait – I can't remember if it was five years – and I could apply for citizenship. First I was a resident, right ahead of the green card. Then I applied for citizenship.

**Interviewer:** What is your favorite holiday?

**Tatyana:** I think I enjoy New Year. We have a big celebration of the New Year back in my country. I love that holiday.

**Interviewer:** Would you explain what your high school experience was like?

**Tatyana:** We don't have differences between schools in general, like elementary, middle school, or high school. It's just one. So we go from the first grade to the 11th grade in the same building with possibly the same people. I had friends that took the same classes. We didn't have a choice like you do here in high school. It's all the same, we all go through the same classes. You're creating relationships with people that are there with you for such a long time. But I think one other part that I can think of, was after the U.S.S.R. broke up. And I think in my city, my whole Republic that I was telling you about Transnistria, was based on a lot of corruption. So at that time, different mafia leaders were fighting with each other. So we were always careful in what we were doing, how we were acting.

**Interviewer:** What was it like before the U.S.S.R broke up?

**Tatyana:** I don't remember much, I was very young. I just remember probably the transition parts, like when it started, and when the money change happened. So a lot of the currency that was applicable to the U.S.S.R. was no longer applicable in the new created country. There were a lot of economic and financial struggles. People had to stand in lines for bread, had to have coupons to get bread- I was doing that too. I was just kind of finding a way to survive and to make money by reselling things or whatnot. I remember a lot of financial and economic struggles.

**Interviewer:** What traditions have been passed down in your family?

**Tatyana:** Well, we have Easter celebrations where the eggs are colored and we have to hold them in hand and beat the eggs against each other. Whoever has the egg without a broken side will win. We break bread, special Easter bread. That's probably the country tradition, but the family traditions would be similar. And on New Year, we always get together with a family and celebrate that. That's probably one of the other traditions that we have in my family. Just stay up and watch all the shows that would be celebrating the New Year.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about your religious or spiritual beliefs?

**Tatyana:** When I came to the States, I joined the LDS church. I'm no longer practicing it as much but I think I've learned from it. So I am in the process of growing spiritually, even though I don't use that tool anymore.

**Interviewer:** What objects tell the story of your life?

**Tatyana:** Food, if you can call that an object. Certain dishes that we prepare. I grew up in a city that's by the river. So if you talk about natural objects, anytime I'm near water I'm reminded of where I grew up. Sometimes walking up the stairs reminds me of growing up because I lived on the eighth floor for most of my life back there - so staircases I guess.

**Interviewer:** Are you married to someone who was born here?

**Tatyana:** No, he was born in Ukraine.

**Interviewer:** How did you meet?

**Tatyana:** We met here. We went to the same university, BYU. We met through a mutual group of friends.

**Interviewer:** Have you been back to Ukraine?

**Tatyana:** Yes. We lived in Ukraine for a little bit when we got married, around 2012. We lived there for a little bit, and then we decided that it would be better to move back to the States. So we left.

**Interviewer:** Why did you decide to move back?

**Tatyana:** It was hard to find a position that would sustain the family and what we wanted to be. We decided to go back to the States because we have more opportunities here. My husband is a lawyer.

**Interviewer:** What do you miss the most about your country?

**Tatyana:** I think it's my family. All my extended family and being close to them.

**Interviewer:** What does the 'American Dream' mean to you?

**Tatyana:** I think I am living the 'American Dream.' I think just what I mentioned before- having opportunities and being able to have the tools to get where I want to be. They're always going to be no matter where you're at, some obstacles on the way to what you want to achieve. But being here provides better opportunities in that regard, even though they're they're still obstacles.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me when in life you felt most alone and most connected?

**Tatyana:** I think I felt the most alone when I served a mission for the LDS church. I started on Temple Square, and another part of it was in Alaska. I was probably feeling the most alone being away from my family that was left in Vermont back then. I felt the most alone because of the experience of doing things on my own and not being connected to who I knew and had to make new friends and to be immersed in what that experience was. But the most connected, I think, is within my family right now. I have four kids and have a husband. I think because my husband

and I come from similar backgrounds, I feel like some of the things we talk about connect us. Even with the war in Ukraine, I feel like we can be the most connected. Even though we're not there, we have a connection to the worry, of madness, of concern. Many think it's a horrible experience to be connected to, but I think because we are from the same backgrounds, it makes us more connected.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell us what city you currently live in?

**Tatyana:** Yes. I live in Taylorsville, Salt Lake County.

**Interviewer:** Do you like food from America or Moldova more?

**Tatyana:** Of course Moldovian [laughter]. Sorry. But I do love the ability to try different types of food. We are exposed to so many different cultures here. So I love that too. But definitely Moldova.