

I, Iryna, being duly sworn, depose and say:

1. I was born on April 28, 19.., in the city of Minsk, Belarus.

2. I came to the United States as an exchange student in June of 2000. Thereafter, I applied to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, now known as United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), for political asylum, and my application was approved. I currently have an adjustment of status application pending with USCIS. My alien registration number is A..

3. I currently reside at West 6th Apt. .., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223. My telephone number is 917/...-.....

4. I am making this statement in support of the application for permanent resident status of my friend Nataliya, More specifically, I am making this affidavit in support of the I-360 Petition that Nataliya is filing concurrently with this affidavit with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as the self-petitioning spouse of an abusive U.S. citizen.

5. I first met Nataliya in the spring of 2001, when she came to work as a waitress at the Diner on Avenue, in Brooklyn, N.Y. At that time, I had already been working at the for about six months. Soon after Nataliya started working there, we became close friends. Her ability to take pleasure in simple things, her sense of wonder about life, and her trusting innocence, all appealed to me. As I was an experienced waitress, I gladly took on the role of a "big sister" for her, showing her around and acquainting her with the job. It did not take long for Nataliya to get into the flow of work at, to understand her duties and responsibilities. As a matter of fact, she became a skillful waitress in a matter of weeks.

6. In the summer of 2001, I noticed that Nataliya had a special customer. A young man would come to the diner almost every night and request to be waited on by Nataliya. Sometimes, when no tables in her section of the diner were available, he would wait for an hour or longer for one of Nataliya's tables. I wasn't the only one who was aware of the fact that he liked her. Soon enough, Nataliya took notice. She started spending time with this gentleman, who called himself Roberto (his formal first name turned out to be Heriberto), literally waiting at his table when time permitted, having long conversations or simply joking around. I believe that, initially, Nataliya was just curious about him, because he was a good-looking guy and was really interested in her. However, once she started spending more time with him, her attraction to him grew. No one was surprised when he asked her on a date and she accepted.

7. From then on, their relationship developed quickly. Nataliya began spending most of her free time with Roberto. It was obvious that they were infatuated with each other. When they were together, Nataliya had a happy glow about her. Whenever Roberto looked at her, she would smile. When they were apart, all Nataliya talked about was Roberto.

8. In September of 2001, Roberto began living with Nataliya. He moved into the furnished room that Nataliya was renting. The accommodations they had were small, but the young couple didn't seem to mind. They seemed to be oblivious to the concerns of the outside world; ensconced in their room, it seemed they were able to leave behind all of the cares and tribulations of the larger world and just focus on their love for each other. When I would visit them, or hear from Nataliya about their life together, my impression was that they made each other feel safe and secure.

9. In October of 2001, Nataliya told me, with much happiness, that she had accepted Roberto's marriage proposal. Even though their courtship had not been a very long one, their feelings for each other were strong and they seemed quite ready for marriage. Nataliya, in particular, was making big plans. She was thinking of moving into a larger apartment, once they could afford it. She was also planning to go back to college, so that, thereafter, they could have a better income.

10. Nataliya and Roberto got married in November of 2001. I think that this was the happiest time in Nataliya's life. Roberto was treating her with love and respect and he shared her plans and goals. However, after approximately a month, I noticed a change in Nataliya's mood and behavior. She became less talkative, and when she had a spare moment, she preferred to spend it alone, just staring out the diner windows and thinking. It looked to us, her co-workers, that she was avoiding us; when we tried to confront her and ask her what was wrong, she just looked away. She was so preoccupied by her private problems that she sometimes could not concentrate on her work; on several occasions, she even brought her customers food that they had not ordered. Luckily, her mistakes did not have serious consequences. When Nataliya refused to discuss her problems with us, we, her co-workers, tried to put the most hopeful spin on this situation, so as not to feel so helpless and worried: we hoped the change in Nataliya's behavior was just a normal consequence of her new life as a married woman, just the usual repercussions of a change of focus from a primary role of waitress to a primary role of wife.

11. In the beginning of January, 2002, Nataliya called in sick for several days in a row. When she came back to work, she was very pale and had dark circles under her eyes. She told me that she had been to the emergency room at the local hospital, as a result of some kind of poisoning. She was not more specific and I did not want to probe. Soon after that, other strange things started happening. Whenever Nataliya came to work, Roberto would call her repeatedly during her shift, sometimes as often as once every hour. When Nataliya would pick up the phone, Roberto would talk so loudly that people in the diner could hear him, while Nataliya just responded quietly, "yes" or "no." It sounded like Roberto was questioning her, to make certain that she was indeed at work and was not engaged in any activity of which he would disapprove. Nataliya seemed very uncomfortable with, and even embarrassed by, Roberto's behavior. I especially remember one time when Roberto came to the diner unannounced. Nataliya happened to be in the bathroom at that time, and Roberto was extremely upset that she wasn't immediately available. He even wanted to go look for her in the ladies' room, but fortunately she came out just in time. On numerous occasions I saw

Roberto standing across the street from the diner, apparently having nothing better to do than watch our front door. On one occasion I witnessed a truly odd event. I was riding a bus to work and I saw Nataliya walking down the street to, also on the way to work. At a distance, Roberto was walking behind Nataliya, following her without trying to catch up to her; that is to say, Roberto was making sure that she would not see him. I told Nataliya about these sightings of Roberto, including the time he was furtively following her, but she just looked away, as usual, without comment. Nataliya must have known that Roberto was unreasonably suspicious of her and was acting strangely, but she also must have been willing to overlook his behavior, hoping that he would change. I know that Nataliya must have been hoping that things would improve because, in April of 2002, she and Roberto moved out of their furnished room, which was in someone else's apartment, and into their first real apartment of their own.

12. In June of 2002, Nataliya quit her job at, I was surprised by this decision, because tips were good, customers liked her, and she was a good waitress. When I asked her why she was leaving, she said that her marital responsibilities and her husband's happiness took precedence over her work. It seemed to me, however, that she didn't really want to leave; on the last day of her job, she appeared to be on the verge of tears. We stayed in touch after her departure, although not as much as I would have liked. When we called each other, Nataliya seldom sounded happy. Now that we were not co-workers, she appeared to be more comfortable confiding in me (I guess that, when we had been co-workers, she had felt that confiding her problems to me would be an imposition, but, on the contrary, I would have welcomed her confiding in me, as I believe that friends help each other, through good times and bad). I think another thing making Nataliya more talkative than before was that she no longer in the position of daily meeting all of us co-workers who had become her friends, so that there were relatively few people in her life whom she could talk with at all, let alone confide in. She was staying at home for the most part, so that her primary contact with the world was through Roberto. She complained that Roberto was purposefully isolating her from her friends because of his overwhelming jealousy. She also told me that he was becoming increasingly controlling of, and rude to, her.

13. In December of 2002, Nataliya called me around Christmas time to wish me happy holidays. She then told me that Roberto had left her. While she was out shopping, he had just packed up his things and walked out of their apartment, leaving no note explaining why he had decided to abandon her. She just came home from the store and found Roberto, and nearly everything that belonged to him, gone. This hit Nataliya very hard. I continued to call her in the months to come, and every time I talked to her she sounded depressed and pessimistic about the future. She was searching for reasons why Roberto had abandoned her, trying to achieve some kind of closure, but she couldn't find any reasons that made any sense. Finally, she started blaming herself for everything that went wrong in their relationship, which made her even more miserable. I ran into Nataliya in the street once, around February of 2003. She had lost a lot of weight and looked unkempt; she looked as if she had stopped taking care of herself and of her appearance.

14. Nataliya is currently seeing a mental health specialist, to help her get over Roberto and the pain he caused her. She tells me that she was diagnosed with depression, but is improving slowly thanks to good treatment. As her friend, I hope she fully recovers and leaves behind the sadness inflicted by Roberto's cruel behavior. This warm, trusting, friendly person deserves better from life than the suffering that Roberto left for her as a "going away present."

Iryna

Sworn to before me this
day of February, 2004

Notary Public