87/6
zc

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

RUSSIAN EMIGRÉ RECOLLECTIONS:
LIFE IN RUSSIA AND CALIFORNIA

Interviews with

Olga C. Morgan
Vera A. Elischer
Vasily V. Ushanoff
Nikolai N. Khripunov
Adolf Idol
Oswald Kratins
Valentina A. Vernon

Interviews Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
1979-1983

Underwritten by the
L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation

Copyright ⓒ 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

This manuscript is made available for research purposes. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

To cite the volume: Russian Emigré Recollections: Life in Russia and California, an oral history conducted 1979-1983, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1986.

To cite individual interview: Olga C. Morgan, "Recollections of Russia and Life in Emigration," an oral history conducted in 1983 by Richard A. Pierce, in Russian Emigré Recollections: Life in Russia and California, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1986.

Copy No. 1

PREFACE

The Russian-Americans, although numerically a small proportion of the population, have for long been a conspicuous and picturesque element in the cosmopolitan make-up of the San Francisco Bay Area. Some came here prior to the Russian Revolution, but the majority were refugees from the Revolution of 1917 who came to California through Siberia and the Orient. Recognizing the historical value of preserving the reminiscences of these Russian refugees, in the spring of 1958 Dr. Richard A. Pierce, author of Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917, (U.C. Press, Spring 1960) then a research historian at the University working on the history of the Communist Party in Central Asia, made the following proposal to Professor Charles Jelavich, chairman of the Center for Slavic Studies:

> I would like to start on the Berkeley campus, under the auspices of the Center for Slavic Studies, an oral history project to collect and preserve the recollections of members of the Russian colony of the Bay Region. We have in this area the second largest community of Russian refugees in the U.S., some 30,000 in San Francisco alone. These represent an invaluable and up to now almost entirely neglected source of historical information concerning life in Russia before 1917, the February and October Revolutions, the Civil War of 1918-1921, the Allied intervention in Siberia, the Soviet period; of the exile communities of Harbin, Shanghai, Prague, Paris, San Francisco, etc.; and of the phases in the integration of this minority into American life.

The proposed series of tape-recorded interviews, as a part of the Regional Oral History Office of the University of California Library, was begun in September 1958 under the direction of Professor Jelavich and with the assistance of Professor Nicholas V. Riasanovsky of the Department of History. To date, the interviews listed below have been completed in several series. Each interview lasted a number of sessions, which were transcribed and, if necessary, translated. Each was edited by the interviewer and the interviewee, and then typed and bound. An interview by Professor R. A. Pierce with the late Professor Gleb Struve, still being edited, will constitute a fifth series.

Funding for the California Russian Emigré Series has come from several sources. First supported by the General Library, it was in the second and third series supported by the Center for Slavic and Near Eastern Studies. The fourth series, begun in 1979, received funding from the L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.

In addition to the completed oral histories, other Russian emigré materials have been acquired as a result of the interviewing program.

An interview begun with Professor Nicholas T. Mirov was expanded by Professor Mirov and published as The Road I Came, The Memoirs of a Russian-American Forester (The Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1978).

Several manuscripts were donated to Professor Pierce by emigrés who had already written or dictated their memoirs. These include:

Lialia Andreevna Sharov, Life in Siberia and Manchuria, 1898-1922, 296 pages. Completed in Los Angeles, California, ca. 1960.

Professor Ivan Stenbock-Fermor, Memoirs of Life in Old Russia, World War I, Revolution, and in Emigration, 1112 pages. Completed in Palo Alto, California, 1976.

Professor Alex Albov, Recollections of Pre-Revolutionary Russia, the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the Balkans in the 1930's and Service in the Vlasov Army in World War II, 550 pages. Dictated on tape, transcribed by Professor Pierce.

These manuscripts will be made a part of the Russian emigré collection of The Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed to the development of the West. The Office is under the administrative supervision of Professor James D. Hart, the director of The Bancroft Library.

Willa K. Baum, Head
Regional Oral History Office

15 April 1986
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California 94709

April 1986

CALIFORNIA-RUSSIAN EMIGRÉ SERIES

The following interviews on the lives of Russian emigrés have been undertaken by the Regional Oral History Office, a division of The Bancroft Library. The interviews with members of the San Francisco Bay Area Russian community focus on their experiences in Russia, the exile communities to which they fled following the Revolution of 1917, and their integration into American life.

First Series: Interviews conducted by Richard A. Pierce and Alton C. Donnelly, sponsored by the General Library, 1960-1961.

Dotsenko, Paul	The Struggle for the Liberation of Siberia, 1918-1921. 114 pages, 1960. [Pierce]
Malozemoff, Elizabeth	The Life of a Russian Teacher. 444 pages, 1961. [Donnelly]
Shebeko, Boris	Russian Civil War, 1918-1922. 284 pages, 1961. [Pierce]
Shneyeroff, Michael M.	Recollections of the Russian Revolution. 270 pages, 1960. [Pierce]

Second Series: Interviews conducted by Boris Raymond (Romanoff), sponsored by the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, 1966-1967.

Fedoulenko, Valentin V.	Russian Emigré Life in Shanghai. 171 pages, 1967.
Guins, George C.	Professor and Government Official: Russia, China, and California. 364 pages, 1966.
Lenkoff, Aleksandr N.	Life of a Russian Emigré Soldier. 64 pages, 1967.
Volume also contains:	Report to Subcommittee on Russian Emigré Project. 4 pages. Bibliography of Works on Far Eastern Emigration. 16 pages.

Third Series: Interviews conducted by Richard A. Pierce and Boris Raymond (Romanoff), sponsored by the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, 1971-1972.

Guins, George C.	Impressions of the Russian Imperial Government. 95 pages, 1971. [Pierce]
Marschak, Jacob	Recollections of Kiev and the Northern Caucasus, 1917-1918. 78 pages, 1971. [Pierce]
Moltchanoff, Victorin M.	The Last White General. 132 pages, 1972. [Raymond]
Nagy-Talavera, Miklos	Recollections of Soviet Labor Camps, 1949-1955. 100 pages, 1972. [Pierce]

Fourth Series: Interviews conducted by Richard A. Pierce, sponsored by the L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, 1979-1983.

Olga Morgan Vera Elischer Vasily Ushanoff Nikolai Khripunov Adolf Idol Oswald Kratins Valentina Vernon	Russian Emigré Recollections: Life in Russia and California. 428 pages, 1986.

Regional Oral History Ofc.
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

INTRODUCTION

The seven accounts presented here were transcribed from interviews with residents of Monterey, Carmel Valley and Laguna Beach, California. Five of the people interviewed were Russians, one was Latvian, and one was a Baltic German, from Estonia. All were born before the Russian Revolution, and all within the borders of the Russian Empire, except one who was born in Machuria, on land set aside for the Russian-owned Chinese-Eastern Railway.

The interviews illustrate Russian folk life and folk ways, not in the narrow sense of"the traditional life of the mass of a population, but as part of the entire Russian culture. Culture in this sense can be looked upon as "a complex of typical behavior or standardized social characteristics peculiar to a specific group, occupation, or sex, age grade, or social class." For it is not only peasants and laborers who must be studied if we are to understand a people, but the group or people as a whole, comprising many cultures, including that of the more "advanced," educated, sophisticated classes whose members have to a large degree forgotten their earlier ways.

In this sense, all human cultures, of whatever era, nationality or class, merit study, and even the simplest will prove complex upon close examination. Thus the Russians, actually a whole congeries of peoples, classes and cultures. "Understanding the Russians" has never been more necessary than today, but attempts are usually piecemeal and incomplete, fraught with error. Some fail to realize that Russia is not of one nationality, but many. Others dismiss the old Russia as a backward, static land, transformed in 1917, whereas the new socio-political-economic structure was in many ways a regression, and in any case retained a strong Russian flavor. Not all the nobility and commercial classes were exploiters, not all the workers and peasants were noble, not all the Red Army forces were paladins of righteousness, nor were all White Army men good, or otherwise, depending on the point of view of the narrator. "Understanding" therefore remains elusive, obscured by stereotypes.

The best way to get behind the stereotypes is through the study of individual lives through biography, or, better still, through autobiographical accounts. The accounts that follow, if studied and compared, permit a small step to be made in that direction.

Mrs. Olga Morgan, half-American, but at home in high circles, tells of her experiences in nursing during World War I, and of a successful departure from Russia just before the Revolution, by way of Siberia.

Mrs. Vera Elischer, of a highly placed family, was a nurse during the war, then lived through hard times after the Revolution until she and her husband were able to escape from Russia with a transport of prisoners of war returning to Hungary.

Dr. Ushanoff, the only one of the seven who was of humble birth, indicates how determination could overcome the economic and social difficulties facing the emigrant.

Mr. Khripunov, the son of a cavalry officer and landowner, educated by governesses and good schools, would in normal times have assumed a station similar to that of his father. Instead, thrown unprepared into a competitive society, he eked out his years on the bounty of others, unable to adapt, like the "superfluous man" of Russian novels of the second half of the 19th century.

Adolf Idol, from Estonia, and Oswald Kratins, a Latvian, both began life as Russian subjects. Idol, an alien in his own homeland and in the Russian Empire, where anti-German feeling was common, gives an idea of the care with which the member of a minority had to tread in troubled times. Kratins describes the Bolshevik excesses he witnessed as a youth in Southern Russia, and then the mauling which Latvia endured in 1940 and 1941 when it was annexed and occupied by the Soviets.

Mrs. Vernon, daughter of an army officer of the General Staff, describes the halcyon days before 1914, and then the hunger and terror of Soviet rule until she and members of her family were finally able to emigrate.

Each interview is preceded by a short introduction, describing the subject and setting, and is followed by a short index.

Dr. Ushanoff's account is followed by a short autobiographical sketch, and Mrs. Vernon's by a longer work consisting of 12 sketches, written for her grandchildren. Some of these parallel the interview, some are on different themes, thus providing additional material. Mr. George Vernon kindly provided a copy of his mother's manuscript.

The interviews were taped and transcribed with the aid of a grant from the Skaggs Foundation, whose aid, and interest in the project is gratefully acknowledged. The grant was administered by the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Richard A. Pierce

History Department
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

22 July 1985

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Olga Chrapovitsky Morgan

Recollections of Russia and Life in Emigration

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
March 12 and 13, 1983
at Laguna Beach, California

Copyright © 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

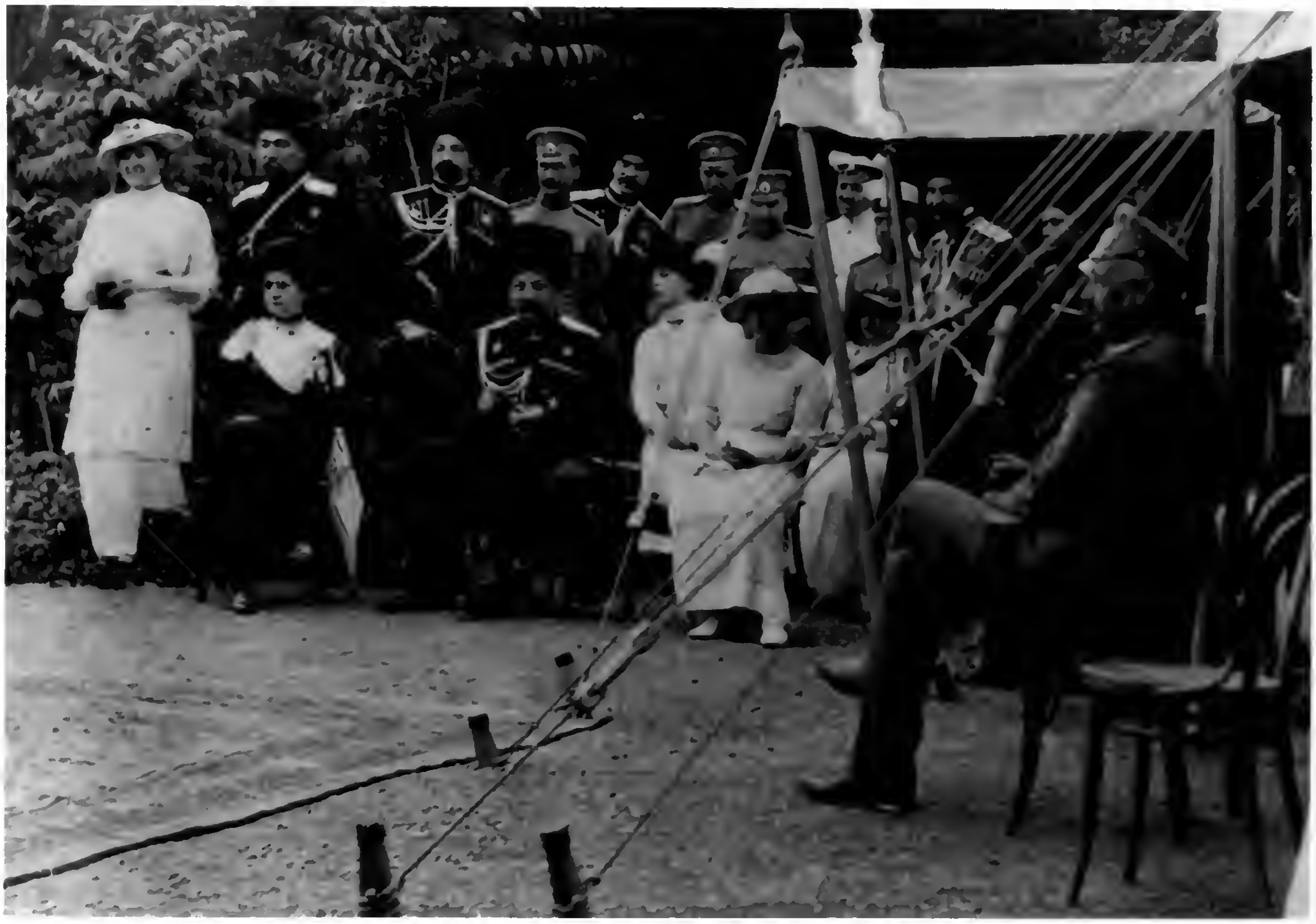
OLGA MORGAN

I interviewed Olga Morgan (Mrs. Jasper Morgan) at her home in Laguna Beach, on March 12 and 15, 1983. Laguna Beach has resisted the mediocrity which has spoiled the appearance of many Southern California beach towns, and the view from Mrs. Morgan's house, on a steep hillside overlooking the Pacific, might be in the south of France. Her garden supports many plants suited for semi-arid conditions, and a trickle from a small fountain, in an artificial grotto framed by ivy, gets a rich yield from others which are more demanding. The visitor enters her lot from the street below, and climbs a steep path to the house, a spacious wooden structure built in the early 1920's. Windows along the south and west sides of the large dining and living room, and large mirrors which make up the north wall give it ample light, besides which one can step out onto a sun porch which runs along the entire west side of the house, for a fine view of the ocean.

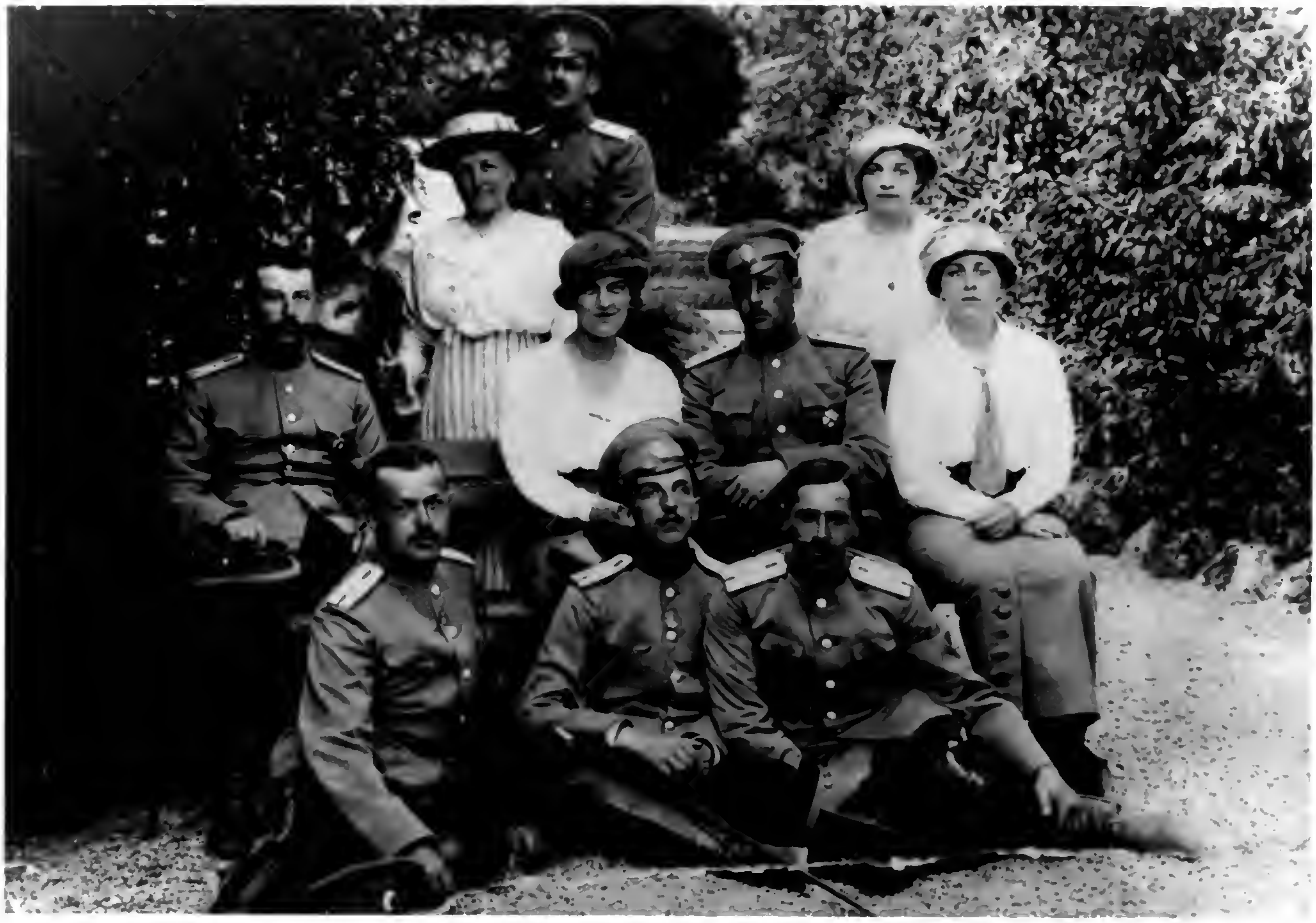
Most of the comfortable furnishings, of the 1920's and 1930's, were picked up second hand over many years. There are many photographs, and a wide variety of bric-a-brac and memorabilia, which is like a museum of earlier 20th century popular culture.

Born in 1896--"Prehistorically old!" she exclaims--Mrs. Morgan retains a zest for life and a youthful flexibility. When I saw her in March, 1985 she had nearly recovered from injuries received in a traffic accident the previous fall, for which she had received damages, and was looking forward to resuming her volunteer work at the gift shop of a nearby hospital.

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1985



Early summer, 1914. An afternoon gathering in the Crimea. Olga Morgan, the narrator, is third from the left of the three women in white. In center, the Grand Duchess Marie. Seated, first row on the left, is the Grand Duchess George, and in foreground, side view, sits the Grand Duke George.



Early summer, 1914. Holiday gathering in the Crimea. Officers are of the regiment which was stationed there. Their guests for lunch are the Grand Duchess Marie (2nd row, center), wife of the Crown Prince of Sweden. Behind her, a lady in waiting, who served as chaperon. In rear, right, Olga Morgan, the narrator, then 18, and in front of her, Zoya Stoeckl, the daughter of the Grand Duchess' lady in waiting.

This page and next: Olga Morgan at society functions.

Interview, Richard Pierce
with Mrs. Olga Morgan,
Laguna Beach, California,
March 12, 1983.

RP: Could we begin with a short autobiographical sketch, including a bit about your family?

Morgan: I will do my best! My mother, Margaret Taylor, was born in 1870. The family had become wealthy, I think it was in railroads. Henry Augustus Taylor, her father, built the library in Milford, Connecticut, and they have his portrait in oil there.

My mother met my father, Nicholas de Chrapovitsky, a Russian naval officer, at a ball in Washington, D.C. A year later she went to Paris and married him in the church in the Rue de Russe--she had become Orthodox--and they went to Russia. Of course, after America it was a very difficult place for her to live; she didn't speak the language, so she always had an English companion with her who helped her translate.

RP: Do you know when they met, or what had brought him to the United States?

Morgan: I don't know. That's the trouble, there are so many details that I don't know. I know she met him in Washington, D.C., but I don't even know the date of their marriage. I only know that I was born on December 19, 1896, so obviously they must have been married for at least a year before that.

RP: Could you relate some of your earliest memories?

Morgan: My earliest recollections, strangely enough, are mostly of life in the country, where we went in summer. We used to go someplace--I don't even know where it was--near St. Petersburg, on the water. My father was away most of the summer. And it had a beach, and I remember we used to go down to the beach, and we had a little carriage, with a pony, that we drove around, with a governess, obviously. That I remember quite vividly, but I remember very little of life in town, and of studying, with governesses and all that.

Then I have a very strange recollection of when I was very small, about five or six. My sister and I slept in a room where we each had a bed, and at night I used to see a little devil, walking around my bed. I could have sworn that it was a little black devil, so there must have been some stories I was told that affected me like that, because I really saw him, and when I'd get up in the morning and try to get my toys out of the closet I was always standing off in case he jumped out, because I thought he lived in the closet with my toys. That's a very early recollectio of when I was in town. I don't remember where we stayed in the country. We always rented different places, I don't remember what they looked like. I only remember that they used to be near that beach.

My father was killed in the Japanese War, in the Battle of Tsushima /May 27-28, 1905/, and I know very little about him. I hardly ever saw him because he was always stationed on the royal yacht, the Shtandart. He was there all summer. I remember only that when we went to the United States during the summer of 1905, as we got off the ship all the correspondents threw themselved on my mother and said "Did you know that your husband was lost in the battle?" And mother had had a premonition while she was on board, she kept saying "I think he's dead." But otherwise she didn't know; it was a rather cruel thing to do, a terrible welcome. He was on the Alexander III. The whole fleet was sunk, many by their own volition, because they did not want the Japanese to take them prisoners. They were all regarded as heroes, so we became ladies-in-waiting to the Empress as one of the rewards for being daughters of heroes.

NOTE BY INTERVIEWER: The New York Times for 7 June 1905, p. 4, has the following:
RUSSIAN COUNTESS HERE.
REFUSES TO BELIEVE HER HUSBAND WAS LOST FIGHTING TOGO.
The Countess Chrapovitsky, widow of Count Chrapovitsky, second in command of the Russian battleship Alexander III, which was one of the vessels of Admiral Rojdesvensky's fleet that was destroyed in the battle of the Sea of Japan, arrived in New York last night on the North German Lloyd liner Kaiser Wilhelm II.
The Countess, who was accompanied by her two little daughters, was met by her brother, Henry Taylor of Milford, Conn., and left for that place soon after the Kaiser Wilhelm docked. Mr. Taylor said that his sister was too grieved over the misfortune that had overtaken her to talk, and added that she was not yet certain that her husband was among the lost, and would not believe so until she recieved official confirmation of it.
She heard of the sea battle when the Kaiser touched at Cherbourg and Southhampton a week ago yesterday.

According to accounts of the battle, the Alexander III went down with all hands--several thousand men. No roster of the officers appears to have been published, and actually there was very little mention of that particular vessel, which was only one of those lost. The Russian press quickly went on to the negotiations for peace. I tried to obtain biographical details concerning Count Chrapovitsky from the Naval Museum in Leningrad, but without success. R.P.

Morgan: After my father died my mother never saw his side of the family anymore, except Countess Heyden, who was a good friend of hers, but they were only distant relatives of the Chrapovitskys. She was the only one I ever met.

RP: Why this estrangement?

Morgan: She didn't like them. And then, about a year later, she remarried, to Christopher der Felden, or Baron der Felden, but he didn't like to use that because he said it was Germanic.

Before that, through my father's family, my mother was always invited to all the balls and other affairs at court. But after she married Baron der Felden, she never went to the balls and things like that anymore, but then the Imperial family used to come and visit us--the Dowager Empress, the Grand Duke Michael, and quite a few others; they were very close.

RP: You mentioned having governesses, could you describe that? At what age did you have the first?

Morgan: The first was before 1905. She was a French governess, whom we disliked very much. Whenever we did anything that she didn't like she would say "Faite la planche!" which is French for "make the board' so we had to get down on the floor and lie like a board--we hated her! And we were never able to tell anyone how much we disliked her, except when we went on this trip in 1905 to America. Then every day we would come out and say "Oh, how wonderful it is, to be without her! How wonderful it is not to have Mademoiselle Mizan around our neck!"

And mother said, "Do you really dislike her that much?" So when we got back she fired her--or retired her--people didn't fire a governess, they retired her. But when we lived in summer in a country place we had a governess for each day. We had to take a walk with her, eat with her, talk to her, all day, and then the next day it would be a French governess.

In the winter we had the same thing; a governess for each day. It was very strict, we had always to take long walks and do healthy things, and then study that particular language for one day and then another language another day, and so I am very proficient in French. After I have been in Paris for two or three weeks they can hardly tell that I am not French.

RP: So this was from the age of 6 or 7?

Morgan: Yes, and before that. This lasted until my stepfather got very ill. Then we had to break the whole monotony of the thing, because then we went every year to Cannes, Nice and places like that. They thought he had TB and that he couldn't stand the winter climate. So then we had only one governess with us, but then we would get another governess there who could speak French. German was a little bit forgotten at that time. We had the Russian governess come with us, the maids--my mother's maid and our own maid--to take care of my sister and me, and a valet who took care of my stepfather, so you can see what a large procession of people traveled back and forth.

RP: That was in what year?

Morgan: In 1907, 1908 and 1909, and I think he died in 1910. After that mother was completely broken up; she never went out socially after he died. She was completely devastated. Then we started the routine of the governesses again, but by that time we were much older, so we were able to pick and choose a little bit.

RP: So it was always female tutelage?

Morgan: Entirely female, except for mathematics. Then I had some kind of young man who taught me mathematics--I don't think he was a professor; he was probably a student. I was very good at mathematics; I wish I had continued. But otherwise it was always females. We had a butler and a valet in the house, but when the war came on in 1914 then there were no men doing any work for us, except that we did have a coachman, but he must have been a very old man; everyone else went to the front.

RP: Where was your house in Petersburg?

Morgan: It was Fontanka 14. After mother remarried, when we moved in the summer we always went to the same country house that belonged to my stepfather, in Gatchina. And that place we adored, for then we had our own animals; we had left them there for the winter.

RP: Gatchina--that was where Paul spent so many years, waiting for his mother to die so that he could gain the throne. It was almost destroyed during the war, but they have done a remarkable job of restoring it.

Morgan: It was a beautiful palace. The Dowager Empress used to come and stay there, and behind the palace was a huge park. We children used to take walks there every day, and on the way to the park we used to buy great loaves of bread and feed it to the geese, ducks and swans. And we loved that; it was beautiful. But it was quite dangerous in the autumn, because then the elk fought; sometimes it was quite frightening. So it was a beautiful, beautiful park; I think that they have left it quite as it was. We also used to drive through it quite a lot, because walking was a little far. We'd drive to it, and then get out and walk, with those loaves of bread to feed the birds.

RP: This takes us up to what point?

Morgan: Oh, it must be already 1908, 09 and 10.

RP: And still you never were in school, but always with governesses?

Morgan: Always governesses. No, I never went to school, but we bothered mother so much about it that finally she said "All right, once a year you can go and take exams." Which was not pleasant, because we had never seen any of the people who would give us papers. She felt that maybe that would keep us on our toes.

And it did. Because you would come for the exam, and there would be all of the other girls who were studying, girls who were in the same age group. You didn't know any of them, which was sort of unpleasant, and then you were given these papers. There would be some oral examination, but very little. It was mostly papers to write. They would give you some literary thing, or geography or something, and that would show how much you really knew. By that they would be able to gauge what we had to study. And as we went abroad very often in the winter on account of the climate, we had to keep up our lessons.

We had very few girl friends, unfortunately, because we never went to school. There were just children of my mother's friends, so we had about five families with whom we were very close. Among them was the Countess Tolstoy and all her children, and I'm still close to them now.

RP: Which Countess Tolstoy? It was such a huge family.

Morgan: He was the commander of the Ekipazh de la garde, the navy guards. In other words the part of the navy that went with the Emperor on his yacht and so forth. It was like a guards regiment of the navy, and Count Tolstoy was the commander. And the Countess Tolstoy was the Princess Meshcherskii, of the very highest aristocracy in Russia. The Meshcherskiis and Vasil'chikovs, you've probably heard of those names.

I only wish I had the book about all those people, but I gave it away to my nephew. And those people I kept up with, and I still see them; the Countess Tolstoy's grandson married my niece. I introduced them in Paris in 1950.

RP: The Vasil'chikovs are still around, are they not?

Morgan: Yes, there are some, but they are all dying out, unfortunately. There are still some Meshcherskiis, particularly in Paris. I don't think there are any of them in New York. There used to be an Obolensky in New York; I have a book by him, his memoirs. I think you would really get much more from his memoirs than you will get from talking to me.

RP: Everyone sees something different.

Morgan: I knew him quite well, and he was an interesting man. We all criticized him at times, because we all had different ideas about how the Russians should be. He married money, so he was able to live very well. Quite a few Russians that I knew who were very well born would always say when you introduced them to somebody: "Has she any money?" They were penniless! And they were not equipped to do any work. You know, when we first came to New York some of the high ranking officers--colonels, and generals--were doormen, in the big hotels. The younger ones drove taxis, but not too many. In Paris, there were a lot of them who were taxi drivers. They were simply not equipped in any way through their military education for any jobs!

We attended very few social events. As a social event we used to have dancing class when we were young, which I thought made up for a real social life. And I did go to one ball when I was only sixteen. It was Grand Duchess Olga and she was giving a ball. She came over to the house and she asked me, "Would you like to go to a ball?"

"Oh yes!" I exclaimed, "I would love to!"

So she said to mother, "I have invited your little girl."

Mother said, "It's not possible! She has not been out in society or anything." But she told me, "Never mind, I told her you could go."

So they made me a dress, which had to be covered up, of course, to the neck, with the arms covered and everything, and then I went to the ball and it was very interesting. Everybody was so beautifully dressed. Pushkin describes it as everything gleaming with jewelry and everything beautiful. And I danced. It was in her palace. That was in 1914, in the spring, just before I went to the Crimea. She was the Emperor's sister; she later married a commoner, and she went to Canada and she died there. A book was written about her, it was called Once a Grand Duchess.

RP: Did you see the Emperor?

Morgan: Oh yes, he appeared in all the parades. In the winter, when we lived in St. Petersburg, we used to go to all of them, and even in summer, when we were there. They used to have them on the Champ de Mars, and it was very beautiful, and very exciting, with wonderful music. Then I remember once going to something where Sikorsky showed off his new planes. Sikorsky was the first to invent the helicopter, so it was a very interesting thing. Just before the war quite a few planes had appeared in Russia. I knew one of the men during the war, Seversky; I knew him very well. We knew him when we were living in Gatchina and he was stationed there, at the beginning of the war. He went to Japan for awhile, and then he came over here, and he built planes, including the first metal plane.

RP: During this earlier period, were you able to attend many cultural events? These seem always to have been an important part of Russian life.

Morgan: Do you mean like theaters? No, we were pretty well cut off, you see, because the trains ran very sporadically to St. Petersburg, and to take a train just to go and see a play... We used to see little playsright in Gatchina, there were sometimes put on by amateurs and whatever, but that was about all that we saw, a few little ballets and things like that, but we never went to St. Petersburg anymore. Before that the cultural events were very fine, because the ballet was marvellous, absolutely marvellous, the opera was very, very good, and they had all sorts of theaters. We never were taken much to the theater, because it was not supposed to be for young people, but we were taken very often to the ballet and to the opera, at least once a week.

RP: It must have been easier to get tickets then.

Morgan: Oh, and then, of course, people had subscriptions to boxes, and if they were not going that night they offered them to somebody else, saying "Will you take my box tonight?" and so forth, so that we always seemed to have seats, very good ones, and always in boxes; we never sat in the [main portion].

RP: How did you happen to go to the Crimea?

Morgan: In 1914 [the Grand Duke George, and his wife, who was Greek by birth], invited us to go and stay with them and their two daughters. They had a beautiful home, right on the water. The house, "Haraks," which still exists, was very, very English, because so many of them had been to England. They loved their chintz and English china. But it wasn't a home where they lived all the time; it was just a place where they went in spring and maybe in autumn for a couple of weeks. But this time they stayed there for almost two months. Their two daughters, Nina and Xenia, were younger than I was, but we were very close, and we remained very good friends. Both of them have died since.

[She shows a photograph of a Crimean holiday scene.]

RP: Who are the people in this picture?

Morgan: I have forgotten their names, but they all belonged to the Crimean regiment which was stationed in the Crimea. They asked us for lunch. This [2nd row, sitting] was the Grand Duchess Marie who was married to the Crown Prince of Sweden. And then, so that we would be taken care of, we had this lady in waiting, who came with us to see that we behaved. That was me (standing in rear) and below was Zoya Stoeckl, the daughter of the Grand Duchess' lady in waiting.

RP: She was probably a descendant of Eduard Stoeckl who was the Russian minister to the United States and who concluded the negotiations in 1867 for the sale of Alaska. The men were handsome fellows.

Morgan: Very handsome! They took us to their regimental place and gave us lunch and then they had the men do a cossack dance for us. That was an outing for three young women, to amuse us a little bit.

And this [another photo] was a party we went to. I am here in back [in white, third], there's the Grand Duchess Marie again, and here [seated, first row on the left] is the Grand Duchess George, and the Grand Duke George [seated, in foreground, sideview]. Some of the others are also grand dukes, but I don't remember who they are, unfortunately; I never wrote their names down. It was a tiny, tiny picture, no bigger than this, and I had it blown up.

I don't know any of them. I may find out from Prince Vasilii /Romanov/ because he was there too; he might remember. He was living there all the time. He is about five years younger than I. He didn't attend the party because he was too young, but he knew everybody who was there. I see him every once in awhile. He lives in Woodbridge.

That trip was really the first time in my life that I had fun, because I didn't have a governess with me and I did a little bit what I wanted. I was very strictly brought up, so I knew very well that I had to kiss the Empress's hand, and make my kniksen, as they called it--a curtsey. In other words I had to have very good manners in public. We were being groomed, you see, for being ladies in waiting. We couldn't have bad manners; you had even to eat in an especially neat way.

RP: I suppose much attention was given to dress?

Morgan: We were very clothes conscious, unfortunately, even as young children, because mother bought all her clothes in Paris, and then she had a very famous dressmaker in St. Petersburg where she got other clothes. When I was going to the Crimea, she took me to that dressmaker and got me some beautiful special clothes to wear there. When you were young you were supposed to be completely covered up, never to be decollete in any way, shape or manner. Even in the day we always wore something right up to our neck, and long sleeves. It was very different /from today/.

RP: And jewelry?

Morgan: We were given a few jewels to wear, but very few. I still have a piece of jewelry which was made for me. My stepfather had a star from someone, it was all diamond chips, you know the kind of diamonds they use in the jewelry in Constantinople. We were taken to the jeweler, and they showed us a lot of designs and I chose one for a barette, because that's all we wore, you know we wore our hair back through the barette. It was like a clip; I still have it, but I have it made over into a pin now, because where would I ever wear a barette? So we did have a bit of jewelry even then, although we were very young, and it was not supposed to be worn by young girls. Mother, of course, was always beautifully dressed, and all the people around me.

RP: And then the war?

Morgan: We were still studying when the war broke out [in in August 1914]. I still had a year, but we refused to study German after that; we thought it was unpatriotic.

RP: Was this suggested?

Morgan: No, no, we refused, and mother was furious with us.

RP: When the war broke out, we were in the country; I remember it very well. We were more or less expecting it, because there was that murder in Sarajevo, and the whole thing which led up to it, but we knew a lot of the military men. My step-father having been commander of a division, all the men who were stationed in the country, in Gatchina, for instance, had to come and call on us and leave their visiting cards, and then some of them were invited to the house; mother knew their family or something; she wanted us to have some kind of rapport with other people. We used to drive to the station to see all the regiments off, and wave goodbye to them, and it was all very heart-rending, that they were all leaving.

RP: Was there enthusiasm for the struggle, or did people look upon this as potentially dangerous for the country?

Morgan: You know, I really don't know. Isn't that awful? we were young, and we were interested in other things; the war seemed so remote. Before that I had not been very happy; I don't know why. I was always very gloomy; I loved to ride on horseback, it was about the only thing I really enjoyed; we went to the theater a lot, to ballets, and some opera, but my great enthusiasm was riding, and of course when the war came on, then it was a little harder, because the men were all called, and the horse that I used to ride belonged to somebody else, so I was somewhat disrupted in that particular thing; it made me a little bit sad. And then we knew quite a few of the young officers; they used to come to call, and say hello and so forth. We didn't see too much of them, but sometimes they would be the brother of a friend, or something like that, which would bring them to us.

RP: And then the casualties began to mount?

Morgan: Yes, and then we were called on to help in the hospitals. We were very young; I was 17, but we were asked. All the young girls in town who were well bred were asked. It was not a military hospital, but they had nobody else. I think there was one doctor for the whole hospital, because the nurses had all gone to the front; everything was depleted.

RP: So although technically a nurse's aid you were taking the role of a nurse?

Morgan: I don't even know what role we took, because we had nothing to do with the bedmaking, or cleaning up or anything of that nature. They had peasant women who did all the work, but what we had to do was bandage, help the doctor when he was seeing patients, and sometimes stay overtime and wait at the door for people who would come in.

I remember one evening I was asked to stay later, and this man came in and he said "I got off the train. I was going to the front but I got off the train because I feel very ill." There was nobody in the hospital except me, that is, of the staff; it was full of patients, but they were mostly peasants. So I took him up to a room which was free, and I took his temperature which was very, very high. "I'll leave a note for the doctor when he comes in the morning," I said.

In the morning the doctor called me, and he said, "Did you touch that man?"

"Yes," I said, "I took his temperature."

And he said "You'll have to go into quarantine because he has spotted typhus." I had noticed when I was taking his temperature that his chest was all covered with spots, so I was in quarantine for two or three weeks. It was very boring obviously; I couldn't work in the hospital; I couldn't see anyone; I just had to stay in my room.

RP: Your room at the hospital?

Morgan: No, no, at home. So I could have given it to everybody at home, if I had had it. I think spotted typhus was carried by lice. I don't think it came from touching a person. Well, anyway, they didn'thave a chance in my case, because I never got it, but it was very annoying. I was completely quarantined; I couldn't go and see any friends.

RP: So you were in this capacity throughout the war?

Morgan: Throughout the war, yes. Then, towards the end of the war a lot of wounded began to come in, and then mother decided to open a little hospital. We had a building, it was not very big, but I think it had about thirty beds in it, and it was fixed up, more or less. I don't know who took care of it or anything. I know that we spent all our days there, but we didn't really do anything very much except bandage. Sometimes the bandage would fall off immediately because we didn't know how to do this thing, but I suppose it was a morale builder, and they were not really people who were very ill, but they were somebody, for instance, who came with a broken leg and had to wait until the leg mended. You know, things like that; it took a little time. They were not ordinary citizens; they were military men who were convalescing, and then they'd have to go back to the front again. So different doctors used to come in every day and check everybody, and it was a little bit better taken care of than the one we had worked in first, and mother was paying for it.

RP: The family must have had very good means.

Morgan: Oh, mother was very wealthy. But unfortunately she took all her fortune out of the United States and took it over to Russia about 1910 so it went down the drain with the revolution, completely.

RP: How did you feel about your work in the hospital?

Morgan: Oh, we were very patriotic; we had to do it. No, I didn't like it. I remember the first time I assisted in an operation. Imagine assisting in an operation and I had never even seen a little boy naked in my life. I threw up. I had to run out into the corridor and throw up. Oh, it was very unpleasant. And I remember another operation I took part in, and I was thinking of something else, and trying not to watch what they were doing. We had no anesthetics, so they had to give some liquor. Imagine, no anesthetics at all for awhile. There was a terrible shortage. But this particular operation the man was screaming his head off; the whole thing was horrible, and I was standing there, trying not to concentrate on what was going on, thinking of something else, and then suddenly I looked down and I had this leg in my arms--unattached! I am sorry to say I fainted.

There was no question whether the war was for the right or for the wrong; we hated the Germans and we wanted to do everything we could for the war.

RP: Yes, St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd.

Morgan: Yes, but of course we had one thing that was very difficult. My mother, first of all, her name was der Felden, which was a German name, and secondly she had a terrible accent; she spoke very poor Russian, so many people thought that she was German. She would go into a shop and give her name and the salesperson would look at her and say "Oh, Nemetskii /German/!" So she had a very difficult time.

In our moments away from the hospital we used to go to a little tennis club, and that's where we had our fun. We all played tennis, and all these officers would come and be playing tennis too. Then, during a sport, we didn't seem to have a governess with us all the time.

RP: A governess was around, then, even while you were working in the hospital?

Morgan: Oh yes! Sometimes they used to come and pick us up at the hospital and walk us home; very rarely did they let us walk in the evening alone. But at the tennis club we were free, and we met some very attractive young men there, and flirtations started.

RP: This takes you, then, through 1916, when things were getting increasingly difficult. Was the assassination of Rasputin looked upon as a patriotic act, or as an aberration?

Morgan: Oh, it was considered very patriotic, very much so. Because everybody hated Rasputin; they felt that he had a terrible influence on the Empress, and through her on the Emperor.

RP: But a great deal of this was exaggerated, was it not? Evidently, though, he did have a hypnotic power.

Morgan: Because he was able to cure the young Tsarevich. And now I have read some books about the medicines in Siberia. And there are really some very interesting herbs and things that people still use. Or he might have been just lucky. Or he might have been just lucky. He was really a horrid man; everybody who knew him thought that he was a terrible creature.

RP: Except for those in his own circle.

Morgan: Yes, his own circle. Madame Vyrubova, who introduced him to the Empress, thinking that he might help the boy, and he did help him, there is no denying it, but it really was one of the reasons that there were less and less people willing to take the side of the Tsar.

But we were very far away from all that, because you see my stepfather had already died, thank God, and we were living in the country; we had moved out of St. Petersburg, so we had very little contact with people there. Before that, mother had lots of friends who lived in St. Petersburg, and she was seeing them all the time, but when we moved out into the country we had very few people. There was the Grand Duke Michael, who used to come to see us all the time, who never talked of politics, obviously. And a few of the grand dukes who lived in Gatchina at that time. And the Dowager Empress used to come and live in Gatchina at that time. We used to see them quite a lot. And I used to play with

Prince Vasilii [Romanov] and the children in the palace; they had slides, indoor slides, and used to enjoy that very much. But otherwise I think mother was very much out of touch with the world, so when the revolution came it was quite a shock.

RP: What do you recall of February 1917? Was the change quite evident?

Morgan: No, not too evident at first except that the servants got a little bit disagreeable, and mother put red armbands on our arms, so that nobody would stop us on the street. Things got to be sticky, but we didn't realize it too much until finally one night we were all awakened, and soldiers came to the door and said "We want to see what you have in the house!" We had a great marvellous collection of antiques and different kinds of firearms which my father and then my stepfather both had collected, and they took every one of them.

RP: When did that occur?

Morgan: At the beginning of the revolution. I can't give you the date because I don't know, but it was very frightening. First the knocking on the door, and then they came in. Soon they came knocking on the door again, another night; they wanted something else, and then suddenly mother said to herself, "This is going to end very badly, because everybody knows that we have a great cellar of wines!" So then she had a file of servants stand, and take the bottles out of the cellar and pass from one to another. Then at a deep ditch by the street the neck of each bottle was knocked off and the street was running with wine for miles. After that they lost interest in coming. She was afraid they would come to the house, get drunk, and rape the girls. I thought that was a very clever move. Everybody said "She's crazy; that foreign woman is crazy, what she did, she poured all the wine on the street, all the good wine!"

I think we saved two bottles of Napoleon brandy, which we buried. It was very hard to do, so it must have still been February or March, the ground was not thawed yet, because we had a very difficult time burying those two bottles. I know where they are, but I don't think I'll ever be able to find them!

RP: So this was probably at the outset, in February or March?

Morgan: Yes. The Americans had already congratulated the Russians on how clever they were to depose the Tsar, and start a new democratic life. We were absolutely infuriated by that. It was some time after that. Before that they couldn't come knocking at your door and coming in at night. Then there were police, but later you were on your own.

We didn't feel it in the country that much, but then the governess was sent to St. Petersburg to feel things out, and see what it was like, and she used to come back with lurid tales about what was going on, so we felt we had to get out. Our name, der Felden, was a German name, and mother spoke Russian with a very bad accent, so that everybody took her for a German, and then all the grand dukes had visited us all the time, so we were definitely in danger.

RP: You were in double jeopardy, first from your social position, and second from the German implication.

Morgan: Yes, so mother went to the American embassy and asked them to help her, and they did. She had given up her citizenship, but she was able to get that status restored.

So we got on the train and went across Siberia. We left just before the Provisional Government was ousted and the Soviets took over [November 7, 1917]. And we left just before that, thank God.

I think the journey took two weeks. The train was full of soldiers, who were all running away from the front, who didn't want to fight anymore. The whole thing was in disarray, but we were just very lucky. I think it was the last train before Elihu Root got out, one of the last [scheduled] trains to cross Siberia. I don't think any [regular] trains ran after that. There were already trains that [did not follow a schedule] and people had to ride in box cars. But this was still a train with a little bathroom between the two compartments, still the old fashioned way of traveling, and they had a restaurant, although we couldn't always get to it because of the soldiers. Sometimes we were just fed through the window. We would buy things at the stations along the way.

At Vladivostok we got on to a Japanese steamer, and went to Tsuruga, Japan, and then to Yokohama. There we stayed about a year, thinking the revolution was going to be over, and we would go back.

Finally we went to the United States. We arrived in San Francisco, and then went by rail to New York, arriving on the day peace was declared [November 11, 1918].

We were then living on our jewelry. Mother had had something like $2,000,000 in the Credit Lyonnaise, but it had all been taken over during the war by the Russian government. And all the jewelry that was in the safe deposit vaults had been taken over too, so we had only what mother was wearing, or what she had around the house--she always wore two enormous diamonds, and another one on her throat, so those kept us going for a long time.

Then in the following year, 1919, I got married, to a Russian. He was sent from Denikin's army to Kolchak's army around the world, by way of the United States. I met him in New York. I have a clipping here that might amuse you, about that whole story.

RP: I am reading from an item in the New York American for Tuesday, July 29, 1919:

"GIRL REFUGEE TO MARRY HERE.
MISS CHRAPOVITSKY MEETS LIEUTENANT DE FILOSOFOV AFTER SHE FLEES TO AMERICA.

"With distinct interest society looks forward to the marriage of Miss Olga Chrapovitsky, heiress to a large estate in Russia, daughter of Mrs. Christopher Der Felden, of number 100 West 59th Street, to Lieutenant George De Filosofof of the Russian cavalry. The wedding will take place in the Russian church, Bridgeport, Connecticut, probably on August 23rd. On August 30th Lieutenant and Mrs. de Filosofof must sail for Siberia. There the young bride will enter an American hospital not far from Petrograd /!/ while her husband resumes his post to fight the Bolsheviki."

Morgan: I think they meant Vladivostok.

RP: "Miss Chrapovitsky returned from Newport yesterday to attend to pre-nuptial shopping. Of her meeting with and subsequent engagement to Lieutenant de Filosofof she said: 'We formerly lived in Petrograd, although we did not meet one another there, perhaps because we were both too young to attend the affairs of society. Our parents were well acquainted,however.'"

Morgan: That is all true.

RP: "'Then came the Revolution, when days and nights were alike horrible in Petrograd and our lives were threatened should we remain. In June 1917 my mother, sister and I were forced to leave our home and sacrifice everything for safety. We went into Siberia where my sister and I became attached to an American hospital for wounded soldiers. My sister is still in Siberia, but last

November my mother and I went to Japan and then came to America. It was here just a month ago that I met Lieutenant de Filosofof.'"

Morgan: Its a little mixed up, because my sister and my mother and I all came to Japan together, and then my sister joined the American Red Cross and went back to Siberia. So it is a little bit mixed up, but never mind.

RP: '"He had been wounded and gassed...'" Gassed? Not in the war with the Bolsheviks; this must have been against the Germans!

Morgan: No, he was much too young to be in the war. I think they invented a little bit; you how newspaper people do that. No, he had not been gassed; he was perfectly healthy.

RP: He hadn't been wounded either?

Morgan: I don't remember. I was married to him only one month.

RP "'...and had been sent with a score of other officers to America on a sort of health furlough. Friends introduced us...'"

Morgan: No, that is not true; they were sent to join Kolchak, because there were too few enlisted men and too many officers in Denikin's army, and they wanted to send officers over to Kolchak, who had a lot of men but no officers. So the newspaper people had it mixed up.

RP: "'friends introduced us; we had both known service and had much in common, perhaps our wedding seems sudden.'"

The other, from a paper in Bridgeport, Connecticut, is entitled: REFUGEES WED ON THE WAY HOME TO RUSSIA.

Morgan: /Looking at photo/. He was rather nice looking, now that I look back.

RP: "A marriage of international interest was solemnized at the Holy Ghost Russian Catholic Church today when Olga Chrapovitsky became the bride of Lieutenant de Filosofof, an officer in the bodyguard of the Tsar."

Morgan: This is also all invented! Because he was much too young! He certainly was not in the bodyguard of... Oh yes, he was! He was in the Pazheskii korpus, the Corps de Pages. It was for the very, very top of the aristocracy, but when they studied in it it was like any other military school, and then later they would wait behind the Emperor and Empress at table.

RP: "Miss Chrapovitsky is the oldest daughter of Madame Christopher Der Felden, late of Petrograd Russia and formerly of New York. Madame Der Felden is the daughter of the late Henry Augustus Taylor of New York, who figured in an international romance. As a young girl she met Nicholas Chrapovitsky while the Russian fleet lay in New York harbor. During the Russo-Japanese War Madame Chrapovitsky with her two daughters visited New York City and while here were informed that the husband and father had been lost..." /last portion missing/"

Morgan: I've got to arrange these things, because they're all falling apart.

RP: And another:
"HONEYMOON TRIP. STOPPING AT STAMFORD FOR A FEW DAYS, THEN PROCEEDING TO SAN FRANCISCO, where they sail on the 20th of September for Siberia, the Bride to continue Red Cross work under General Kolchak, while her husband will join his regiment under command of General Denikin."

Morgan: Which of course was nonsense! Denikin was in the south. You see how reporters get everything wrong. They don't always, of course, but...

RP: "Lieutenant de Filosofof has been in uniform for 13 out of his 23 years, having received his education at a military academy..."

Morgan: That was true, the poor guy had only been in military schools; he had known nothing except military life. At the age of fifteen he was in military school, then he was thrown into the fight against the communists; he was very young.

RP: "...then at once entering the army. He wears the silver star denoting service with the Tsar's own regiment, and one of his brother officers also wore the same decoration. Among the guests, Marguerite der Felden, the mother of the bride; General and Mrs. Theodore Lodyzhenskii, General and Mrs. George Mukhanov, Mrs. de Kruliov, Prince Victor Kochubey, Lieutenant Konstantine Bildau, Mr. Timely; Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Bergstrom, James Burnside, Frederick Burnside, Mrs. Frederick Burnside, Miss Henrietta and Miss Molly Burnside, F.Roskie, Mr. and Mrs. Harry R. Parsons of Bonnie Brae, Stockbridge, Mass., formerly of Morningside, Palm Point..." etc.

Morgan: Then this is a long story of how Filosofof divorces me. /Pause; off the record remarks/. But I was the one who paid for the divorce. I still have the lawyers' letters telling me that I owe $650. Anyway, I divorced him. I had a very difficult time getting a divorce, a terrible time. But anyway I got it finally, in Paris.

We left, intending to go to Siberia. I could not get in, however, so he went on. I stayed in Japan for awhile and then came back.

RP: So you never got to Siberia? Perhaps it was just as well.

Morgan: I suppose so. But it was all sort of hand-to-mouth, as you say in English, you never knew where your next penny was coming from. I had a few jewels, and I would sell something. Life seemed very cheap in Japan. I stayed with some friends, but they were not very well off, so I had to rent the room from them, but still I probably paid practically nothing.

When I came to America the second time, and we had to earn our living, my sister and I took an apartment on 14th Street West, and it was on the ground floor, lower than the ground floor, so you could only see people's feet walking by. It must have been very cheap. I have no idea of how much we paid.

We had never cooked in our life; we didn't know how to do anything, not even cook an egg, but we had to. We had absolutely no money. I remember we sold two fur scarfs, and that kept us going for two or three months. And then we got sort of door-to-door selling jobs until we finally took a secretarial course, and then it became easier, with languages, to get some kind of a more or less respectable job, and later I was able to be sales lady in a good district of 5th Avenue. It was called Chez Rosette, and then for a little while I worked in Bergdorf's.

RP: So by these means it took two or three years, and then you were fairly well on your feet?

Morgan: I don't think we really got on our feet too well for quite awhile yet, because we didn't make very much. But then mother had a little tail end of her stocks and bonds which had not been sold when she took everything to Russia, so those stocks and bonds already were bringing her a little money. She never sold the capital. She should have, of course, but she never did; she just lived very frugally on what they brought, and then she did some writing. One story, called "The Buddha," appeared in Scribners, sometime in the late 1920's.

Bit by bit, things got better. We got a nicer apartment, we moved to 110th and 114th Street, I think, near Riverside Drive, and that already was much nicer than living on 14th Street. And then finally when my sister got married--she married very well--we were on 78th Street between Park and Madison, I think. It was a small apartment, a sort of walkup, but still it was quite a nice district.

RP: New York must have been nicer to live in then.

Morgan: Oh yes, it was very nice. I used to go out to parties and sometimes come back on the subway late at night at 1 o'clock in the morning, with never any fear of anything. I couldn't afford taxis, so I had to use the underground.

RP: It must have been difficult for nearly all of the refugees to adapt to this new life.

Morgan: Yes, my sister and I joined an organization which was called Russian Refugee Relief. We were paid a salary for working there; we worked as secretaries. This organization was helped by many Americans, and it was specially arranged to find jobs for people who had come into the country. Most of them were well-educated and spoke foreign languages, so that helped. But the jobs we could find them would be in buscuit factories, or in soap factories, or in places like Elizabeth Arden, making creams and things. If they were very good looking and had beautiful skins she would let them be sales ladies. But it was very hard for most people when they came over, very hard.

Because a lot of them came out, you know, with the White Army through the Crimea, then through Constantinople. They stayed at Constantinople for awhile, then they went on into Africa and then came out slowly to the United States. A lot of them stayed in Paris. There are still plenty of them there.

RP: You mentioned the conflicting ideas as to what Russians should be. You yourself were bridging two cultures. Are Russians different than other nationalities? Do they have distinctive characteristics?

Morgan: I don't know. The aristocracy--it's hard to tell--I think they have some distinct characteristics. But of course that had a lot to do with your education, with your way of life, with thinking. For instance, we had one lady--I forget her name--who was very well born. When she came here she said "I'm going to support myself." So she went out and completely broke her ties with everybody; we never saw her anymore. She became a cleaning lady, and she said "I have such a job that I don't want people to know me." She was ashamed of what she was doing. We wouldn't be ashamed of whatever we were doing.

RP: Others might have menial jobs but retained their ties?

Morgan: Yes, some did, but she wouldn't; she was so ashamed of what she had to do. So you never can tell. And then of course we had two or three places where we all met. There was a General Lodyzhenskii, who opened a restaurant which he called the "Russian Eagle," a very well known restaurant in New York, and a lot of Russians would go there. And I guess he was kind, because sometimes he would meet people who had very little money, because you know he would give them a little credit, but it was one of the favorite places, lots of Americans went there. It was on 57th Street. He did very well for himself. A few of them were able to.

Quite a few of the women did very well in Paris in dressmaking and designing, very well, because they were used to beautiful clothes, and they knew what they were doing and they got very good jobs. Prince Yusupov, for instance, who was married to the Tsar's niece, Irina. She was one of Princess Xenia's children, a very large family.

RP: He was the Yusupov who helped to kill Rasputin?

Morgan: Yes. We knew him very well. He and she used to come and have dinner with us in New York when we had this tiny little apartment and very little money, and he started a dressmaking place in Paris, and did very well. His place was very popular.

RP: How was he looked upon by other Russians?

Morgan: With great envy! Because he did well, and was able to live very well. He had a little more money than others, because his family was very wealthy; they had country homes in Nice.

RP:

/Discussion of her divorce from first husband, de Filosofof, and subsequent remarriage. Shows photograph in another article, in Vogue, April 1, 1928/.

Morgan: This me while I was living in New York /as Mrs. Edward B. Condon, second marriage/. I was for awhile very chic. I've gone up and down so much. I'd be written up in all the newspapers about my clothes and everything else, and then I'd again start with nothing!

RP: Could you say a few words now about this book that you have, about the possible survival of the Imperial family--have you any thoughts on that?

Morgan: I don't somehow believe it. I think that the people who made the investigation did their best, but do *you* feel that it is possible at all that the Tsar could have survived? I don't think so. I knew a man here, a former Russian officer. Everybody said that he was rather--a very vulgar expression--a B.S.-er.

RP: There are many such, in all nationalities.

Morgan: And he told me that the Tsarevich was one of his best friends when he was a little boy, that he played with him in Tsarskoe Selo, and that he was in New York, and he had seen him there. However, he had such a reputation for being a liar that it didn't make much impression. I can't remember his name now, but I was rather nice to his mother, who was quite old and very religious, and I used to go and see her and sometimes bring her something--a book on religion or something of that sort, so he was a little grateful to me that I had not neglected her; I hadn't known her before. And then he disappeared. His little story about Alexis is mentioned in that book.

RP: Well, people like a good story, and Russia in particular has had so many stories of imposters.

Morgan: Now for instance Vasilii and his family don't believe in that at all, and they didn't believe in Anastasia either. But my family and Xenia Leeds, who had her in their home for quite awhile, we all believed in her.

She is still living, I saw her on TV a couple of years ago, and she was very funny. She had a hat on and her husband said "Please take your hat off, because the newsmen can't see your face," and she said "I don't care!" "Oh, but do take it off!" he said. And she said, "I spit on them all!" Right on TV! It really was funny, and she didn't care about newsmen, and I think that is a little bit characteristic of the Tsar's family. They didn't have newsmen in those days hounding everybody. I am sure that the poor Queen of England would be very glad to say "I spit on you all," sometimes, if she had a chance, and if she wasn't so well brought up!

RP: She married a professor of Russian history.

Morgan: Yes, and he's twenty years younger than she is. They are still trying to prove something, but it is very hard to prove. Botkin brought her over, when she first came here. Botkin was the son of their doctor, and we knew him very well, and he was completely sure that it was she, and he was with the children all the time. I think the father, Dr. Botkin, was shot with the whole Imperial family. The son at the time was very interested in religion, and he had gone to a monastery, so he didn't get shot. Then afterwards he escaped the communists. He was sure that she was alive, and when she came to Europe, and was in an insane asylum for awhile--well you probably know all this.

RP: It is a strange story, one that fascinates people.

Morgan: Yes, but there were so many claimants. My mother was very close to the Dowager Empress, and she said that when she used to go there, she would often see Anastasia, and she said that she wouldn't speak Russian, "that dreadful language; I don't know it, and I don't want to speak it!" So she spoke English and German, but if she would drop a cup or something else would happen she would immediately revert to Russian. In other words, you could see that it was her language, and that she knew it pretty well, but they did talk mostly in English, because the Empress learned Russian quite late, only when she became a bride. So they did speak English mostly at home. All the Imperial family spoke English; they still do. I don't think the Empress ever wrote in Russian, maybe a few words; otherwise it was always in English.

RP: Have you ever seen Anastasia?

Morgan: Yes, when she was staying with Miss Annie Jennings, in New York. I went to see her several times, but I had hardly known her when I was in the Crimea in 1914. She was younger, quite a bit younger, and she didn't come to the dinner parties, where I met the older sisters. I talked with her a little bit, and I brought her a bottle of perfume, and she was very gracious and nice about it, but there wasn't anything that I could remember that was anything special, and I didn't know her enough when she was a child to be able to absolutely pinpoint it and say that it was she. My mother seemed to think that she knew so many things about the family that she could not have been an imposter.

But several of the Imperial family all said that she was not Anastasia; they wouldn't even come to see her.

INDEX - MORGAN

Botkin, Gleb, 22

Chrapovitsky, Nicholas de, father; died on *Alexander III*, 1905, 1

Der Felden, Christopher, Baron, step-father, 3

Gatchina, palace and estate, 4, 5

George, Grand Duke, 8

Lodyzhenskii, General, proprietor of "Russia Eagle" restaurant, New York, 1920's, 21

Maria Fedorovna, Dowager Empress, 3

Michael, Grand Duke, 3, 13

Morgan, Olga (nee Chrapovitsky), birth, 1; governesses, 3, 4; nursing, 10, 11; departure for USA via Siberia, 15; marriage to Lieutenant de Filosofov, March 1919, 16, 21; marriage to Edward B. Conton, 21

Imperial family, Romanovs, purported survival, 22; the question of Anastasia, 22

Grand Duchess Olga, 6

Rasputin, 13

Revolution, February 1917, 14

Romanov, Vasilii, Prince, 9, 14

Seversky, aircraft designer, 7

Taylor, Henry August, grandfather, 1

Taylor, Henry, uncle, 1

Taylor, Margaret (1870-1942), mother, 1

Theaters, 7

Vyrubova, Madam, friend of Rasputin, 13

World War I, beginning, August 1914, 4

Yusupov, Prince, slayer of Rasputin, 21

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Vera Aleksandrova Elischer

Recollections of Growing Up on a Russian Estate and Nursing in World War I

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
July 28 - 31, 1981
at Monterey, California

Copyright © 1986 by The Regents of the University of California

VERA ELISCHER

Although born at the opening of the present century, Vera Aleksandrovna Elischer gives the impression of being very much younger, directing her energy and spirit into long tours, and hospitality for family and friends. In our interviews she recounts her memories of an idyllic life on her family's country estate. World War I cut short her education and swept her into nursing. After the Revolution, in June 1918, she was employed by an Austro-Hungarian commission, under the Red Cross, to look after prisoners of war and prepare them for dispatch to their homeland. She married a co-worker, Alii Bruckner. In danger of arrest by the Cheka, they went to Petersburg, where, although still in danger, they lived until 2 June 1920, when they were able to leave with a transport of Austro-Hungarians.

She lived in Hungary for many years, during which time she remarried. Emigrating to the United States after 1945, she and her husband settled in California, and eventually in Monterey. Widowed, she supported her daughter and two sons by teaching Russian at the Institute of International Studies in Monterey and renting out rooms to students at the Defense Language Institute at the Presidio of Monterey. One of her sons is now head of a driving school; the other, an engineer has attained a high position on scientific projects. A daughter is married to a dentist in Southern California.

Since her children are sufficiently well fixed, Mrs. Elischer uses her funds to a large extent for travel. She has been twice in the Soviet Union, has made several trips to Western and Eastern Europe, and has been on several cruises.

The house, where the interviews were conducted, takes up most of a large corner lot. Probably built in the early 1920's, it is comfortable and spacious. The living room contains a few Russian pictures, and there are many photographs in her bedroom, although very few dating back to the time she spent in Russia. Mrs. Elischer is gregarious and callers, by telephone and in person, are frequent.

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1985

Vera Elischer, Monterey

[Interview: 28-31 July 1981]

Elischer: I was born Vera Aleksandrovna Voronets. My father, they told me, had been a vice-governor of Vologda gubernia. He was 17 years older than my mother; he had participated in the Russo-Turkish War, in which he was wounded.

Then he retired from the military service, and was appointed to the State Council. That is all I know about him. He died in 1901, when I was only 13 months old, and was buried on my grandfather's estate, called Mikhailovskaia, near the station of Lykoshino, in Novgorod gubernia. My grandfather--on my mother's side--built the church on a hill, which you can see from the railway, and all his family, including himself, and his daughters, were buried in the sklep (crypt) under the altar of this church. My father was buried outside the church--my mother didn't want to bury him with my grandfather's family. Instead, she brought some marble from Italy and they made a big marble cross on his grave and my mother painted the ikon of Jesus Gefsemanskii (in the Garden of Gethsamine) in the middle of the cross. It was very well kept. Later on my uncle, Nikolai Panaev, and one of his daughters were buried in the same place, so there were only these three graves. It was quite a large place, and nobody else could be buried there.

Pierce: So the estate was in Novgorod gubernia, and in both Borovichi and Valdai uezds?

Elischer: Yes, they were adjoining. So it was the same estate, just overlapping. There was a big monastery at Valdai, very well known where the Iver icon [Iverskaia ikona Bozhiei materi] was. It is a copy of the original in Athens which they said produces miracles, and every year in July the icon would go away from the monastery and go around the uezd, Valdaiskii uezd. My grandfather built this church and gave it to Iver monastery.

My grandfather was Kronit Aleksandrovich Panaev. Kronit is a very rare name; it derives from the Greek kronos. So my mother was Vera Kronitovna, her brother was Kronit Kronitovich, and my brother, four years older than I, was also named Kronit. The family of Panaev comes from Kazan gubernia. They have some Tatar blood; that's why my eyes are a little slanted, so that people have sometimes called me Genghis Khan!

My grandfather's brother, Valerian Aleksandrovich Panaev,* was the main engineer and supervisor of the railway from St. Petersburg to Moscow, the one the Tsar said should be absolutely straight. Valerian Panaev engaged my grandfather, Kronit, and his brothers, Ippolit and Arkadii, to supervise the engineering. Their mother sat on this hill and looked on--because from the hill you could see the whole panorama--where later on my grandfather built this church, in memory of his mother, and bought this estate. The Tsar gave each brother jewels, in gratitude for this railway; I still have a big pearl which was given to my father. Valerian became a very well known architect and he built in Petersburg--it still exists--the theater bouffe, and a lot of other structures. They had the Italian opera there. His daughter was a well known singer; she sang a lot at the court, and Tchaikovsky adored her. Later on she married one of Tchaikovsky's nephews, George Kartsov. She was a beautiful woman, with a beautiful voice, and Apikhtin, the Russian poet, of the 19th century,** dedicated several poems to her. One is very beautiful: "Ona krasavitsa po prigorovu tsveta" and he describes her. I have this book; I can show you these poems and to her husband Kartsov. When Tchaikovsky composed "Eugene Onegin" he wanted her to sing Tatiana, because he composed many songs for her which she sang in the court, but her father said "It's impossible; no lady can be an opera singer!" But later on when he built his own theater, and the Italian opera came--Mazzini, Battistini, and Figner--she sang there, several times. She had a really beautiful voice; I remember her singing.

---

* Panaev, Valerian Aleksandrovich (1824 - ?), engineer. In 1844, on finishing engineering school with the rank of ensign, he began service on the Vikolaevsk railway. He built the Grushevsk railway in 1860, and half of the Kursk-Kiev railway. In 1870 he retired. He wrote several brochures in Russian and French on the economics of railroad policy, and the books: Vostochnyi Vopros [Eastern question] (1877) and Finansovye i Ekonomicheskie Voprosy [Financial and Economic Problems] (1878). He also built the Panaev theater in St. Petersburg. Brockhaus-Efron Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' (St. Petersburg, 1897), Vol. 44, p. 680.

** Aleksei Nikolaevich Apukhtin (1841-1893).

When my father died, my mother was still quite young, with my brother, five years old, and myself, so we moved to my grandfather's big estate, where [for several years] we lived winter and summer. It was a beautiful estate, not with palaces, but big mansions; we lived in the biggest in the summer and in the other during the winter. The winter house was smaller. We, the family--the close family--moved there in the winter because the big house was difficult to heat.

We had, I think, seven houses in all where the family would come in summer. The brothers had big families, so everybody came there. The houses were completely equipped with everything, and then they got servants from our village, Mikhailovskoe, so it was very comfortable. And each house had a name--Krasnyi dom [Red house], Uiutnaia [comfortable], and Okhotnichyi dom [hunting house].

Pierce: These seven were like a little village then, all arranged together?

Elischer: No, they were in completely different places; they had complete privacy all around. The main houses, the Krasnyi dom, and the house where we lived with my mother were in the middle, quite close, and the others were in the periphery, half a mile, or a mile, across the river, over the bridge. The carriage house was close to the big house, and horses for riding, but the farm was across the river. It was excellent; we had many cows and they sent milk, butter and everything to Sumakóv, and to Petersburg. We had a very good manager, a Finn, who managed the whole estate.

Later on, when the family had grown up and did not want to come anymore, my grandfather was in a harder situation; his sons spent a lot of money and were always sending telegrams that they had to have more. He gradually sold a lot of land and then in the summer he started to rent those houses to people from Petersburg and two of them to officers from some of the regiments from Tsarskoe Selo who came and founded a hunting club there.

Pierce: Who were the servants?

Elischer: We always had a lot of servants, especially in the summer, when the guests came, so we had to provide servants for each house. They were absolutely furnished with everything for the household. We usually provided one maid, from the village, from the *krestnitsy*, and they were paid by the guests, usually. I don't know how they did it, but there were so many young people who would love to work, and then come to Petersburg. Our servants in Petersburg were from our village.

Pierce: Did they like their work?

Elischer: Yes, they liked it.

Pierce: Were any of them lazy?

Elischer: No, there were so many they didn't have to work very hard, so they enjoyed it, I think. The last servant we had, already during the change, was alone, and she sued my brother, saying that she had had a child by him. She was very nasty.

Pierce: And the governesses?

Elischer: They wrote away to Switzerland, and to France, and they were sent to us. Some of them very nice, and some of them not at all. If my brother and I didn't like the governess we did something, we played dirty tricks. We put a glass of water in her bed. We cut brushes in the bed, and so forth, so they would leave, and another one would come. The one we liked the most was a young French girl, who taught us a lot of French songs. I remember that some of them were very daring. When we sang them the people were horrified, but everybody loved her because she was very gay. She was the last one that I remember very well.

Pierce: How long would someone like that remain?

Elischer: They stayed two or three years, as long as they wanted.

Pierce: Was this by contract, or by verbal agreement?

Elischer: Just by agreement. I don't know how much they paid them, maybe forty rubles a month. And they had everything. They loved it there because there were always so many people--officers--in the house. I remember that she taught us to make a liqueur, chartreuse, from seeds. She was very nice, the last one, the daring one--pretty and nice.

Pierce: Could you describe the routine of things as you remember it? Just how did a year go?

Elischer: During the winter we lived in the winter house, only the family. My grandfather, we two children, my mother, my uncle, who later married Honey, a British girl, Ethel Dicken. She had a child, but he died. And we all lived together, and the governesses, and we usually got up very early, we had to have breakfast with my grandfather, who was already up at 6 o'clock and came back for breakfast, from work if it was summer time. If it was winter he was there, and when my grandfather stopped eating we had to stop whether we had finished or not. When they served the soup, for instance, and he finished his, and put down his spoon, we had to put down our spoons. We started the dinner with a prayer, and finished the dinner with a prayer, and everybody, my mother included, respected my grandfather greatly. He loved me very much. He had his own room, a big study, where he sat all day long, no one else was supposed to go there, but he invited me, and I would go and he would teach me to read. The letters were cut out of visiting cards of the guests, and he made them different colors. He started when I was about four, maybe, maybe earlier, so that at five I could read everything completely well.

Yes, then I always see myself sitting with my grandfather, and learning to read, and how I read, and how I stole books to read, because they didn't give me all.

Pierce: Why? Did they think you were too young?

Elischer: Yes, it was very strict at this time, but I read very early Dostoevsky and Turgenev's Pervoe liubov'--it was a big event when I read it. And then we read a lot in French.

And my grandfather would play solitaires and I would help him, and [would be with him] if something happened in the family. Two of Mother's three brothers were living in Petersburg. One was in the horse guards [konnogvardeiskii polk], and the other was a grenadier, a dragoon. The youngest brother, Nikolai--his son, Michael Panaev, a dancer, still lives in Los Angeles--was very sick, with only one lung. He quit the military service, but the others stayed in and sent telegrams that they needed money. Then my grandfather would be very upset and closed the door and stayed there, and paid, paid, and paid.

He always had to spend much time going over the accounts because there were two big flour mills, and that required a lot of work. And my mother learned the bookkeeping, two systems, I don't know what kind, Italian or whatever, because she was widowed, and she helped him a great deal with the accounts.

Pierce: How were the mills powered?

Elischer: With water, with a water wheel. But I think later on they had electricity; all the last years we had electricity.

Pierce: There were lots of entertainments, and many guests.

Elischer: Especially in July, for the 20th of July. We had a big place where the tennis courts were and a big pavilion, that was brought from an exhibit at Borovichi. And in this pavilion the big festivities were held, and they had the buffet and the children of the peasants came for all kinds of entertainment. For instance, they put bags on them and they had to hop for a certain distance.

Pierce: Sack races.

Elischer: Yes, and they had all kind of plays, and the children took part. I was very little, I didn't do it. And then in the morning, with my grandfather, we went in all the villages and then in the evening there were fireworks, and the peasants and everybody else came, and all of that was in this place. The games were held in a big field in front. Then there was a lot of horseback riding, and jumping.

Once--I was probably between four and five--we had a big dinner and the table wasn't cleared immediately, because everyone went to the salons or living rooms, and the servants went for their dinner, and my nurse certainly went too, to eat. On that occasion I escaped and went to the dining room. They never drank everything--something always remained in the glasses--so I poured everything together in one glass and drank it all, including the beer and everything else that was there. Then I got very sleepy, and when they found me I was in the big arm chair in the corner, asleep. So I started very young. Now I don't like it so much as I liked it then.

Hunting was also a favorite sport. My mother took part in that and sometimes she shot more than the others.

Pierce: Where did she learn?

Elischer: Probably on the estate, when she was a young girl.

Pierce: This would be with a shotgun?

Elischer: Rifles, and double barrelled shotguns.

My brother got a small double barreled shotgun; he was very young and I was horrified; I never hunted. They called it a Monte Cristo, it was a small gun, for small birds--sparrows--and they would eat them. I loved to eat them too, but I hated to see them killed; they would fry them and put them on a crouton and you could eat even the bones. It was very delicate, very good.

Pierce: What livestock did they have on the estate, besides the horses?

Elischer: Horses, pigs, sheep, everything that belonged there, that for me was a real farm. The farms here, in California, are not mixed farms, so when I went to Indiana I liked those mixed farms, that was what appealed to me, a lot of animals. And there was a lot of poultry. A poultry yard, they called it [*ptichii dvor*]; you had geese, turkeys, ducks and chickens, and they sent eggs also to Petersburg.

Pierce: That was in what town?

Elischer: Lykoshino in Borovichi uezd. [The estate was] in two uezds Borovicheskii - Borovichi - and Valdaiskii uezds in Novgorod guberniia, halfway between Moscow and Petersburg, on that strait railway. My two uncles spent enough money, and my grandfather sold half of the estate to pay their debts. Kronit Kronitovich then retired and became zemskii nachal'nik in Borovichi. He was elected by the local landholders.

Pierce: Would the local peasants have a vote?

Elischer: I don't think so.

Pierce: Was the zemstvo a major factor in the life of the region?

Elischer: It was a big factor. During the first war they worked very hard for the war; they had a good organization. If they had remained, communism would not have come. Automatically I am sure, Russia would have become a constitutional monarchy, like England. And then the fate of the Duma would have changed. But they were not popular enough. But [laughs ruefully] you have to accept...

Pierce: As a child, what did you see of the peasants, how much did you associate with them?

Elischer: Oh, very much, because our estate was on the border of the village of the same name, Mikhailovskoe, most of the village people were god daughters or god sons of my parents, my grandfather. They adored my grandfather because he lived with the peasants. He got up at 5 or half past five, he went always to the harvesting, and worked with them, and my mother willingly worked one day at least every summer, so she could cut with the scythe. The women usually didn't do that but she worked in the row with the men, and never gave up because if you give up for a moment they will cut your legs, and so she had to go and keep the tempo of the men. Everything was done by hand, only *later* on we had the machines on the farm. We children went out there too, and had picnics. The peasants were always *very* nice to us, to all of us. On the 24th of July, the holiday of the village, Il'in den', the day of the prophet St. Elias, and we had to go, all of the family, through the village, and in each house you had to stop and eat something. For this day the peasants prepared beer, they brewed it themselves in big kettles.

Pierce: Was this kvass?

Elischer: No, beer, made from hops. And they worked on that a lot, and they had this beer, and all kinds of Russian things--piroshki, pirogi, vatrushkas, and tvorog. So we had to stop at each house, and when we entered the house in the corner--I think it was in the left corner--they had the icons, surrounded with towels that they had embroidered themselves, and usually they had an izba. You came in the part which was neutral. They lived in the part to the right with the big stove, while to the left was the festive part, which was kept very clean. They usually didn't go there during the week, only on Sundays, when they had dinners there. It was always very clean, they had a lot of pillows on the beds, and it was beautiful, all with handworks that they did during the winter, when they didn't have harvesting. In the evening, all the women would come together, they would sit and embroider and sing. That was in the winter, because the winter was very cold and they couldn't go out. They gathered together in one house and they sang, sometimes big sons, sometimes these short little chastushkis as they are called. I made a collection of these chastushki, but later they were lost.

Shila milomu rubashku
da iskrapi..   ristash..
da elo ego telo
chtoby pomniu on menia

That was one.

Po doroshki vyzhit
telenochik
Ia ego za khvost
A on milionichik ?

And such things. Four lines. I remember very few. Always the same tune, with a harmonica. And then the longer songs, "Sten'ka Razin," and "Ukhor kupets," those they sang too.

Pierce: What was the attitude of the peasants, then, toward your family?

Elischer: Very, very good! They had to work a certain number of days for the farm, but if they worked over that they had to be paid, and I know my grandfather paid them very well--I don't remember how much--25 or perhaps 40 kopecks a day.

Pierce: They weren't just being sly again, and pretending that they liked the family?

Elischer: No! My mother opened a little hospital; the doctor came once or twice a month and my mother went there. When someone was injured she bandaged them. I couldn't bear the sight of blood so I always screamed and went away. They were very, very grateful; they called them Kresńyi papen'ka and kresńai mat', god father and god mother. And then he helped them; he sold them a lot of land and they had an arrangement with the peasant bank which paid my grandfather, but very slowly, or not at all. So he tried to help them a great deal and he was always with them and they were very attached to him.

The peasants disliked it very much when my grandfather and especially my uncle, who inherited the estate, hired a manager, who was a Chukhonets, a Finn, they thought "It's a German, and it was he who brought the machines." When he brought the threshing machine for the harvesting, they were furious and said "That comes from Germany!" They thought of all the machines, whatever they were, as German. They felt that because of the machines they got less work, which irritated them very much. My grandfather and my uncle thought they could give the community these machines if they wanted them, but they never wanted them. And then electricity was installed on the farm, and milking machines, to separate the milk, and they just hated them, because they used to put the milk in big earthenware containers and then skim it by hand and when the machines came they didn't have to do it. So they were irritated by everything, and they thought "All is nemcherá--Nemcherá prinesla" [It's all German--they have brought the German things.]. And that's why the war of 1914 was very popular.

Pierce: What is a Chukhonets?

Elischer: It is a term for a Finn, anyone who came from Finland, or from parts of Finland which were in Russia. They were very good farmers, excellent, and specialists in dairying.

Pierce: Did they not realize that the manager was not a German?

Elischer: They didn't know. For them German meant someone was foreign--nemcherá--anything which came from outside Russia, so they disliked this manager very much, although he was excellent; he increased the output of the farm very much, and we had electricity already when my grandfather died, in 1906, I think, after the Japanese war.

Pierce: So the machinery was introduced only on your grandfather's part of the estate?

Elischer: Yes, and everywhere it started, it spread.

Pierce: What did the peasants call their community?

Elischer: It was the mir, and every year or two they redistributed the land between them, so it was like a commune.

Pierce: Did they like this?

Elischer: Yes, I think they liked the whole procedure. Sometimes someone got a bad [piece of land] one year and sometimes he had a piece of land here and then another piece half a mile away and that was very incorrect, because they wanted to distribute [it] so that the quality of the land would be more equal.

Pierce: Stolypin was against this; he wanted to change it.

Elischer: Yes, and he was right. In many things he was very wise.

When we were older and no longer lived on the big estate, but on our small [one] then my mother read every evening--Shakespeare usually, in English, and Schiller. And I hated it when she read in German, and I didn't understand it, and I didn't want to learn it. They tried to hire a German nurse, but I didn't like her--you see that was the influence I hated. Just the mere fact that it was German, I hated it, even though my grandmother was a Rizenkampf, not a German, but a Baltic German. I think it was bred into me, but I got used to that. I don't know why.

The peasants thought that everything that came from there was evil, because they believed the machines were evil for them. And I hate machines too; I like to work with my own hands; it's still in me, even today! When Vera [my daughter] says "Such a mixer!" I tell her just to keep it, I don't like a mixer; I have my two hands. The Russians call it perezhitok starogo, a survival of the past, I am very modern in many ways, but the perezhitok starogo is very strong in me.

Pierce: Could you tell something about the customs of the peasantry, their beliefs and superstitions?

Elischer: That I cannot tell you because the whole of Russia is full of superstitions, not only the peasants but the higher classes!

Pierce: What are some of them?

Elischer: One was the evil eye, if somebody looked at you with it, that was very bad.

Pierce: What would you do against the evil eye?

Elischer: I don't know; I really don't know.

Pierce: What brought bad luck? Anything like a cat walking in front of you?

Elischer: Yes, especially a black cat. If a black cat crossed the road... and I still have this superstition! If I go in a car and a cat runs in front. It's funny, but its born in you.

Pierce: What about the number 13?

Elischer: Thirteen, yes, because of Jesus and the Apostles.

Pierce: And what of customs regarding marriage? Did the peasants have different customs than the upper classes? How did their marriages differ?

Elischer: In the beginning it was so that the bride didn't see the groom, and the parents arranged it, and between the parents was a matchmaker, svakha, who came to talk it over, with first one set of parents and then the other, how much land, how many if she gets a house, or how much linen she would get, so all those things were discussed, and then they brought them together and they were married.

Pierce: You mention the linen, was this part of the dowry?

Elischer: Yes, the dowry was mainly the linen, how many towels, how many pillows, how many sheets. That was very important, because they didn't have much money. So they usually started to collect it from childhood, even in the big families, I know that my mother had a big chest, filled with beautiful linen, stitched and embroidered in monasteries by the nuns, even the lace was done by hand. The nuns or the young girls who went to become nuns.

Pierce: Russia was known as "Holy Russia" and it is said that the Russians are a deeply religious people. Would you say that this is so?

Elischer: It is true. But they have many perezhitki starogo--survivals of ancient times--and it is still alive. Like the belief in the bad spirit, the zloi dukh. I explained to my students--I don't know whether it is true or not, but this is my theory--that the oven they call in Russian "dukhovka" may be called that because the Russians had the superstition that the spirits are hiding there, when someone dies, they are still in your house, in the big ovens. In the country they had these big ovens, made of brick, where they baked the bread, and the used to say 'The spirit lives there!' [Tam zhivet dukh] so I think that's why they call it dukhovka.

Pierce: A rather hot place to hide.

Elischer: Yes, but the peasants slept on the top because it was warm. They believed in God and also in bad spirits. I cannot remember all of them. They called one the domovoi. It lived in the house.

Pierce: This was the house spirit, and I have heard that a little food had to be put out for it.

Elischer: Yes, and that's what they believed. That's from times past, long ago. The domovoi was a good spirit, was it not, except if it wasn't given something and then he could turn otherwise?

Pierce: Do you think they really believed it, or was it just a kind of old custom fondly retained?

Elischer: No, I think they believed it. Then there were other things, the rusalka for instance. The rusalka lived in the water, a fish-like woman. But that they have many places, I think, in Ireland, and Denmark, they believe in mermaids. It's the same.

Pierce: When someone died, what customs were followed?

Elischer: First of all, you washed the dead person--it was usually somebody who was close--and dressed it, and the body would stay three days in the house. They would take all the furniture from the room, and the plants and cover everything with white sheets. Usually the body was laid diagonally in the room with the head pointing toward the icon and then they put it in the coffin, and it would stay three days this way. And sometimes it was the opposite, I don't know why, but usually it was this way, and twice a day they had panikhidy [required services] and all the people would come to the panikhid with candles.

Pierce: Where was this held?

Elischer: In this room, around the coffin, and the coffin was open, so you could see, and in summer it wasn't very pleasant because they couldn't prepare the body. The room was filled with flowers, it was hard to stand there, the candles, the flowers and the body which was not always very good, and then they would take [the body] to the church, and there a mass was held--I have a record of the mass--and then they would close the coffin and take it to the grave. And the pallbearers were always friends or close people to the deceased, and they would put it down in the [grave] and each of them, like you do had to take a little bit of earth and throw it on the coffin. I think they do this here, too, do they not?

And then in the old time--we didn't do that but many people, especially the peasants, they cried! and wailed!

They would cry and sit there, and you wouldn't leave that body alone, all the time you would read from the Holy Scriptures. Even in Santa Barbara, when an American died, who was very close to one Russian woman, she and I took turns reading and we didn't leave, so he was never alone. And they believe that you pray for forty days. On the ninth day, they have a service and on the fortieth day you have another service.

Pierce: And all of that time the spirit of the dead person remains around?

Elischer: Yes, for his peace. You know, I don't even dwell on these things; where I'll be forty days afterward I don't know.

Pierce: I have heard that a window is kept open, so the spirit can go out.

Elischer: Yes, to be free to circulate.

Pierce: And that food is left for the spirit during this time.

Elischer: We didn't leave any. I don't know, probably in the old time they did it, but we didn't.

Pierce: You mentioned something rather interesting, your theory about the peasantry and the years that were given to them. Could you elaborate on this?

Elischer: Yes, I always explained to my students that only in the Russian language do we say that the years that we live are given to us, with the dative case: *Mne dvadtsat' let, mne tridsat' let. Bog dast eshche desiat'*. All those refer to it as if it is God who gives us the years; we don't take these years, as they state it in French--"I have thirty years", or in English, "I *am* thirty years old". I explained to the students that the Russian faith is so big that anything that comes they think it comes from the good Lord, sometimes the Devil takes over and dictates to you, and that's why, I explained, that the Russian people accept Fate, accept all that comes, and for me it starts with this moment that they talk about their age, *Bog dast*, they said, *eshche deviat' let* [God gives yet another ten years].

Pierce: So this fatalism, then, is one of the aspects of the Russian character?

Elischer: Yes, but the fate comes from God, it does not come by itself.

Pierce: How do you look upon the Russian character; what makes Russians different from other peoples?

Elischer: Because by the geographical situation already, Russia is a mixture of East and West, and until Peter the Great, the East predominated. Peter brought the West to Russia, and they adapted to it pretty well, although in the beginning they wouldn't, like them, shave their beards and cut their hair, and were reluctant to take the way of life of Western Europe. Certainly we had many mixtures, just as I have for instance Tatar blood--the Russians are not a really pure race. Because of the Tatar occupation many Tatars married Russians and in the end it became a mixture.

Pierce: But still this mixture of East and West was incomplete, and it has been said that there was a split, and the people who were above in the upper classes were westernized, and those who were in the great mass below were not.

Elischer: Yes, that is true, and now it was a big break for them, they tried to fight the influence of the west on Russia. Solzhenitsin is more western, and Sakharov is more Eastern or real Russian. That's why he won't leave Russia, and won't even try. And the Russians usually accept anything that happens in their life, because they think it may be a punishment for the past, and you have to expiate the faults or the crimes of the past generation. I myself held this belief for a long time, that you have to accept, it's a punishment, and so forth, but then I got wiser, and I shook it off from my mind.

Pierce: You now feel that this was rather naive?

Elischer: You cannot say that it was naive, it was born in the Russian people. And in this way I was westernized; I got free, but it took me a long time. I accepted all like a punishment. But the Americans start too to feel guilty for the Negro question, the new generation, so in this way I always think that the Americans are like Russians, in some way they want to expiate the mistakes of the previous generation, but I got over that already, all of it.

Pierce: What other aspects of Russian character stand out, in your opinion?

Elischer: I think they are very sly, and naturally wise. The peasants, the simple people, are very wise, but sly.

Pierce: You mean that they would trick people?

Elischer: Yes, but they will trick people naturally, not intentionally.

Pierce: Is this because they think that someone else is trying to get the better of them?

Elischer: Yes, and they fight it. They are very naive, but in the meantime they act as if they believe you, but inwardly they do not; they always find something.

Also laziness; I think the Russian people are very lazy; they love to let themselves go, they don't fight, because they feel that it's due to them what comes, they don't fight, they don't struggle really. Look how they could take the Tatar yoke; they didn't fight enough, they didn't organize.

Pierce: There was quite a bit of resistance at the start, but then they lost out.

Elischer: Yes, they lost out, and then they became resigned. They accept very easily, too easily for me.

We lived on my grandfather's estate at least five years, but from the time I was six and my brother was ten we had to move in the winter to Petersburg, where my brother went to school to a classical gymnasium, and I was taught French and English at home by a governess. German I refused to learn; I didn't like German. And my brother didn't do very well at school, and my mother couldn't afford at this time to put him in the Aleksandrovskii Lyceum where my father had gone.

So we lived in Petersburg in a big apartment on Nadezhinskaia street 40--I saw the house when I went back; it's partly rebuilt--with the wife of my mother's grand uncle, Rizenkampf. My grandmother from the Panaev side was born a Rizenkampf, a Baltic German. Her brother was a general in the etat major, and he married a very nice woman, whom we called--both my grandmothers had died by this time--and we called her "babushka babusin'ka". And she was in some way related to Dostoevsky, for I know that Dostoevsky lived for a long time with a Rizenkampf. That is in all the books, the friendship between Rizenkampf and Dostoevsky, in the early days.

So this Babusin'ka took over my education in French--she spoke a beautiful French--and I had a governess besides that. I had learned to read while on my grandfather's estate, but still she was very, very protective and loved me, and I did anything she wanted, because I adored her. Once a week she took me to

Dostoevsky's house, on the Spasskii ploshchad to see Anna Grigorevna Dostoevsky. It was the corner house--I think it was on the third floor. I was maybe nine or ten years of age. I remember when we entered the living room, it was very, very formal, the furniture was the Austrian Biedermeier style whereas we had the French style, with Louis XV and Louis XIV, and each chair--I can see the whole picture, but I don't remember what color it was--it was green or wine, dark red velvet, and on each chair was a little doily, crocheted, and everywhere these little crocheted doilies on the chairs--it seems to me so petit bourgeois. But I was so surprised, and I always thought my goodness, Dostoevsky sat in this chair! And she came in from the left side, very formal, in black, and she seemed to me very, very tall, and I got completely numb; I couldn't even greet her. Babushka-babusin'ka told me to make a [curtsey] so I greeted her and she talked very formally, very coldly. I don't remember anything more about her, [although] I know that I had to go every week, but this [first time] I remember very well. We called it [*khodit' na poklon k Anny Grigor'evny*] "to go to pay homage to Anna Grigorevna". "*Na poklon*", that means it was like a duty. This Babusin'ka was born a Kipriianov--Kipriianov was a very well known Russian painter. I think that Anna Grigorevna --was a Kirprianov too--there was some family connection, and that's why we had to go. By this time I read *Bednye liudi*, *podrostok*--many, many times--but I never dared to tell that openly to Anna Grigorevna, or even to Babusin'ka because she would be horrified that I was already reading such things at ten.

Pierce: Were these regarded as risque?

Elischer: Yes. And children didn't read them; at this age they were [still] children, but I wasn't a child; I grew up very early, *very* early. However, I couldn't master arithmetic. I had read all of the Russian literature but didn't know anything about mathematics, and I didn't get a regular instruction.

Pierce: Do you mean multiplication and division?

Elischer: I couldn't do division. I had learned multiplication by myself but nobody had taught me anything. And then my brother decided to teach me division, and when I couldn't understand he hit me on the head with the little book of arithmetic--Vereshchagin, I think it was called, very thin, and I fainted. Then suddenly the whole household realized that I had to learn something, that they had to hire teachers. And so they took a teacher, Mrs. Vasil'ev, and three times a week she came to teach me with another girl, I think she was Marguerite, and she was a niece of the well known Russian painter Belibin, who illustrated fairy tales. Her mother was the sister of Belibin's wife. This Mrs.

Vasil'ev was excellent, and I learned very well, and in two years I caught up everything, and passed very well the examination for the fifth class. I wanted to go to the Obelensky School, which was very near where we lived and where all my friends were going, but my mother refused. She said, No, she wanted to put me in a much more serious school where there was not so much social life, because they had constant balls there, and from the age of 12 years everybody went to the balls. So I went to the Lokhvitskaia School with courses in languages and painting. When you finished this school you had everyday languages, and the diploma of a teacher. With the diploma of teacher you could not yet teach in the school, but you had the right to teach privately anyway. And that's where I was; we had only ten girls in the class; every day we had French--thank God because I learned it well, a French lady taught us French grammar, and a French gentleman, a Professor Marceau--I remember the woman teacher, but I do not remember the man--French literature. We had English lessons every day, and mathematics, and history, all very well [taught]; it was a very serious school.

Most of my fellow students were Jewish, so I came in contact very early with the Jewish people, who were snubbed quite a bit in Russia, especially in Petersburg. I became very good friends with two of them, and I invited them to come, but my grandmother told me I could not, and then still, if my grandmother was away--she always went to the Riviera in the south of France--they came to my house. So I was very liberally brought up. My mother too. My brother's best friend Senia Iafkin also was Jewish, and he also came to our house, and I liked him very much. My mother didn't mind, but grandmother wouldn't come out if he was there.

Pierce: So your mother and your grandaunt didn't agree? You had no tutors at that time?

Elischer: No. My brother had tutors, because he learned very badly in school. He had Greek and Latin. The classical gymnasium in Vasil'evskii Ostrov was a very serious school, one of the most serious, and he was always backward; he didn't write very well in Russian; I always wrote very correctly, but he did not. And every summer we had a tutor, a student, Dobychyn and Fedorenko. One of them married mother's friend who was Jewish by descent, Fedorenko. I even remember their names; some of them very serious and others not. Dobychyn was a kind of nihilist [nigilist] and my mother protected them. By this time we didn't live in the big estate, because my mother's brother inherited it, and mother got a smaller estate nearby to the station with three houses. I don't know how many desiatins there were, but it wasn't a farm, nothing like that.

Pierce: During family crises, such as sickness, who was the doctor and how far did he have to come?

Elischer: There was a doctor at the station [*stantsiia*] Lykoshino. That was where we got off the train. There was a little town there, with perhaps a thousand population. And only two big shops were there, the Brat'ia Troniny--Tronin Brothers--and another I cannot remember.

Vera Elischer, Monterey

Interview: 29 March 1983

RP: In our previous sessions you told about your girlhood on the family estate and about getting an education in St. Petersburg, but you didn't mention your higher education.

Elischer: I didn't have any. I had only nurses training. I finished high school with the diploma of a language instructor, because we had languages every day. It was a special private school called Lokhutskaia skalon (*Gimnaziia Lokutskaia skalon s khudozhestvennymi kursami iazykov*), with language courses. There we had English, French and German every day. There were only 12 in the class and it was very strict; every day we had an hour of grammar, under a Mademoiselle Monseau, and an hour of literature, from a man. It was all in French, and the same with the English and the German. It was a very serious and very difficult school, and when you finished it, with the diploma--I have mine here--you had the right to teach those languages. So later, in Hungary, I got such a position on the basis of that /training/.

I was in the gymnasium seven or eight years, and was in the last class when the war broke out in 1914, early in July. For awhile I worked with the families of men recruited in the army, if they needed help to survive, and then I went to nursing school in the evenings, and worked in the hospitals on Saturday afternoon and Sundays. So I studied very little, but I had very good reports. I finished in May 1915 with a gold medal, but because it was wartime they didn't give me the medal; they only put it on paper.

/After graduation from the gymnasium I wanted to enter nursing school full time/. I went to all the schools, but not one would accept me. I was only 15 and a half, and they did not accept anybody who was younger than 18, and you had to finish high school. I had finished, but I wasn't 18.

My mother at this time was already on the front, supervising hospitals, and the head of the school with which my mother worked didn't accept me because she knew that my mother would not want her to. So I asked my cousin, Count Bennigsen, the secretary general of the Red Cross, to submit a petition addressed to the mother of the Tsar, Mariia Fedorovna, in which I asked to be accepted in the Red Cross, in spite of my age. He went every week to present her with a report on the Red Cross, so he handed her my petition. She wrote on it that she accepted me to be in one of the schools if the school found upon trial that I was capable of becoming a nurse. By then I had tried all the schools, and not one wanted me, and only the third one, one of the biggest and the best, the school of St. George, of the Red Cross, where my cousin was one of the head nurses, finally accepted me, on trial.

So I started to work there. My mother wasn't there; she didn't even know what I was doing, and they didn't ask permission. I lived with my brother and my *soi disant* grand aunt, and went to the school every day. It was very hard, because they considered me a baby and always called me *dityo* and made me do the most awful, the most dirty work, but I took it quite well.

RP: I think you mentioned your grand aunt before.

Elischer: Yes, Rizenkampf, the grand aunt who took us to see Dostoevskii every week, in Petersburg, when I was about 12. Later I knew that her husband, my uncle, the brother of my real grandmother, Nikolai Egorovich Rizenkampf, was a friend of Dostoevskii and they lived quite a while together; he is mentioned many times. Mrs. Stenbock-Fermor told me "Oh certainly, he was a friend, and Dostoevsky lived with him." So now I know why we always went to see her.

Minsk

RP: So you were taken into nursing, but rather conditionally?

Elischer: Yes, but it worked out quite well. And then, at the end of June, or in early July--I cannot remember exactly, but I have my Red Cross book, with all my work indicated--I was sent to the private hospital of the Tsar's mother, Mariia Fedorovna, in Minsk. And there for the first time I saw a Jewish ghetto. I was so surprised because we didn't have anything like it in Petersburg, nor in Moscow.

RP: What was your reaction?

Elischer: I was surprised! I hadn't seen Jews with the long kaftans and black hats, and beards. Everybody was the same there, and I couldn't understand. "What is it?" I asked.

"You don't know?" they said.

"No, I have never seen anything like it!"

"That's the Jewish settlement!"

A Jew had to have a special permit to be able to live in Petersburg or Moscow; he had to have a profession, or be a tailor. There were some lawyers too--Ginsburg, for instance, was a very famous lawyer, but to have the whole part of town set aside this way was completely unbelievable for me, and I felt somehow strange, and a little scared. In Petersburg Jews were scarcely distinguishable from the rest of the population.

That's why it made me so mad when I heard people say that the Jews were so suppressed in Russia. My brother's best friend was Senia Hafkin. He and a brother went to Petersburg university. Their father was a tailor, on Vasil'evskii ostrov; the two boys were very good students. The older son finished so well, with distinction, that he was accepted in the Military Medical Academy (Voennaia meditsinskaia akademiia). He was accepted, and he was Jewish. So I said always that it was not true that they were suppressed. They had to work very hard, but they were accepted in many places. My grand aunt, however, was fantastically hurt that Senia Hafkin came to our house, but we loved him very much. Of twelve girls in my class in the Lokutskaia skalon, at least 6 or 7 were Jewish. It was a very hard school, and we all were excellent students.

RP: And you all got along well?

Elischer: Very well! I could invite them to my house, but made sure that my grand aunt, Babushka Rizenkampf, didn't know about it; she shouldn't see them; she wouldn't accept them. And I went sometimes to their houses too. They were wonderful; they were all such gifted girls. So it was a funny situation. That's why I was so surprised in Minsk when I saw the ghetto. I couldn't believe it. In Moscow I had never even heard about ghettos.

I worked in Minsk for quite awhile, until later on I got news that my grand aunt, Rizenkampf, was very sick, that she had something with her gall bladder and liver, so I asked for leave from the hospital and went to Petersburg to take care of her. She was very sick, but they brought her home from the hospital. I slept in the same room, and took good care of her. I gave her morphine injections, but she was dying. It was hard on me because she suffered a great deal, and the doctor told me I could only give her morphine every four or five hours, and then she suffered so much that my aunt, her daughter, asked me to give it to her, and I gave it a little bit earlier. When she died, after two or three months, I thought that maybe I had caused her death by giving the morphine to her earlier, but it wasn't that; she would have died anyway.

So I stayed quite awhile, and meanwhile had a young man friend, Spirtov. He was on leave, and we kind of thought that we would marry, but then I didn't marry him; I kept back, and he went back to the front and I went back [to hospital work]. I wanted to go back to the hospital of the Tsarina, but I learned that there had been a big intrigue between the chief doctor and the head nurse. She was a very sweet woman, and very prominent, but there were terrible intrigues between them. I heard that she was very badly treated by the head doctor, and that she went to have an audience with the Tsar's mother in Petersburg, but in the train she committed suicide. I didn't want to go back to the hospital and work with the doctor, Rudnikov, so I resigned and went to the Georgievskoe obshchestvo [George society] and told them that I was resigning, and why. Those names are all in my book.

RP: Was this usual, for a doctor to behave like that?

Elischer: No. She was a very fine and prominent woman. She was the fraulein of the Tsarina, so she behaved a little bit too high-toned. He didn't like that, so he tried in every way to put her down, and humiliate her, and she couldn't stand that. Then the Tsarina asked her to come, and on the way, in the train, she committed suicide. I decided that I could not go and face this Rudnikov because I loved her; she was a very good person. So I went to the Society and they understood and didn't force me to go back.

Smolensk

And so I was assigned to the Second Georgievskiĭ hospital, first in Smolensk and later in Iur'ev. The war was quieter in Smolensk, but we had a lot of scurvy. The hospital was filled with soldiers who had it. They lost their teeth; it was very hard. But the life in Smolensk was otherwise rather pleasant. My father was from there, and I met a lot of relatives whom I had never known before. They were very nice to me, and I went to see them on their big estate, "Zhdanova," in Smolensk gubernia, I think it was in El'ninskii uezd.

Iur'ev, 1916

We worked at Smolensk for quite awhile, and then we were evacuated to Iur'ev. There was more action on that sector, and we were there for half a year. It was a beautiful town; we loved it and we went sailing on the river Narva. It was very interesting to be on the river.

Riga, February 1917

After that we were moved again, more toward the front, to a big hospital in Riga. By then they liked me at the hospital; they didn't consider me as a child anymore, and I was nominated to head a department (otdelenie) in the hospital. I was very happy there, and the work was very good. The main doctor, Solov'ev, was the head of the department, and it was nice to work there. I learned a great deal about surgery and many other things.

After being there quite awhile I started to have terrible pains in my face in my triangle nerve--here. It was terrible; I couldn't work, I couldn't see, and then I started to have little fevers, but I continued to work.

At this time the people came back from the front. It was the awful 17th of February, of the first Revolution. We heard of what was happening in St. Petersburg; it was agony for everyone in the hospital. By this time the doctors decided that I could not stay, that I had to go to Petersburg, so they gave me a leave of absence, and I went to Petersburg in this awful time.

In Petersburg I went to see a famous doctor, Manukhin--he died later in Paris. He examined me and said "My goodness, you have something on your left lung. If you don't do what I tell you right away, then we won't have anything to talk about!" My cousin was still in the Red Cross, and I went there and they sent me to a sanatorium in the Caucasus, at Kislovodsk, for two months.

Kislovodsk, March-April 1917

I loved Kislovodsk; now I have seen it again, and it is so changed, but then it was very good. The sanatorium for the nurses was very good and it was very quiet there; you didn't feel the war or revolution or anything. Next to it was a sanatorium for officers. They had horses, and I went riding with them. We weren't allowed to go out of the sanatorium, but I took my amazon and went through the window and out with them.

RP: What is an amazon?

Elischer: That was a long black dress, with one side long, which women wore when they went riding. At that time women very seldom rode like men; they rode side-saddle. It was easy to fall off if you were not strong and if you did not know how to sit. I also rode in the cossack saddle, which is very high. You were nearly standing, but then you had slacks, and a cossack tunic. I loved that, but there you couldn't [use it].

Once I rode in the rain, and came back wet, and they caught me. They told me that if I did it again they would punish me and send me away, so I couldn't do it anymore. I was at Kislovodsk until June. Then they said that I was better, and they sent me back to Petersburg.

By then it was already nearly the summer of 1917. I went back to Dr. Manukhin, who told me that I was still in a very bad state, and I would have to stop working. I didn't believe him and went to my doctor, Georgievskii, in St. Petersburg. He told me he didn't think it was so bad, and if I would do what he told me I could go back to work. You had to work, because in Petersburg there was no way to stay. So I went back.

By now the hospital in Riga was in a terrible state; I didn't want to go back there, and they didn't want to send me, and it was already no longer the 2nd Georgievskii hospital. I had to get a new assignment, so I went to the Red Cross center, and they assigned me to the 102nd golovnoi punkt /advance point, or medical station/ at Dvinsk.

Dvinsk

A golovnoi punkt, or advance point, was not a privileged hospital. We were very close to the front, and they bombarded us; we had a very hard time.

The Legion of Women was at Dvinsk then, and it was fantastic how they fought. Late in the war, when the men were deserting, they began organizing women, under Bochkareva. I remember seeing her, marching at the head of them in Petersburg, and there was another, Sverdlova, or something, very well known. Now I met them again in Dvinsk. They were wonderful, wonderful!

RP: But they were only a company or so, were they not?

Elischer: Yes, they were just in Dvinsk, but they were fantastic, and when they were brought in wounded, they never complained. When one was asked "Where are you wounded?" even though she was bleeding, she would say, pointing to another, "Oh no, no! Take her! I can wait!" They were just fantastic. A woman can suffer, really.

After I had been in Dvinsk quite awhile, they sent me, with two railroad wagons, up to the front to pick up the wounded. There the sanitars (corpsmen) brought you the wounded, and when the two carriages were filled they were taken back.

By this time there were already many deserters. They always came and wanted to get in the wagons. I stood by the door of one of them and told them "You cannot get on; it is only for the wounded!"

"Yes, we can!" they said, and while I was holding the door this finger got in between and they smashed the end of it, although I had a glove on. We went back to the punkt, but there were so many wounded nobody had time to do anything with my finger. So I took off the glove myself, froze it, and cut and took off my nail. I still have a trace of it here. It was a very difficult time. And now they told me that I could not go with this train anymore.

My hand was so terrible, I couldn't work as a nurse in the operating room or anywhere else, so I got another job at this punkt, as chief of the doctors' and nurses' mess. I didn't have the slightest idea about cooking, but the cook, a Polish man, knew a bit more than I did, so we went together and bought, he cooked, and I directed as well as I could.

And then they started to elect deputies of the army, of the front, and of the medical doctors, to commissions which would be represented in Petersburg later on. So we had many meetings, and they elected me as a representative of the army for the Dvinsk district, and sent me to Pskov, the headquarters of the Northwest Front. There I attended a congress of medical personnel, consisting of the doctors, the nurses, and the sanitars (orderlies).

The sanitars wanted to be on the same level as the nurses, but they didn't know anything, and there was an awful fight. The nurses sided with the doctors.

When they held the election for the big All-Russian Congress (Vserossiiskii s'ezd) in Petersburg, they sent me there. It was held in the Military Medical Academy (Voennaia meditsinskaia akademiia), on Kamenno-ostrovskii [now Kirovskii] prospekt. It begins when you cross the Troitskaia most (bridge), when you pass the Kseshinskii palace, where Lenin had his headquarters. So it was held there, and all the fronts and all Russia were represented. In the beginning the meeting went very well, but then the communists came and tried to take over. Those were the troubled times, when they were trying to get power.

RP: What was your attitude concerning the communists?

Elischer: Oh, I hated them, from the beginning. I don't know how I was elected, but the people were not communists, and they wanted to have good representation.

RP: But this was still before the takeover. Did you look upon them then merely as a kind of bad element?

Elischer: Yes, a bad element, who wanted to disrupt things, but we didn't believe that it was serious. My goodness, they were throwing chairs and all that.

After the meeting was finished, I went home, and now I was without a job. I couldn't go back; I was no longer a representative. Nothing existed there anymore; it was disbanded. So I didn't know what to do.

And then my brother told me: "Don't go back to nursing; it's bad. Find another job." And someone, I cannot remember who, recommended me to the Teatr i zrelishche (Theater and spectacle). They had no one who could even add 2 and 2; there was no one to hire. So they took me in as a bookkeeper. I didn't know a thing, but I remember sitting and adding figures, endless figures, as a bookkeeper /schetovod/. I was good at mathematics, so I did it well, I hope, but it was terrible work, and you got very little pay, but still you went home and could eat. And so it went for awhile, and then suddenly, in May 1918, [I got a job with the Red Cross].

My brother didn't go to the war because he was the only son of a widow, and they didn't take those in the army. So he worked in [the Red Cross], a very good organization, throughout the war. He was in the university; he studied law.

"The Swedish and Danish Red Cross have come to Petersburg," he told me. "They are going to take care of the prisoners-of-war, because we have so many. They have arrived here and now they will organize them." I can arrange for you to work for them as a nurse. They are looking for nurses who can speak several languages. Do you want to? Then go to the Tserkovskii, the palace of Volkonskii. They are my friends. I worked for the daughter of Volkonskii when he was the intendant of theaters."

I went there and there were very many people--nurses, and foreign looking men. We waited, and finally they called us and asked if we wanted to go to work, if we were willing to work during epidemics, and if we were afraid of anything. I told them we were not afraid of anything, we would go anywhere. They asked who they should notify if something happened to us, and we gave that to them.

With the Red Cross, May 1918

Then three or four men came and started to look at us, and said, "You, you, you, and you." I had a friend with me, the daughter of the Vice Minister of Communications, a very nice girl--I have looked for her for years and have never found her. She came with me and I told them "Please take her too, if you can."

Then he told us to come to his room, and we talked,in French and English. He said his name was Josef Gyorgi, and he wanted me to sign all the papers. I did so. He asked me where I lived, and how old I was--I was just 18. And then he said he would like to see my mother, to talk to her if she was there, to know if she would give her permission.

"Yes, she is here," I said. And so he went and talked to my mother, and told her that she shouldn't worry, that they would look after us very well, and the pay was excellent, a thousand rubles--that was enormous pay! We would have food, and we could help our families; it was fantastic.

And so they told us that we had to be ready in two days, and get on the train at the goods station (tovarnaia stantsiia). My brother would bring me, I said, but nobody could see me off, nobody.

So Novikov and I, and a third nurse, Krymskaia, a Jewish girl, very nice, went to this goods station. My brother took us to the first aid car, and we boarded the train.

The train was very full, and we found that we, the three nurses, were to share a compartment with three Red Cross officers we didn't know. We thought they were Danes, but after awhile they came in and told us: "Now we have to tell you something."

"What?" we asked.

"That we are not Danish. You have to know that, but you must not tell anybody, because now you are attached to us. Mr. Paulik and Mr. Gyorgi are Hungarian, and I, Mr. Burger, am Austrian."

"How can this be?" I exclaimed. "We want the war to be fought to the end /to victory/. I don't want to work with you or accept your money!" And I started to cry. "Oh," I said, "this is terrible!"

They waited until I had finished and then said, "No, don't feel that way. The times are very bad for you now; if you are with us we can help you and your families. If you go back you will have to go to the Red Army, because already they have said everywhere that they have to mobilize."

So we left Petrograd on the 18th of June, on a special train of the Danish Red Cross, the Mission for Prisoners of War (Missiia dlia voennoplen). The Swedish undertook the protection of the Germans, and the Danish Red Cross the protection of the Austro-Hungarians. I want to show you how interesting the papers are; I still have them.

By the time we got to Moscow we were all good friends. I stayed in the apartment of my uncle, Shirinskii-Sheikhmatov. My grand-aunt's daughter, Liudmila, the youngest, has described it in her book As I Remember Them. It is very good. There she describes the estate of the Prince Shirinskii-Sheikhmatov, Andrei, and they lived in Moscow. So when I arrived in Moscow with the mission, which was called the Tenth Ekspositura, I said I would try to get them rooms, so I went directly to No. 6 Obukhovskii pereulok, to the Shirinskii-Sheikhmatovs. They were so happy to see me. And I told them, "Now I know its very hard on you, but would you like to give us two or three rooms? One for the nurses, one for Mr. Gyorgi, and one for the two others." But they could give only two rooms, and they would have had to pass through to the kitchen and the bath and all, so Gyorgi said they would find something else. So I stayed there, with the two nurses, at the Shirinskii-Shekhmatovs.

When I married, in 1919, Andrei Shirinskii-Sheikhmatov was already in Liubianka. When I saw them Volkonskii lived there and they were afraid that they would all be arrested, but they still lived somehow, but in a year and a half they were already gone. I think Solzhenitsyn describes how his son Anikita (Andrei) became a fantastic man, he helped others when they were in the Far North, in terrible camps. He suffered a great deal and he died there.

On July 6, 1918, the German ambassador, Count Mirbach, was assassinated in Moscow, so we were stuck there for awhile.

From Moscow we went to Kursk. By then I already spoke some Hungarian. It had taken us nearly a week to go from St. Petersburg to Moscow, this short distance--usually it is overnight, but it took us a week--and I learned a lot in that time. And by then I was very much in love with Josef Gyorgi, the head of the mission. I liked General Haig, and Gyorgi looked very much like him. But he was 34 and I was 18--a big difference--and he was married and had three daughters, and he loved women in general.

From Kursk, Gyorgi sent me to Orel, and the other nurse, my friend Novikov, to Voronezh, while Krymskaia stayed in Kursk. They disliked her, so they decided just to send us, and kept her. They had no patience.

So I went to Orel, and it was while I was there, in October 1918, that they killed the Tsar.

After that, we became the Austro-Hungarian Mission, openly, because the war was finished. And then they sent a commissar to us. He worked with us and supervised us, because they didn't trust us. He was a Bolshevik. It was terrible to work with them, because they were always looking over your shoulder. My chief in Orel was Bruckner, who became my first husband, and I went with him to different camps to visit the Hungarian prisoners of war.

In November, when the communists had already been in power for a year, they came with the international battalion and searched through everything in the mission. They found things which were compromising for us, and they arrested Bruckner.

The international battalions were formed from Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Austrians who were communists. I think they entered those international battalions because they wanted a better life. They were fed, and had good uniforms, and were active. They arrested all of us in the mission. And that's when I decided to marry Bruckner, because I felt very guilty about the things that they found. They found things of the poet Miatlev--you never heard of him? He is fantastic, I have one little booklet by him. He and his wife were in Orel, and the Serbievs (?), and the Golokhovs. We were good friends, and they brought their furs, and jewelry, and I put it all in the mission's safe, and /the communists/ found it all. Some items had inscriptions, and some did not. So Bruckner told me "Don't say anything; don't tell them that you did it. I will say that I did it." He didn't want me to /say that I did it/ because he knew that that would be worse. /So he took the blame/ and the next day they said they would take him to Moscow as a counter-revolutionary, and they closed us. I had a French woman, a nurse, Shulgin, the wife of the Shulgin who was in the Duma, and she was with me, in the mission work.

The next day we were surrounded by international battalion soldiers, and Shulgin was away, and they said that Bruckner would be sent to Moscow. "Don't tell anything," he stressed, "say that you don't know about anything."

And then he said: "Will you marry me if I come back?" "Yes, yes!" I said. I felt so guilty; I felt terrible.

And the next day was the 7th of November, the anniversary of the Revolution, and the train didn't go. There were no locomotives, so everything came to a standstill and they all celebrated. So he didn't leave. But then in the afternoon, Gyorgi arrived, in a car, with a commissar from Kursk.

"Now everything is arranged," he said. "They will let Bruckner out; I arranged everything."

The commissar said: "Well, you will have a commissar, and you have to continue to work because only you know how to organize the transports of the prisoners of war and all these camps, and you have all the papers of everybody, and everything, so they cannot work without you. So you will work, but they will control."

So they left Bruckner there, and there I was, tied.

RP: You were married?

Elischer: No I wasn't married yet! But nearly. And I couldn't go anything, and we stayed there to work with this commissar. And Gyorgi went back to Kursk . He said there was communism in Hungary. "Ill have to go back to Hungary," he said, "and I'll leave Bruckner as the chief of the mission in Kursk, so you will have to move there; you will have commissars over you, but you can carry on with your work." He was horrified that I wanted to marry Bruckner.

So we stayed in Kursk quite awhile, and continued to work. We were invited to Plenbezh, an organization for the prisoners of war. The Plenbezh was headed by a commissar and they invited us and held a big reception in honor of my marriage to"Tovarishch Bruckner." I was just horrified; it was terrible.

For awhile, everything went alright, and then suddenly the international battalions came a second time, and started another search. They took Bruckner, and I heard a gunshot.

The next day they came and took all of Bruckner's clothing, all his suits that were in the other room; I thought they had killed him. I couldn't ask; they wouldn't have answered. They took my revolver, some pictures of the Tsar I had, some jewelry, and perfume--I had beautiful perfume, Guerlain--all that, and everything else they could take, and they forced us.

The next day one of the wives of the international battalion men, an Austrian, came and said "Now you will come with me, and with a soldier." "Where?" I asked. "You have to come," was all she would say.

They took us to the Cheka and gave me a typewriter and said that I should type names, a whole list of Russian names, including those of Serbeiev, and Miatlev. I didn't know what it was for, but later on I knew that it was people that they wanted to arrest or to send away.

RP: How long was the list? How many names were there?

Elischer: A million names! It was written by hand. They told me to write, so I had to write all kind of things.

/Bruckner was then freed? but soon/ they arrested us a second time. We had decided to make up a transport of prisoners of war to Kiev. And I wanted to go and stay in Kiev, and Bruckner wanted to accompany me. So we went to the goods station /tovarnyi vokzal/ where all the war prisoners had gathered to board the train to go with them. And there they arrested us a second time.

You know how a Russian railway station is--there is a high embankment, a nasyp, and there are wooden stairs going down to the tracks. So when they arrested Bruckner they took him right away, and I started to walk on the steps. They they came after me, thinking that I would go down. But I stepped aside and went on the nasyp and hid there, and went to a hospital where there were two doctors, one, Heinerli, a Hungarian, and the other, Michael, a German. And I went to the hospital and told them that they had arrested Bruckner again and they wanted to arrest me, but I had escaped.

They said "Alright, stay here, we will try to get a passport for you and you will go back to your family in Petersburg, but we won't let you go back to the mission."

"But I cannot," I said, "because now they have arrested him and that will be worse than the first time!"

So Dr. Heinerli went and looked. It was a house with very low windows, and at first he said "It is full of soldiers, and we cannot see..." but then "No! Bruckner is sitting and playing chess with one of the soldiers!"

So I said, "It's all right; so I should go."

Then a Russian officer came and said "I can give you my wife's passport, and you can get through to Petersburg and escape."

But I said "No, I cannot do it! I cannot leave him! He will probably be..!"

So I went back. They met me at the door and said: "We knew that you would come back! Where could you have gone?" And they were right, because I couldn't have escaped them.

They put me in the same room again, and then next day they took Bruckner away, and that's when I didn't know if they had killed him or what had happened. But then one of the international battalion soldiers too care of us and looked after us. We had to sleep with the door open. He was a Hungarian, and he told me "Don't be afraid; he is in the Cheka, in a room with forty people; he asks for handkerchiefs." So I gave him two or three and he said he would take them. So many of them were not bad, these international battalion men. But some of them were very bad, like those who killed the Tsar!

RP: And then you were with the Hungarian mission again?

Elischer: It was a very chaotic period, and we were arrested several times. In the end we had to go. Mr. Gyorgi came and told us that he was going back to Hungary. And my future husband--he was not my husband because you couldn't marry because he was a Catholic and

I was Greek Orthodox, and we had to have a certain permission from the Catholic nuncios for him to marry a Greek Orthodox--he and I were to go to Kursk.

On the train, going from Orel to Kursk, it was Christmas /1919/ and we decided that we would ask the chaplain of our mission to marry us. So we stood up, and he started to look, and look, and he said "You know, I don't have the prayers for a wedding; I am not used to marrying anyone, only to bury them. I cannot do it!" He had only been going to the camps to bury people. So we laughed over that, and when we arrived at Kursk we started those procedures again so we could get married there in a Russian Catholic church.

In Kursk, Mr. Gyorgi told the commissar that he was going back to Hungary, which at that time was communist /the Bela Kun regime, March-July 1919/, and so he played the role of a very enthusiastic, patriot who was very satisfied with what was happening in Hungary, because otherwise they would not have allowed him to go. The commissar was also very good and said that everything was beautiful in Hungary now, and we could continue to work in Kursk, directing those big transports of prisoners of war--thousands and thousands of men were going, and we would continue to organize them, take them to the train, and see them off. Gyorgi talked to Bruckner and told him how he was to work. He gave him a marshrut, a long band of paper on which were shown the towns they would have to go through. This he was to give to people who he was sure were not communists, to the officers in the transports. At this time they wouldn't let the officers go home, they wanted only the ordinary soldiers to go, but many officers pretended that they were ordinary soldiers. So my husband was to find out whom he could trust, and give instructions.

So , they went back to Hungary, and we stayed there and worked with this commissar. At the end of December /1919/ we could marry; we got the permission and we were married in the Catholic church. I sent a telegram to my mother that I was married, and that I hoped that we would be in Petersburg and I would see her.

At this time the typhoid was very bad in Russia; everybody had it. Our commissar got sick and was separated from all the mission, in the samehouse, but nobody would go to him; they put food for him by the door and he had to get it himself. I was furious. I said "You know he is sick; you cannot do that."

"No," they said, "because we do not want to spread the sickness. Nobody can go."

And I said "I am a nurse; I will go." And I went and I took care of him. And he recovered, and we became very good friends, and he was very grateful to me.

We continued to work, but it was very hard. Because a new commissar came who was terrible. He was completely a communist, a red one, and he didn't trust us, and looked at us with suspicion. We had a nice apartment, but we were afraid to talk there because we always felt that somebody might be listening and would report. So the situation was very bad.

Finally, in February or March, 1920, I told my husband, "You know, we have to get out of here, because something will happen; they don't trust us, and they will arrest us. We have to get out."

"How?" he asked.

I told him, "I will write to my mother through my friends who are going to St. Petersburg, and ask her to send us a telegram that she is very sick and wants us to come. And then we will try to get to St. Petersburg."

And she did it; she sent us the telegram and we told the commissar that we wanted to leave now, not for good, but for awhile, and go to Petersburg. So he allowed us to leave. And with us went the cook of the mission, Matiushkin, a Hungarian, and my maid. Yes, I had a maid there--my goodness, I was something! She married him and they came with us. They were proletarians, and they got permission to come with us. We went and then we didn't go back. They pressed us all the time from Kursk to go back, to work, saying we had deserted, we had to come back, and always we told them "My mother is sick, we cannot do it." We went to the mission--at this time the missions for prisoners of war were called Missii rabochikh i soldat. Not the military mission, but the mission for workers and soldiers. The president in Petersburg was a very nice Austrian, Mr. Pohl. He was a banker, but he was playing the communist, and was there.

"We don't want to go back," we said, and asked him what we could do.

And he said, "I cannot help it; I will have to send you back, because I am getting pressure from Kursk all the time. You have to go back."

And I told him, "No, please do something; we don't want to go."

He told me, "I will call you in another two weeks."

Then I went to my brother, and he got me a job as a nurse in the central hospital on the Bol'shoe Kammeno-ostrovskii prospekt, the Lechebnitsa kamera Meiera (?). There they brought everybody who was sick, and then sent them to different hospitals. They kept only those who were sick with typhoid, cholera, dysentery--all epidemic diseases--in this hospital, the others were sent away. It was a big hospital, six stories. And I worked there, and they took my husband, who knew how to drive a car, in the first aid organization as a chauffeur. The cook became a painter, repainting the cars, and my maid stayed with us. We had a big apartment, 7 rooms, but we all lived in two small rooms, my mother, my husband and myself in one room, and in the other the cook and his wife. We couldn't live in the rest of the rooms because it was so cold already. My brother lived where he worked, because it was such a terrible time of epidemics.

And every night some agents of the Cheka would come to look for something, we didn't know for what. "What do you want?" we asked, but they would tell us nothing. And all of the things from the drawers were on the floor. We didn't even try to put them in order.

So we lived in those two little rooms, having as cooking facilities a little burzhuika, or stove, quite small, with little pieces of wood, and this time we had to break up the furniture in the other rooms in order to be able to cook something.

We lived on the corner of Tavricheskii and Suvorovskii prospekt, where the military academy is. Before we lived in Tavricheskaia 5, but they took the whole house for the Red Army, so my mother moved to Tavricheskaia 5, on the 6th floor. You couldn't get in the house from the front, because it was closed; the elevator didn't work, so we had to go up the service stairs in back--po chernaia lestnitsa as we called it. This chernaia lestnitsa was terrible. You came home, and you couldn't have an electric bulb, they were all stolen, it was always dark, the stairs were all covered with ice because we didn't have water in the faucets; we had to go one block to bring water in buckets; it was terrible. The toilets didn't work. Everybody used buckets and then emptied them into the little court between the houses. It was a terrible life. They wanted to put somebody in the house, but nobody wanted to come there, and there weren't many people in Petersburg at this time. So many were sick, so many had died, so many had left for the south, so they didn't need the space.

To go to work, I had to go over the Troitskii most (bridge), and along Kamenno-ostrovskii, it was five miles. I had to walk because the tramways were filled, and very seldom came, and you never knew when. You might have to wait for an hour to get one, and so you walked to work in the morning, and from work at night.

And we had to work long hours, from 8 in the morning until 8 in the evening, 12 hours. Then we could go home for the night. Then we had to go for 24 hours, and then we had 24 hours free, so it was hard work. And when I came in the morning, after 24 hours, I usually stopped on Marsovoe pole (Champ de Mars). Before it was for military reviews, and I guess now it is for parades, but then the black market was there. So you usually stopped to sell something--a table cloth or something--to get fresh milk. For a big table cloth for 12 or 20 people you got 1 quart of milk. Maybe it would be real milk, maybe it would be hot water. It was a terrible situation.

But as we worked on the epidemics, we got more bread, much more than others, and that was the solution, that we got so much bread that we could exchange some. My mother and I exchanged it for cigarettes, for makhorka /cheap tobacco/, and that saved us, we had more to eat. When I brought our ration /paek/, of millet, and a little oil, and dried fish, and bread, and maybe two or three potatoes, we put it in the cupboard, but my mother would steal it and take it to somebody who didn't have anything to eat. So we always had to fight to get enough.

The cook usually walked home from the hospital, far away, and on the way he sometimes saw horses which died on the street, and people just rushed on those horses and cut off pieces with knives. And he brought those pieces of meat home, and we cooked on the little stove, and that wasterrible, becauseif you cook horsemeat as soup the foam is so high that it boils over; it is terrible! My husband ouldn't eat it for anything in the world; he would die first. But we ate it. And then, because he worked and painted the cars, eight of them, he stole gasoline and brought it to us. It was a mixture of benzine and spirits, and we cleaned it through coal, and drank it. It was terrible. My goodness, what a life; I wonder that we survived.

At this time the American Relief Association, the ARA, started to work, and was very active. Mr. Ruhle was one of the chiefs, and when we left in 1920, my mother worked with him. Mother was in a special commission to help the scientists and the professors of the university, and ARA did a lot to help with that.

RP: So they were active right in Leningrad?

Elischer: Oh yes, in Leningrad, and everywhere. You know, they sent commissions to the villages where they ate people. One of my friends in San Francisco, Mrs. Il'in, who came from Shanghai and is still alive, has told how terrible it was to go there. She went with the Americans, to see how it was, and then in 1923 or 1924 it was terrible. And the deaths and the epidemics. My brother always went to pick up the people, with cars. And he told how they would come in the house somewhere, and call them, and hear nothing, and then they would find five or six people dead there. Some of them, who had died first, would be completely decomposed, and others would have died later. The telephones didn't work most of the time. I don't know how we survived. Very often I have nightmares that it is freezing cold and I am walking, walking endlessly across the bridge, and somebody is following me, and I don't know whether he will throw me in the river or he will take my coat, and I don't know what will happen, and this awful persecution. It is terrible.

You didn't see many old people there. Hardly anyone survived.

And then, by and by, Mr. Pohl, thehead of the mission, told us he could not even put us on a transport. The transports were leaving all the time, but my husband was an officer, and he could not send officers back.

"My goodness," I told him, "we will pay you what you want. I have some jewelry, but try to put him in as a Zivilgefangener /a civilian prisoner/." He could not do it, he said, it was too obvious, and Kursk was demanding constantly that we be sent back, but he would see what he could do. So we continued to work there.

In between, we tried three times to get out of St. Petersburg illegally, but with all kinds of agents provocateurs it didn't work. The last time we tried to get out, my husband and the cook ended up in the Cheka, in Shuvalova, and I escaped it only by a miracle, because I went back to work. We met a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Solpris--they died in Paris about 10 years ago. They told us that there was an agent who could take us to the Finnish border. They were going, and with them the Galitsyns. This is Maia Galitsyn /shows portrait/. She married a Hungarian later on in prison. She lived in Westphalia; I went over to see her; she died three years ago. Her father was governor of Novgorod /Velikii Novogorodskaia/ gubernia. He was dead already, but the whole family--the father, four children and the mother, and my friends the Solpris--he was a Hungarian--decided to go in the first group with this man.

We all met in the apartment of the Solpris' and we talked with the man and he said, "Yes, I will take you."

"But we have no money," we told him.

"That's all right," he said, "your husband has leather pants and a leather jacket as chauffeur for the ambulance service /skoraia pomoshch/ so on the border you can give me this suit."

"All right," we said, "that's something else. But first you take the Solpris' and the Galitsyns, and if they pass the border all right, they will give you a letter that you will bring to us. In this apartment we will meet again, and in a week you can take us."

So in a week the batiushka (priest)came to our house and we had a moleben (prayer service) and we left with my husband and the cook and his wife--all of us--and my brother took us in this car, to this empty apartment. And we went in, and the man came and said, "Now you are ready; we will go."

"Yes, we are ready," we said. So the four of us grownups, and the Matiusheks' little baby met in the empty apartment. Just then the phone rang. My husband went to the phone, came back and said to me, "Oh, Vera, it is your mother! She is very sick; she has had a heart attack. We cannot go. We have to go back!"

The man was very angry. "How can you do this?" he said, "I came all this way..."

"No," said my husband, "they say she is very ill. We have to go back. In a week, if she is better, we can meet again,in this apartment."

So the man left. And then my husband told me, "It's not that, but a cook, from some grand family, was arrested and in Shuvalova, and now they have let him out of the Cheka and he has let us know that the whole Galitsyn family and the Solpris' are all in the Cheka, in Shuvalova. He came to see Mrs. Shamanskii, the mother of Mrs. Solpris and told her, so she called to tell her daughter that she knew they were not going to let us go."

So we went home and considered what to do. Then my husband said, "Now we have to go back to work. You go in the hospital, I will go to my cars; everybody will go."

The chief of skoraia pomoshch, Dr. Iurii Grigor'evich Hafkin, a very nice man, knew that we were going to leave, and when we let him know that we were back he said "All right, you're back, and if they call me I will tell them that."

So we started to work, and toward evening my mother called the hospital and said that the Cheka was there. The man who was going to help us get over the border, an agent provacateur--she did not know him--was there, and three or four soldiers, and they demanded that Alii Bruckner should come home right away, and Matiushkin, the cook. So they left their work, and went.

"What about me?" I asked.

"No," she said, "they didn't mention you. You just stay overnight there until you hear from me."

And so my husband and Matiushkin had gone home, and the first person my husband saw when he entered was the agent provacateur. He was so furious he told him "If I were to meet you anywhere else, your head wouldn't stay on your shoulders!"

The chief of the mission sent to arrest them was an educated man, my mother said. They were sitting in the house for several hours, but she was very quiet, and calm. She made them tea and talked to them as if nothing had happened, as if they were guests. And mother said he was looking around all of the time, and went to her books and said "Oh, my goodness, you are interested in theosophy!"

"Oh yes," my mother said, "I am very interested in it."

And he said, "I would like to buy this book" But then he said, "No, we are not allowed to buy anything. Can you lend it to me?"

"Oh yes," said mother, "take all the books you want, and keep them if you want." So he took a lot of books and put them on the piano, and on the piano he found my diary--I had a diary I had kept throughout the war and the revolution, and letters from my friends who had gone to the army of General Miller, of the White Army, from Petersburg, and letters from my cousins, all of it was there together. He picked it all up and put it next to those books on the piano.

Mother was horrified. "Now," she thought, "Vera will get arrested because of all that!"

But when they to talked to Alii, and the cook, they said "You must come with us. Take some things, because we don't know how long you will be away."

And so they all went, but the head of this little group stayed back. He looked at my mother, went to the piano, and picked up the books, but left my diaries. Whereupon my mother burned it all. When I saw her in Budapest later I said: "Oh, how could you do that! How could you do it!" It was such a good diary, and I had cherished it so.

But she had to, she said; it had to be done. Later, when she was banished, she burned all of the family photographs, everything. She said it took three days. By then very little was left already, but still she burned it all. She didn't want them to get it, and she couldn't take it with her.

I stayed in the hospital for two days. The third day I came home, and then went back to the hospital. For a week we didn't know anything about Alii and the cook, Matiushek. Then, one day, on my day off, Alii came with two soldiers. "What's the matter," I said, "did they let you out?"

"No," the soldiers said.

Matiushek, the cook, had told them that Alii was a proletarian and a chauffeur. He didn't tell them that he had been an officer, or anything like that. And they said, "All right, we have two motorcycles that have to be repaired, and we don't know how. Can you repair them?"

"Yes," he said, "I can, but I need tools."

"Tools?" they asked.

"Yes, I have them at home."

So, two soldiers brought him home, and he picked up his tools and went back.

"What will happen?" I asked him.

"There will be a trial," he said. "The Galitsyns and the Solpris' will all be on trial, and I will be too, and Matiushek."

But Matiushek, who was a simple soldier, a peasant, adored my husband. "I can save you," he said, "if together we repair the motorcycles and show that we are real proletarians and not officers. Everything will be all right." I forget even his first name. Grusha was the name of the maid, his wife, and I was godmother to their daughter. I never saw them again. They lived in Sambatai, and for quite awhile I got letters, but then we lost touch.

And so a whole week passed, and then another week. They repaired the motorcycles, and at the trial they said that they were proletarians, and they let them go. They both came home, and we continued to work.

Then we decided that something had to be done. We still wanted to go. That would be our third attempt. The first time my husband had gone to the border but he had to come back. They had changed the guard there, and they couldn't pass. The third time we went to the Danish Red Cross, in Petersburg, at the Hotel Dagmar, on Sadovaia. They said that they were sending transports to Finland, and maybe they could take us. We had those Danish Red Cross papers, so my husband went to talk to them. Night came, and he didn't return. Another day passed, and still he didn't come back. It was in the spring, and I remember the white nights. I was standing on the balcony and always waiting to see him come. Then I called my brother, at skoraia pomoshch--he was living there--and asked him what to do. "Don't do anything,"he said, "I will go." And he went and he didn't come back either, and now it was already four or five days and nobody had come out.

Then I went to look. there were people there, but from the street, opposite the Dagmar, you couldn't see what was going on. And then I thought I would go in. I went to the door, it opened, they let me in, and then they closed it, and there I was, caught. "You cannot go out," they said, "why did you come?"

I said "I came because I am an Austro-Hungarian. I am not a Russian. I came to look for my husband, who is a Hungarian and wanted to go home, and came here." I didn't mention my brother, only my husband.

"We'll see," they said. "A lot of people here say they are this and that, but they are not." And they took me to where the women were. One of them had I don't know how many thousand rubles, and she went to the toilet and flushed them all down, because they were searching people and she didn't want to be found with them. I had no money, nothing, so I merely sat there for a day waiting, and asking "Can you tell me where my husband is?"

"Oh," they said, "there are so many people here we don't know where your husband is." Then they asked me about him.

"I tell you," I said, "he is an Austro-Hungarian, and a member of the Danish Red Cross. I am too. I think Mr. Pohl has my papers." So after that they found him in a room where the foreigners were, and diplomats and all, and they took me there. For two or three days we stayed there, they fed us biscuits or something, and we couldn't learn anything about what had happened to the others. But they said the whole block was filled with people whom they had arrested. It was a trap. And then they let us out, but they said, "There won't be any transport; you cannot go."

We went home, but my brother wasn't there. We learned that he had been sent to Moscow, to the Liubianka. I went to Hafkin, the head of the First Aid, to ask what we could do. We had to free him. "You know," he said, "I can send somebody who will try to get him freed. He will talk to Dzerzhinsky, and they will try to get him out, and they will tell the truth that he went to look for you because you had disappeared here, and that he had no intention of escaping from Russia."

The epidemics were bad, and they needed their men, but Hafkin arranged for one of six or seven instructors in first aid to go. He was a very good man; he and one of my brother's friends went and brought my brother back. He didn't even have any laces in his shoes; they took everything that he could have used to hurt himself. He was in Liubianka for about 2 or 3 weeks, and they had wanted to take him to Siberia. He came back, but he was on record, and I think that in the end that was bad for him.

And then we started to wait, and wait, and wait. And then by and by it got easier. It was already May, 1920. We went to the Austro-Hungarian mission, where Pohl was, and found several officers there, who said that they were not officers, they were only volunteers who were in the army. They were starving, so we brought them home and I cooked for all of them. At the end Pohl told me, "You know, now I think it is easing. I believe that I can put you in a transport. The communists have been beaten in Hungary, so you can go home." And we gave him money and jewelry.

Now the question was, we had three officers, good friends who came to eat, who were inscribed to go in the transport--Charlot, Kari and the actor from Issinghaus, Zapad. "Can you take somebody out of Russia?" we asked.

"All right," they said, "we are ready to marry any Russian you want."

We were thinking of one of the Galitsyns. They had all been sent to Moscow, to Liubianka. Maia/Galitsyn/ too; she met her husband, the Count Sechenyi, while she was in prison. But the two youngest children had been released in the protection of a communist woman, Andreeva, and a third, Fuga,was also let out. They came to see me and I tried to feed them, and to help them as much as I could. Alek was too young, 14 or 15; the boy was 16, but the girl was 17 or 18, we could take her. So we married her to one of the officers, a Soviet marriage. They brought a lot of people from Russia in this way. The officers drew lots to see who would marry her, but Charlot, the youngest, an architect, and very kind, drew, and he married her. My mother, who worked in a local Soviet at this time, was a witness. So they were married and then we were included in the transport. I urged my mother to leave in that way too, but she didn't want to.

We were all fantastically happy, and then we started to select the things which we would take, and to conceal jewels in toothpast, and all kinds of other ways, including this big pearl that I have.

Departure

We left Petersburg on June 2nd, 1920, leaving the country through Narva. It was a very difficult moment when we approached Narva and the Russian controllers. We were so afraid that they would keep this Princess Galitsyn who was with Charlot, and that the officers would know.

RP: And Maia Galitsyn?

Elischer: Maia was in prison in Moscow. She came many years later, in 1932 or 1933. She met her husband, Count Sechenyi, while she was in prison--she washed toilets in the men's prison--and they were married. And then he got a permit to leave as a prisoner of war and he brought her. We were very good friends later.

As for Fuga Galitsyn, we brought her with the transport through Germany and left her in Berlin with the Vasil'chikovs, her aunt and uncle, and she was a companion in different big families for quite awhile. In the end she married a rich Czech industrialist, Baron Liebich, and had six children. She came to Hungary, saying she could never forget how we had saved her, and how she was so happy, but during the war he left her. The children were grown up, and she is now living in Munich. I saw her two years ago, and I may see her this year /1983/. She is now in her late 60's.

When /my friend/ Lilly's husband went to Russia in 1935 I asked him to go and see my brother, and when he came back he said he looked "like a living corpse /zhivoi trup/." And he took a picture of him, and I have these pictures of my mother and my brother. And that's the first and last that I had news of them, and then they were banished.

At Narva we boarded a boat, to Svinemunde, and from there we went by train to a camp where we stayed in quarantine, and from there we sent a telegram to Jozef Gyorgi, who had become the aide-de-camp of Horthy. He had a very big position. And right away he gave an order through Horthy to let us out. So we didn't have to go through quarantine, and we went right away to Budapest, where they invited us to go to the palace, for an audience to tell what had happened.

There we met Gyorgi, and Gömbös, later to be the prime minister of Hungary. /Note: Julius Gömbös, former extreme reactionary and anti-Semite, became premier 4 October 1932. He held office until his death 6 October 1935./

We brought money, a lot of rubles of the Profisional Government. We had gone through hunger and all sorts of difficulties to bring them out, because they belonged to the mission. But Gömbös, then young, was very unpleasant. "I don't understand you," he told Alii, "Why did you leave? You could have made a big career, speaking Russian and all that! And you brought the money!" He just treated us like two idiots for having done it, and we were so proud for having done so, and for having got out. He wasn't very nice; I didn't like him, though my husband did.

RP: And your mother?

She remained, working, she was a bookkeeper, and she gave courses in bookkeeping. That's what you will read now, in these ten or fifteen pages that I have given you. There it is written that when my father died she went back to the estate and helped my grandfather to manage the big mills--they had fine mills, with electricity and everything--and she was managing it and doing the bookkeeping. Double bookkeeping, Italian or something very complicated that very few people knew at this time. The estate was very big, but by and by my grandfather had to sell a lot, because my mother's brothers were very extravagant, they were in the guards, they had dancers as mistresses, and the Panaev's house in Petersburg, a little palace on the Nikolaevskaia, but by and by it was all gone.

The best one was the one who died, who married the English lady, Nicholas. He quit the military service and came to manage the estate, but he was impossible, he couldn't do it, or handle money. He died, and a year ago his son, my only first cousin, died a year ago. He was a dancer in Los Angeles. Lilli /a friend/ knew him, he was a charming man, such a russkii barin, 100% and a bohemian. He painted a lot, and he adopted an American boy, a dancer. This boy called me a few days ago and told me that he would come and see me. He refers to him as Papa, he speaks a little Russian, and he manages my cousin's studio.

My mother was an accountant, and then she taught courses of bookkeeping, and then she became a scientific translator, so that when they started to build the Dneprostroi, she was sent there as an interpreter. They were mainly French engineers who came and built the whole project, and when they went home they wrote me letters about my mother. One of them wrote: "If your mother starts your letter 'Dorogaia Verochka,' then you can write back to her, but it it is 'Dorogaia Vera,' then no." Because it was a bad period, and they dold me that nearly every night the Cheka called her in and they interrogated her. And my mother told me afterwards, "I was so exhausted, I never could sleep, and en I went the first thing they said was "Now sit down," and would be very nice. And she would tell them "All right, I will tell you, but give me a cigarette. I won't open my mouth if you don't." They gave her one so she could stand it, because she was always on the edge of /collapse/. And my mother, strangely enough, she thought they were right in doing that.

My brother became an employee of the tea trust, but mainly he was a sports manager, because in this time they tried to lancer les sports, especially tennis, and my brother was a wonderful tennis player, so good that he was a trainer and he arranged all the tournaments, so his position was very good, absolutely out of politics.

When Kirov was killed, they arrested him. They took his passport and held him for five or six days. Then they let him out, so you never know. When Lilly's husband asked him why he didn't leave, he replied "Because I love Russia more than I hate the communists." He married one of my colleagues in the hospital, whose husband was killed on the border escaping. I saw her. He was an officer in the White Army and he wanted to escape, and on the border they took him from the train and shot him in front of her. They let her go and she came back to St. Petersburg and worked in our hospital.

My brother was in love with another nurse that I introduced him to, a nurse that I met in the Caucasus, very beautiful, but I didn't want him to marry her, and when he wanted to tell me that he would marry her he went in the bathroom and filled the tub with water, cold, closed the door, sat in the bath, and then screamed! I rushed to the door and cried "What happened?"
"I have to tell you!" he said.
"What?" I asked
"I am marrying this girl."
"No, no!" I said, and I hit the door. "Let me in!"
"No!" he said, "not until you tell me you accept it!"

I didn't want to accept it, but then it didn't happen anyway, but he liked this girl very much. I looked for her for a long time, and in 1967 I found her. I went to see her in 1976, and she was very, very weak. She was the same age as I was,and she cried all the time. This /most recent/ time I didn't take even Vera /daughter/ and John, because she was completely gone, completely.

I settled in Hungary, and corresponded with my mother. From the time I arrived I sent her $20 a month, and books. The dollar was blocked, but the Hungarian banks allowed me to send that much.

In 1935 a French writer wrote good things about conditions in Russia, and I decided to try to go there for a visit. Intourist started to give people permits to go to Russia as tourists, so I gave my application for a visa to Cook the travel agency, and a fee of $50, or 50 pengoes. They sent it, and in two weeks I had money, and clothing--all my students gave me clothes to take to my relatives. And then I got the answer that I could not go, and that they would repay me the $50. They would not give me a visa. I was very upset.

/My mother and brother were happy to receive the help I sent them/ but in October 1937 he was arrested. They took him without even giving him a chance to take his hat. He was banished to some labor camp in Siberia, where he had only a number, with no right to correspond.

In December my mother /and my brother's wife/ got the news that in two weeks they would have to leave for the town of Osh, in Fergana oblast /in Central Asia/ at their own expense /svoi sobstvennyi raskhody/. So they had to sell all that they had. My mother said that they still had something--very little probably--but they had to liquidate everything to get the money to go. They were told that it was very important that they should have cots to sleep on, because in Osh they would be given four square meters in a room where there could be from twenty to a hundred people, and you could not get a cot there. So they bought cots and had to pay, and that is when she burned everything. So I didn't even have a picture of my father. I had one in Budapest, a small one, but I lost it. Only recently, when I was 78 or 79, my cousin got one, and sent it from England. It was a miracle that I should get that, a real miracle.

/The last I heard from my mother indicated that/ she thought it was my fault that they had been arrested. She said that our paths had separated, and that I never could understand her, and she could not understand me, so I shouldn't bother to write to her, and she would not write to me. I have these letters!

RP: This probably did not reflect her feeling in the matter at all, but was just a desperate measure to break off the correspondence, which in those times was dangerous to continue!

Elischer: When I visited Russia in 1976, after 56 years away, I went first to Kiev. There I asked if I could get a permit to stop at the stantsiia Lykoshina, if I paid for the trip myself.

They said, "No you cannot, because we are the Ukraine", and so forth. "Ask in Moscow."

In Moscow I asked, and they said, "No, you cannot do it, you can do it in Leningrad, because it belongs more to Leningrad than to Moscow." Before I left I asked for a trip by train from Budapest to Kiev; from Kiev I didn't care how, to Moscow, and from Moscow by day in the train to Petersburg, because I wanted to pass this railway [station] where I was born. They didn't allow me to go from Budapest to Kiev by train, which would have been much simpler. They said I would have to fly from Budapest to Moscow, then change planes at the airport and go down to Kiev, which was silly, to go this way, and then back. From Kiev they allowed me to take a night train back to Moscow and stay five days in Moscow.

I said, "I won't go if they won't [let me go by train to Petersburg]". They will allow you to go by train in the daytime, from Moscow to Petersburg, so we took the train from Moscow to Petersburg. "Do you know this place Lykoshino?" I asked the conductor.

"Oh, yes, that's a most beautiful place," she said.

"Do you know if something remains from before which you can see from the train there? The church on the hill?"

"Oh," she said, "No, no."

"Will you tell me [when we come to it]?" I said. "I know Uglovka, and then Lykoshino, I know all the stations, but still tell me; maybe I will forget."

She said, "Yes, all right, I will tell you."

And it was a bad day; it was raining. And then I went out to smoke on the perron [corridor] in the car. Two men were there, and when I smoked an American cigarette, and lit it with a lighter, and they said, "Hmm, inostranka! Ne russkaia!" [A foreigner! Not a Russian!]

"Ia russkaia," I said. "I am Russian."

"Da? sigarete u vas, sigarete da, Amerikanka!"

And then we talked. And one was drunk, and the other not. We talked for awhile, and I said, "You know, this railway, where you go was built by my grandfather and his brothers."

"Oh," they said, "that's history!'

"Yes," I said, "that's history!"

And then the militsioner--you know, they don't have policeman--on each train they have two or three militsionery, all the time. He came, and looked at me and them, and said, "What are you talking about?"

"We are talking about this railway," I told him.

"Who are you? What are you saying? You! Go!" he told them, and they left, and they were very scared. He asked me, "Who are you? Where do you come from?"

I told him, "I come from America. I left here 56 years ago."

Then the conductor came, and said, "Yes, yes! This woman asked about the stantsiia Lykoshino."

"Lykoshino?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said, "I lived there, my grandfather built the church there. I wanted to see it."

"I was born in Lykoshino," he said, "and I still live in Lykoshino."

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Sixty," he replied.

I said, "I am nearly 77, and haven't been here for 56 years."

Well, he changed completely. "My goodness!" he said.

"The church was built by my grandfather, and he was buried in the crypt. I want to go there."

"Don't go," he said. "Don't."

"How is the estate?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, "the estate is good, but you wouldn't recognize it. It is all built up, to the station! But the house is about the same. They have a children's recreation center there now. But don't go there /Ne ezdite tuda; ne nado!/, it would be too hard on you!"

And then we talked about the station. "Do you recall the name Tronin?" I asked, and he replied, "Oh yes, I have heard of the Tronins. But there was another one I can't remember, it began with --, they were very rich. But please, don't go there!" And then we talked, and he was very nice.

Imagine! 280 million people and I met on the train someone from that little station. It was a miracle. He was very official at first, but then he changed completely, and he felt free to talk to me. I didn't ask him anything that could embarrass him.

INDEX - ELISCHER

American Relief Association, 33

Belibin, painter, 16
Bennigsen, Count, secretary general of Red Cross, 19
Bochkareva, organizer of Women's Legion of Death, 23
Bruckner, Alii, first husband, 27, 28, 34
Burger, Austrian with Red Cross mission aiding POW's, 26

Dzerzhinsky, Feliks, head of Cheka, 37

Elischer, Vera Aleksandrovna, education, 4, 17, 18; estate life, 6; nursing, 19, theater work, 24, 25; Red Cross work, 25

Galitsin, Fuga, 38
Galitsin, Maria (Maia), 33-37, 38
Georgievskii, Dr., 73
Gömbös, Julius, Hungarian statesman, 38, 39
Golokhovs, 27
Gyorgi, Josef, Hungarian, Red Cross mission head, 26, 27, 29, 30, 38

Hafkin, Iurii, Grigor'evich, Dr., head of ambulance service, 34, 37

Jews, 17, 20

Kislovodsk, sanatorium, 22

Lykoshino, Novgorod gubernia, 1, 41, 42, 43

Manukhin, Dr., 22, 23
Mariia Fedorovna, Dowager Empress, 20
Matiushkin, Hungarian cook, 31
Miatlev, poet, 27
Mission for workers and soldiers, successor to military mission, 41
Mirbach, Count, German Ambassador, assassinated 6 July 1918, 26

Nicholas II, Emperor, murder October 1918, 27

Panaev, Kronit Aleksandrovich, grandfather, 2
Panaev, Nikolai, uncle, 1
Panaev, Valerian Aleksandrovich (b. 1824), 2
Panaev (married Kartsov), opera singer, 2
Paulik, Austrian, member of Red Cross mission, 26
peasant life, 7-10
Petersburg (Leningrad), arrival in, 31
"Plenbezh", organization of POW's, 28
Pohl, Mr., head of prisoner of war mission, Petersburg, 31, 33, 37

Rizenkampf, Nikolai Egorovich, grand uncle, friend of Dostoevsky, 15
Rizenkampf, grand aunt, 15, 21
Ruhle, Mr., one of chiefs of the American Relief Association, 33
Russian characteristics, 13-15; holidays, 6, marriage customs, 11, superstitions, 12; funeral customs, 13; holidays, 6

Sakharov, 14
Sechenyi, Count, 38
Serbievs, 27
Shirinsky-Shaikhmatov, Andrei, Prince, 26

Shulgin, French nurse, wife of Duma member Shulgin, 17
Solpris, Mr. and Mrs.., 33
Solzhenitsyn, 14
Spirtov, first love, 21
superstitions, 10, 11, 12

Troitskii most, bridge over Neva River, 32

Voronets, Vera Aleksandrovna, 1 (See Elischer)
Voronets, ____, mother, 1, 3, 9, 40, 41
Voronets, Aleksandr, father,(d. 1901), 1
Voronets, Kronit, brother, 2, 24, 25, 31, 36, 37, 39, 40

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Vasily V. Ushanoff

Recollections of Life in the Russian Community in Manchuria and in Emigration

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
July 1981
at Laguna Beach, California

With Written Recollections by
Vasily V. Ushanoff, 1979

Copyright ⓒ 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

DR. VASILY USHANOFF

Unlike many Russian emigres of the "old" or "first" emigration, Vasilii (Basil) Ushanoff was not of the privileged castes of pre-Revolutionary Russian society, or of the professional or commercial classes, but of humble origin. The son of a stationmaster, he grew up outside of Russia, in Manchuria. The society of his boyhood years was as Russian as that within the borders of the Empire, but the exotic environment of Manchuria evidently exerted small influences in diet, crafts and outlook.

Emigrating to the United States in 1922, Dr. Ushanoff at first worked at a variety of jobs, particularly in sawmills, until he could afford to enter university. In 1966 he tetired, at the urging of his second wife. For the first time he had time to read extensively, to attempt (unsuccessfully) writing, and to make a tour of Greece and the Near East. They sold their house in Hollywood and moved to Laguna Beach, where Mrs. Ushanoff's three sisters lived. There he busied himself with modernizing their house, being, he says, a carpenter, cabinet maker, plumber, bricklayer, cement worker, tile setter and gardener. Until recent years he made annual trips to Tule Lake, for hunting.

"This self-sufficient, simple life" was suddenly shaken when his son, William B. Arthur gave up a promising career and became a Witness of Jehova. Finding argument unavailing, Dr. Ushanoff, characteristically immersed himself in the principles of his son's new faith and Christian fundamentalism in general. He read hundreds of books and eventually compiled two lengthy studies of his own, Satan, Gods and Armageddon and The Flood, Noah and his Ark. These are well organized, well documented, and well thought-out, but although sceptics might praise them, his son, by now an ardent believer, rejected such a logical, analytical approach to his faith.

Assisted by his brother-in-law, the late Alexander Dolgopolov (Doll) of South Laguna, Dr. Ushanoff's interest focused on Russian culture in the USA. He studied the penetration by Russians of Alaska, California, and Hawaii.

In 1976, at the age of 72, Dr. Ushanoff was led by accident into oil painting. By trial and error he learned to mix colors and apply them on canvas. Painting soon became his hobby and main interest. Taking scattered engravings from old works, in two years he completed a series of 120 paintings on Russian America, which have been exhibited in Alaska, and some of which are now part of the collections at Fort Ross, California, and museums in Alaska.

The interviews were made in July 1981 in the light, airy kitchen of the Ushanoff home in Laguna Beach. Dr. Ushanoff talked in an even, well-modulated tone, quietly in order to avoid straining his vocal chords, delicate since an operation in boyhood. His thoughts were well-selected, the sign of an orderly mind. I have confined changes chiefly to small points of English, and to occasional rearrangement in order to keep chronological order.

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1986

Pierce: May we begin with an autobiographical sketch? When and where were you born?

Ushanoff: I was born on February 7, 1904 in Manchuria, China, on the Chinese Eastern Railway. My father, Vasilii, was a stationmaster on that railroad. There were six in our family--my mother and father, myself, two brothers and a sister.

Pierce: Did you live in a town, or a suburb?

Ushanoff: We were generally in small stations. As an employee, my father was transferred from one station to another, wherever his services were needed most, and so we lived in several different stations on the Chinese Eastern Railway. Some of these were very small, with maybe about ten or twelve buildings for the employees.

Pierce: What were the buildings made of?

Ushanoff: They were made of brick. Construction in Manchuria is mainly of brick and stone.

Pierce: Was this fired brick, or was it sundried?

Ushanoff: It was fired. With the exception of some commercial buildings, there was permanent construction along the entire Chinese Eastern Railway. In the small stations, where about 1,500 people lived, the commercial people had buildings made of wood, in the Russian style, with the same tall stockade around, and a big gate that would admit two or three horses abreast. They were engaged in different varieties of business. In the smaller stations, for instance, several people were engaged in cutting grass in the autumn and sold hay, or they engaged in trade with the Mongolians. We were close to the Gobi Desert, and there were lots of Mongolians travelling throughout the country. In the spring they used to come in with their herds and settle around the river. I came in contact with them on many occasions, while I was riding on horseback and hunting. The Chinese element was mainly used as labor on the stations and on the railroad; a laboring force. That particular part of Manchuria was sparsely populated, so I could go for fifteen or twenty miles inside the country along the river and I wouldn't meet a single Chinese.

Pierce: Was there a class distinction, a feeling that the Russians were higher than the Chinese?

Ushanoff: Yes, the Chinese were just a laboring group, that's all. Now, in some of the big cities the Chinese population was quite large. Of course, they had war lords who were governing them, but on the Chinese Eastern Railway, according to the treaty between the Russian and Chinese governments, there was a sort of line of demarcation, of Russian influence not only along the railroad but also for two or three miles around the small stations and the Russians governed it. However, to protect the nationals there were military forces, cavalry units, and also regular army units stationed there. Some of the army units were engineering corps, employed in different services for the railroad, and cavalry units. Whenever they heard of any of what we used to call the hung-hooze, the Chinese name for bandits, they would make forays against them, and if they captured any they just shot them and that was all there was to it. That way they kept them out, away from the Chinese Eastern Railway. They were quite prevalent in areas where the Russians had no influence and were too far away, and they used to commit murders and kidnap people.

That's about the way it was. In Harbin, where I was educated, we had some Chinese students too, but instruction was in Russian. The Chinese language was taught in one school only, in what we called a commercial school, which was equivalent to a gymnasium. They concentrated mainly on training a cadre of Russians who spoke Chinese and who also would know how to carry on business. It was a very good school, but I happened to go to a gymnasium, which was just a regular educational institution previous to getting into a university. However, after finishing at that gymnasium I could go to any university without passing any kind of examinations. But commercial school required examination in order to attend university. Gymnasium in Russia was equivalent to junior college here, and many Russians who came to the U.S. took that opportunity and completed some of the courses in two years, commercial courses for example, where there were no scientific studies required. But whenever a professional college was involved, that was a different story. They had to take the complete course. Just as I had to.

Pierce: Was the Russian community in these towns a fairly closely knit group, in which everybody knew everybody else?

Ushanoff: Oh yes, it was closely knit.

Pierce: And you mentioned a stockade. Was this for protection?

Ushanoff: Yes. If, for instance, we had a home built of bricks, we didn't have any stockade, we had maybe just a fence around the place. Most people had a fence or something, either to keep animals in or out. But ordinary Russian people--not the employees of the railroad--whenever they built any home on the Chinese Eastern Railway themselves, had to do it in the same way as it was done in Russia. It was of log construction--and there would be quite a stockade, probably 8 or 10 feet high, all around their particular place, and which could be very extensive, because they generally had cattle there, and horses, and they were engaged in some kind of business venture.

Pierce: So this was protection against thieves?

Ushanoff: I'll tell you one thing. When my dad came to China they never locked the doors there. Of course, it was a primitive life to begin with because it was during the construction of the railroad, and there were no doors or the doors were not closed, and nobody was afraid of anybody. The Chinese wouldn't touch anything because in those days any thief had his hand cut off, and that precluded them from entertaining any ideas about stealing anything. However, with the influx of Russians, as more and more people began to be settled there, and derive their livelihood from it, the Russians themselves began to do the occasional pilfering, and then gradually the Chinese too began to help themselves, because the Chinese law courts had no jurisdiction over Russian territory. The only punishment they received in Russian territory was to be put in the clink and that was about all.

Pierce: Before the Revolution the Russians were under the law of the Russian Empire, were they not? After the Revolution were they still under the same law?

Ushanoff: No, they weren't, because, actually there was no government. After the revolutionary period, which includes the time in which the White Army, fought against the Red Army in Siberia until the collapse of the White Army, many of the people, to save themselves, came into China, to Manchuria, and many of them came over here to the U.S.A.

So there was quite an influx of them, both intellectuals and common people, and they had a pretty tough time. Some of them served in the Chinese forces as guard units for the warlords, just to get by somehow.

Pierce: Could you describe a Russian household in one of the villages or smaller towns?

Ushanoff: The places we were living in were hardly villages. They couldn't be considered as such. The houses, as I said before, were solidly made, of brick and with peaked or pitched roofs, V-shaped, and double windows in the winter time. The winter was very harsh.

Now I will describe one of the different houses where we lived when my father was station master. We had three bedrooms, a dining room, and a sort of cooler room where supplies were kept. This cooler room was a part of the house, an unheated room, generally on the north side. During the winter time two stoves provided heat. The Chinese Eastern Railway alloted so much coal and wood to each employee, so we didn't have to buy any. During the winter the house was heated with that fuel.

In the cooler room, there was an opening into the basement. You lifted up the door, and you went down. There were shelves there, and our mother--as other people, of course--used to keep all kinds of preserves which she prepared during the autumn, from fruits and vegetables. For instance, she made sauerkraut, and there were barrels of it there; she put up beets and carrots in sand. When I was hunting, there were salted wild ducks and geese, and smoked pheasants. They were all kept there, and milk and so on; it was a regular storage place, because it was cool there.

Secondly, during the summer, starting in June, and in July and part of August, the warmest days, the perishable food used to be kept outside in a place specially built for that. I'll describe that particular construction. They would dig a hole in the ground, then they built a V-shaped roof over it and covered it with all the dirt that they dug up. There would be one door to enter and wooden planks set all around this hole. In the winter time when the rivers froze the Chinese laborers would break the ice and bring it over and fill up the hole with ice. So, in the summer time, it would preserve all the food that you wanted, on ice.

In the spacious kitchen, like I mentioned before, was a big oven made out of brick, with an iron top.

This had openings for the pots and pans that could be closed whenever they weren't needed. The frying was done there, or the baking. It was fueled mainly by wood.

Pierce: What kind of wood?

Ushanoff: In those days I wasn't interested in what kind of wood was growing in Manchuria. All I knew were birch trees; that is the tree Russians sing and have all kinds of verses about, so one couldn't help to know that. There were also quite a few fir trees. Manchuria has a very interesting fauna and flora, and it varies in different places. Once upon a time, as you know, the earth was in a different position and some of the remains of tropical growth are left in Manchuria. For instance, they had lianas there, and large water lilies, with huge leaves which denoted tropical growth in the past.

Then there was a profusion of flowers. I haven't seen anything like it here in California. Perhaps back East there is a variety of flowers, but there it was really amazing; they start in the spring. The snow is still on the ground when the blue flower begins to appear.

If you walk in the fields in California, they are dead; you don't hear anything, it is just dry grass. But there, the fields are alive, they have crickets and all kinds of insects; you could hear them everywhere, and you could pick them up. And, because of those little animals crawling on the ground, there were naturally many birds, and you could hear them singing at any time of the day. Around 12 o'clock, of course, you didn't hear so much because it was too warm--but otherwise when you walked on the fields you were in a different world altogether.

Secondly, as I mentioned, there were many different flowers, which came up in a sort of [schedule], two weeks one flower and another week another. In damp places orchids grew; I used to pick them up and bring them home, and it was quite a thing for the boys and girls of the community to go for walks in the evening, before dark, and collect the flowers, bring them home and present them to mother--"Here, mom, here's a present for you!"--and she would place them in a bowl filled with water, and maybe the next day we would come again with more.

That's the type of country I was brought up in. Also, we had mountains that we used to climb, not very tall ones--they were part of the Khinganskiĭ khrebet, the Khingan range--and we had the river about four miles from the station that I am describing. Wherever we lived, in whatever station, there was always a river. During the Easter holidays, in April, when many places still were snow covered, and the river still had ice on the shores, in the middle it was open and running, and we kids used to take a dip in it. And boy! that was just like getting in a hot stream! That was quite a pleasure, of course.

As I mentioned, the region was sparsely settled, uninhabited by Chinamen, and so the streams were abundant with fish, all kinds of fish. I remember the pike especially. My father loved fishing, with a net, and when I was a kid I used to tie a string on a pole, with a hook and a cork, and fish. Then, when we were living in that small station, occasionally the people would organize the whole place and kids, women and everybody would ride in telegas [carts] to the river. One member of that group, a commercial fellow who was living there, had a big net, a seine, about 200 feet long. There were a few good places where everybody could fish, but in some places they could tear the net. The first time I was helping there I was, of course, a youngster. I had to be of help around there, but not a nuisance. I had to swim to the other bank with a thin rope, and then pull a thicker rope with an adult. Gradually more of the men came and finally pulled the net across the river and then got on the boat and pulled it out to a shallow place. By the time I swam back to the place where they pulled the net out I saw lots of silvery fish! They were flopping on the sand. But at first I couldn't figure out why there were so many logs brought up from the bottom of the river. Now I'm not exaggerating, as a fisherman would. They seemed to be logs, as much as 2 feet and as long as six feet or more. My gosh! I said, they've brought so many logs! Actually the net did sometimes catch some logs but when I cam closer I saw that the logs were actually huge pike, covered entirely with green moss. How old they were I don't know. As I mentioned before, everybody was there including little kids and teenagers; the only people who stayed in the station were the stationmaster or his assistant, and the switchman. Otherwise it was empty, and I don't think the doors were even locked. But actually there was nothing to steal there; they were poor people, with no valuables of any kind, except some simple furniture and who would want that?

When the catch was brought in, first of all the women cut the heads off the catfish and put them in a big cast iron pot full of water suspended from a tripod over the fire. They put in pepper, salt and all kinds of herbs and boiled them. After it was cooled they gradually poured what was in that pot through a sieve into another big container. It left a sort of golden liquid. Then they put it back into the pot, added potatoes and carrots and a variety of fish without small bones. Of course, the women folks were doing the cooking, and men were having a drink and telling stories. Somebody would play an accordion and with more vodka to drink, he would start singing and everyone would join him. They all had a hell of a good time, and that happened maybe three or four times during the summer. All the catch was divided. The owner of the net got the largest share, and the rest was divided into sacks and distributed evenly amongst the families. In our place, in a little house, separate from the main dwelling, there was a specially built outdoor smoking device, and mother used to smoke the fish.

I should also mention that in a small station, not so much in the larger station of about 1,500 people, but in a small station, in practically every household the outhouse was outside. In the winter, with snow and a deep cold, it was quite tough to go there.

They also had a special barn for cows or horses. We had a couple of cows, and one horse and she had a colt, and mother also raised ducks, geese, and chickens, so it was quite a household. But actually it was the same in practically every household in a small station. It was possible to have that because we were living in the wide open spaces. In the morning, after the cows were milked, a Mongolian shepherd would take them out in the field and stay with them until evening and then bring them home. It was in some ways a pastoral life.

Pierce: You mentioned the stoves; could you discuss them further? I suppose the simplest kind was in the village, in the peasant home?

Ushanoff: Well it would be a rather simple kind of stove, because it didn't have any frying facilities, only baking facilities. Of course, you stuck something in that big oven which had hot charcoal, well naturally it could fry there too, but it took quite a long while, and as I recall from when I was back in the old country, they used to make soup. Generally in peasant homes they had two types of ware, mainly pots, made out of clay and of cast iron. They would bake in those things, and make soup in them. They didn't have very much iron or copper ware; as I recall it was mainly clay fixtures. Of course, on the Chinese Eastern Railway they lived in better conditions, and some of the simple folk even had big homes. They had pots and pans and they fried things on a hot plate.

In Russia the peasant's big, long brick stove had a place on top for the old folks to sleep during the winter time, because it kept them warm there. It was quite spacious, probably it could fit in four or five people.

There were Russian peasants in Manchuria at this time, but they would not have lived in this fashion because they lived in homes furnished for them by the Chinese Eastern Railway; they didn't have to build them. If they had to build, then they might have made them like that, just like I mentioned awhile ago that when the common people built their homes they built them in the same way that they were built in Russia. They had those kind of stoves, though not necessarily in every household.

Pierce: What kind of stove did they have in the better class type of home?

Ushanoff: The better class of homes had tiled kitchens and tiled stoves and there was a big long iron hot plate on top. All the walls were tiled, as I recall, and also the floor. Those were people of some importance, well-to-do people; they lived in a different condition. They also had toilet facilities, built in the home. They didn't have to go outside in cold weather, so everything was provided for them.

Pierce: This would have been a flush toilet then. Would this have been imported, perhaps from England?

Ushanoff: Not necessarily! They were made in Russia too. In big cities in Russia where people could afford to have them, they did so. And naturally they preferred to have them; they could afford it. The poor folks, on the other hand, had to have outhouses. As I recall, they used to have a huge hole [yama] dug in the ground alongside their home, and probably underneath their home. They didn't have a cesspool similar to what is constructed here, with several sections for purification of deposits. Instead, in winter time, common laborers, like for instance Chinese in this case, they would come in when everything gets frozen; they would break it up and cart it away so that was a simple way to get rid of the waste material. Of course it was covered, and the cover could be raised up. At the stations there was a building specially made for that purpose. It was a small place, with several wooden seats, open, and the pit itself was very deep. Now it was an interesting thing, you would think that in the winter the waste would be carted away from the big stations but the laborers came around in the summer time and pumped out the stuff. The Chinese used to put the waste on their vegetable gardens for fertilizer. So if you bought vegetables from the Chinese you had to be very careful; it had to be washed thoroughly.

We grew our own vegetables; I used to help Mom cultivate [the plot]. Father was about my height --but he was very thin and, as mother used to say, he couldn't hammer a nail in the wall without hitting his finger; he was entirely useless with such things. Evidently I took after my mother; I used to help her cultivate the garden.

Mother was a hard worker. Women, in general, were very hard workers, raising large families. My mother had four kids, but some of them had as many as eleven kids and no help. Sometimes I reminisce with Lisa, Ashia and Ol'ga [wife, and two sisters-in-law] and we just can't imagine how our mothers could do the terrific amount of work they did. They had to dress the kids, to prepare dinner for them, had to see that the husband was fed and children sent to school. They had to wash the dishes and clean the house, milk the cows, feed the animals and wash the clothes. In order to wash the clothes mother had a large pot. She was small, shorter than I am, but husky. She would place the pot on the stove to boil the clothes. Then she was able to lift that pot off and put it on the ground. It is no wonder that for many women it was as the saying went in Russia, when the women was forty she was finished. Actually we could see that around forty-five or fifty years of age they were worn out. They were old, gray-haired and wrinkled, and actually feeling old. They would begin to dress in dark clothes. I don't know why. It made them look older, with a dark kerchief around their heads. I suppose they considered that they had already completed their life; they had done what they had to do. They were old, they couldn't help it.

Of course, my mother lived until she was ninety-three, but I think that much of it was due to the fact that she came over here. Association with old folks makes one old too. In those days they would say, oh, you are an old women at the age of forty-five or fifty years old." Naturally women of leisure, who had help in the house, they had cooks and maids, at forty they were just blossoming, and sexually they were just roaring to go, but women of the sort I am describing had passed over that stage of life; they were tired out. For instance, in the Caucasus Mountains they say that some people live to be a hundred and eleven or a hundred and thirty years of age. There, the woman marries at around 12 or 14, and by the time she is 35 or 40 she is old.

Pierce: It is a long time to be old. And for the men, on the other hand, was it a little easier for them?

Ushanoff: It was a little easier for men, because the man considered himself the head of the household. As such, he brought home his wages and gave them to his wife. Some handled it themselves, but most of them gave it to the wife, because a wife knew how to buy food and to distribute it for other things. Most of the people were in debt. I know our family was always in debt to Chinese merchants from month to month. That's why, when I came over here and began to get on my feet, I said I am never going to run into any kind of debt. For instance, when I was married the first time and we had a child, I began to practice [dentistry] and finally we somehow got together five hundred dollars, and made a down payment on a home, because we had a child. We had to buy a frigidaire and a stove but we didn't have any furniture. My sister gave me a table and chairs for the kitchen and we had beds, of a simple kind, but we didn't have any furniture in the sitting room or dining room. In the sitting room I had wooden boxes, covered up with some kind of a quilt to sit on. I was a dentist then, so some of the friends would come in and say "What the hell! what's the matter with you? You are a dentist, aren't you? You could go and get anything you want, and just pay five bucks a month!"

I said "No, when I save enough money to buy the things I want, I'll go and buy. It becomes mine from then on. Till then, if you like my company, you can come and sit on those boxes. If not, you don't have to come!"

That's what this early upbringing taught me; I don't want to have any kind of debt on my neck; I would rather do without it. It was like that not only for our family, but for practically all of the low wage earners on the Chinese Eastern Railway, despite the fact that they were paid higher wages than anywhere on the Russian railroads. That's why father went to the Chinese Eastern Railway, because they paid more, and they received various exclusive privileges but still ran into debt.

They couldn't very well do otherwise. There were four of us, but let's say you had eleven, well they had to be fed, they had to be dressed and so on.

Occasionally maybe someone gave them [some clothes]. Let's say my youngest brother had outgrown his clothes and there was no one else after him, so my mother would say "Well, you have a younger son than Tony, so would you like some of his clothes?" That's the way they did, they helped each other. They didn't want to throw away this stuff which could be worn by somebody and helped them. So they were kind that way; you see, they had to be. So that way they had very cordial relations between the people around, they were all friends. Well, of course there were exceptions, naturally. Human beings are different, and so there could be some nasty people, but as a rule most of them were very cordial, and they were trying to help each other in any kind of need. Let's say that a mother was ready to give birth to a child; she had to go to the hospital and stay there for a couple of weeks. Well, the neighbors would pitch in and help her to feed and look after her children because the father was out all day long as he had to work. Actually, it was a hard life.

[My first trip to] Russia was when I was 6 1/2 years of age. My mother took me and my youngest brother to see our grandparents in the town of Lukaianovo--it's close to Nizhnii Novgorod. I recall travelling through Siberia, on the Trans-Siberian railroad, and particularly the trip around Lake Baikal, because I could see a huge body of water, which we hadn't seen in China. We had only rivers of different kinds. That excited me very much, just as it did later on in life when I was in Vladivostok where I saw big sea-going ships and the ocean itself. I thought it was a marvellous sight. Well, anyway, I do recall large fields of wheat, and how, when the wind was blowing, you could see the waves of the golden wheat fields. And, of course, I even can visualize the houses in which my grandparents lived, and I remember my great grandfather, who was bald headed, with some white hair hanging down on his collar and he was very stooped as he walked. Judging by the size of his shoulders, he had probably been quite a strong person, or at least it seemed so to me, because I was a little boy.

Pierce: He had his own farm?

Ushanoff: No, they were in some sort of a business, but I have no idea of what they were doing. I know that like every household there they had a big garden, or actually a fruit orchard. They had apples, and I think they had pears. My grandmother on my mother's side was a widow. Her husband, red-headed, died from pneumonia which he contracted hunting. He loved hunting very much; evidently I sort of inherited that particular trait from him, because my father [wasn't a hunter]. We stayed there a whole summer. My grandmother on mother's side wanted me to stay with her, because whe was lonely, and go to school there. In the summer I would go back to Manchuria, and then come back again, and things like that. So in the autumn when I was 6 1/2 years of age, I started to go to school there. I think I spent a couple of months there, but mother couldn't stand leaving me so she took me back to Manchuria.

There father had a very hard time trying to place me into schools in Manchuria. According to them I had to be seven years of age, and in order to be seven years of age I would have had to wait until I would be seven and a half years of age, because you see I was born on February 7th. He couldn't see why I should lose so much time, particularly as I had done all right in the school in Russia. But he persisted in that and they had to take me, and they said if he doesn't do very well we'll kick him out, and he will have to wait." Well, I did all right, and I never stayed in the same class for an additional year. So that is why I graduated at 17 1/2.

I went to Irkutsk once more in 1914, when I was 10 years of age. I had a growth on my vocal chords and was speaking in a whisper. In Manchuria no one was able to perform the operation because it was very delicate, and so they said the best thing would be for mother to take me to Irkutsk where they had a medical school, and a very famous professor, Dr. Zimin, who would perform the operation. So I went there and stayed until they performed the operation and I began to speak as you hear me now. However, if I talk too much, as it will be by the end of this interview, you will find that my voice goes down and down and down, and gets tired very quickly, my vocal chords get tired.

Pierce: To return to the way of life for a moment, what holidays were observed?

Ushanoff: You would be interested, I think, in how the Russians prepared and spent their holidays, which differed in many ways from what we do here. When they come over here the tend to spend them the same way the Yankees do; they get Americanized; they change their ideas, and because everybody does that they gradually do the same thing. However, in Manchuria it didn't make any difference how poor the person was; they tried either to save the money or even got in debt. A week or two before, let's say, Christmas, they began to buy different things, ham and all kinds of canned foods, candies for the kids and so on.

Now, on the very first day of Christmas, starting about ten or eleven o'clock, the male head of the family began to make the rounds of the homes of their friends--of course in a small station everyone was a friend--and congratulate the members of the household with the happy holiday. The table was all set with all kinds of food, lots of drink, all kinds of wine, and vodka and so on, and he had to sit at the table, even if he was the only one. He sat there, and he had a shot of vodka and had to eat ham or something there that he liked. Then he went to another place. Or, in a big place, in many cases, he hired an izvozchik--a driver--and a horse. The izvozchik took him from one place to another. Which was a good thing, because by the time he ended up he was drunk, and had to be escorted home! Now, of course, in a small station where there were only twelve or fifteen households it didn't happen, but anyway he came staggering home.

In the evening the whole station, with all the kinds, usually was invited to our house. Because my father was stationmaster they had to come and pay their respects to him. They were invited for dinnertime, to come around five o'clock, when it was still maybe a bit light, so when the whole bunch came in all the rooms were filled with people. They would borrow a table from somebody, one big enough so everybody could sit together.

We had a Christmas tree--Christmas was a children's holiday, not for adults. We did send Christmas cards, congratulating our friends and relatives, but not so extensively as here, just to relatives mainly, and very good friends. They generally tried to get as big a Christmas tree as they could, decorated it, and put candles on it. Sometimes there were fires, when a candle would [ignite a branch] so somebody usually watched it. The kids played around the Christmas tree, singing Christmas songs, and then they were given presents. The adults didn't get presents; children got candies, nuts, and tangerines and apples, which, in December, was quite a treat, of course. They generally put it in a little bag.

The next day the assistant to the stationmaster had a party, and everybody went there. So Christmas was not a one day or three day holiday, but it started on the 25th and ended up on the 6th of January. Of course, people were working, but still they went and visited each other and had Christmas trees and parties. Finally, on the 6th of January it was finished, and on the 7th or 8th the children went to school and then everyone sobered up.

At Easter there was again lots to eat and again the male head of the family visited different households, congratulated them and kissed them three times and they gave him colored eggs. Sometimes he broke the egg and sat there and ate and had drinks again. And the same thing happened in other places.

This holiday lasted three days, and again maybe if you didn't have a chance to visit someone they would say 'Well come over anyway on the fourth or fifth day; we still have paskha [Easter cheesecake] or we still have kulich [Easter bread]'.

Another holiday was Maslenitsa. It was a remnant of the old religious customs when the Slavs believed in the sun god as their creator. During February, when the days begin to lengthen, they used to bake round cakes that represented the sun. You partook of that and then you would get all of the strength of the sun. That particular maslenitsa has been retained to the present time and is still being practiced here. That is to say, the family had pancakes, but back in Manchuria, or in the old country, it could last any length of time, even two weeks. Again, you ate in one place and then the next day you would go to another place and eat more of the same. As a rule sour cream and butter with caviar, never with anything sweet like we have with hotcakes. They also consumed quite large quantities of caviar, ham and smoked fish, plus lots of vodka. That was important, because otherwise the sun god probably wouldn't help you much. Before they were converted, the old Slavs did the same thing; they used to drink braga and eat those particular pancakes which they called bliny.

So, I have described the main holidays.

Pierce: What was the role of the church? I suppose families varied according to their dependence on it, but how big a role did it usually play?

Ushanoff: Oh, it played some role of course, but I don't think it played a very great role in the lives of the people. To some extent it did, because they considered themselves Christians, and they had to go to church. The kids, whether they liked it or not, had to go to church, to Saturday evening service and Sundays.

Now I will describe to you how it was when I visited Russia. I was 6 1/2 years old then, but I do remember many of the things that I saw there at that time. Sunday morning we would get up. We had to wash, naturally, but we were not given anything to eat. We were allowed to drink a glass of water. Then we were marched to church. From my grandfather's place it was probably about fifteen to twenty blocks. We had to stay for three hours at that service. It was a large cathedral, with beautiful choral singing. But how could I think of singing when my stomach was making all kinds of noises and I was hungry?

At our home, in Manchuria, we always ate something after we got up in the morning before we went to church. Later, as a teenager, I didn't mind attending the service, because I could chat with girls there and see them home after the service.

By the time we all came home, grandmother--it was a kind of tradition--had baked two, sometimes three, pies, not round but square pies--pirogs, one of meat and rice, and the other a fruit pie. It could be fish and veziga, or carrot pie. We all sat at the table, and only then we had our meal. Veziga was made, I think, from soya bean; it resembles spaghetti, only it is colorless, practically transparent, after it is cooked and mixed with fish and a pie is made. Of course, they add all kinds of seasoning. It was delicious.

I don't think the church played a great part in our communities in China. I don't think there were many pious people there. There were exceptions, of course, but most people were too busy with everyday life to devote much time to the church.

In the small station where I received my preliminary education the church was generally built like a cross, with an altar on one side and then two wings. On Monday the altar part was covered up, the wings were divided in two, and the children of the preliminary grades were taught there. I went to the church school when I was 6 1/2 years of age, only for two years. The school at another place was in a specially built brick building, of two storeys, as I recall, a good deal higher than in the church. It was a well heated place and there were wonderful, well-educated teachers. As I look back, I wonder how they could have had an interest in the kids who were growing up in that particular section of China. It was a small place, education was free, provided by the railroad, and they were all paid by the government.

Education in the gymnasium was free but it kept our parents poor, paying our board and room. I used to live at the school, in what we called the pension, a boarding place, right on the school property and the cost of my living there was deducted from my father's wages every month. Then, when we were living in the small station, my youngest brother and sister had to attend school in another, larger depot, so their board and room had to be paid.

I don't think the church exerted a very great influence on the lives of most of the people. Most, that is, except the peasants. They were more pious in many respects; as far as they were concerned, everything depended on God. All the good that they received, or all the bad things that happened to them, they probably considered as punishment for their sins. They were closer to God in some respects.

Concerning this, I could relate to you a very curious and interesting story. The family of a friend of mine, living in the same station, had one of their distant relatives come and be a helper around the house. They had eleven children. He is now the only living member. He lives in Seattle, Washington, and we still keep in touch. It was quite an intellectual family. One member of the family was my teacher, a very interesting person in many ways. He came to the U.S. and passed away in San Francisco.

Well, anyway, she came and began to live in their household as an equal to them. She was like a member of the family, but was helping around the house. They would sometimes ask her about life in the village. Once she said:

"St. Nicholas used to look after us; he would walk for many versts and protect us."

"But how do you know?" they would ask.

"Well, every month we had to put new high boots in front of his icon because the old ones were worn out."

That's the mentality of the people. The village had to collect the money and place the shoes in front of the icon. For us it is laughable, but for them it was real. The priests were poor folks too--they lived on whatever the peasants gave them. They might bring them a chicken for christening a child or a suckling pig for performing a marriage, so one can't criticise them severely either.

Pierce: So, the peasants had such superstitions, but were the people in the towns more free of these?

Ushanoff: Oh yes, most of them. Educated people didn't have any such superstitions, with the exception of some city folks who would say that if you met a priest, you'd better hold on to a button--on the blouse or anywhere, or you would meet with bad luck. They practiced that occasionally, but that was the realm of simple people. Any enlightened person wouldn't.

Pierce: But since practically everybody had some connection with the church, could it not be said that in that regard they retained some belief in the supernatural?

Ushanoff: The intellectual people, the educated people, might still have been believers in God, but maybe they questioned, as I began to do, when I was not long past my teens. I questioned many of the things that were preached to me by the priests. By the way, we had, from the very beginning of our schooling until the very end, to take what was called God's law, Zakon Bozhii, a required subject. It started with Adam and Eve and stories from the Old Testament, and as we progressed in our education we had to learn the church services. Why did we have to say 'Gospodi pomiliui' three times and not five times? Why did we have to say something else six times? It was boring! Then, at a certain age, we had to go to confession. Mother asked me:

"Are you going to go to confession this time? You are getting to be a big fellow. You'd better go."

"What's confession?" I asked.

She said, "Go and see the priest, talk to him, after that he will forgive you all your sins and will give you the body of Christ and His blood. Actually it's wine and a piece of bred."

I didn't like the idea of having the body of Christ and his blood, but anyway, just because I was getting older, and was a good boy--in some respects --I marched there, and come to the priest and he asked: "Do you obey your father and mother?"

"I do."

"Do you tell lies?"

"No, I don't tell lies!"

"Such impertinence!"

"I don't tell lies!"

"Did you ever steal anything?"

"No, I never stole anything in my life."

And a few questions of a similar nature. "Well," he said, "I forgive you all your sins."

I came home, mother asked me, "Did you go to a confession?" Naturally she was busy at home cooking pie; she used to go to church only on big holidays.

"Yes," I replied.

"And what did the Father ask you?"

So I told her.

"Oh, no," she said.. "That's not the way to go to confession."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

You should say: "I am sinful, Father."

"But I am not," I replied, "so why should I say I am?"

"You should say it anyway!"

So next year I went and to whatever the priest asked me, such as "Did you steal anything?", I replied "I am sinful, father!" He looked at me as if he was sure he had some kind of a creep before him!

That was just a minor story, pertaining to religious beliefs, but as I said, from an early age I questioned many things that were being taught and on several occasions I would ask some questions in the classroom, raising my hand. Once, I don't recall exactly how it was, I asked some sort of pertinent question and the Father raised his voice and said "Sit down, you fool!" I didn't like that! I had asked him for a definite and reasonable explanation on a subject he introduced to us.

Personally I was never religious. I had to attend church when ordered, but whenever I could skip, I did. During services I stood mostly outside the church. On a warm day I derived more pleasure being in the fresh air. I'd just go outside and sit down there on the steps and chat with my friends about where we should go hunting, or where we would meet the girls whom we knew. Of course, everything was on the pure side, there were no sexual undertones in any of our activities. The moral upbringing in our time was very, very high.

Pierce: Were young people more innocent then than they are today?

Ushanoff: Oh yes! I may say that, roughly speaking, ninety-nine percent of the girls were innocent. The boys respected their innocence. When boys reached their high teens, as I know some friends of mine did, when they wanted a sexual outlet they would go and see a prostitute. Those of my friends who were able financially to afford it did that. As a matter of fact, I know that one woman, the aunt of one of my friends, used to give him money and say, "Go and see a prostitute; you need it!" When I was in high school I used to pal with a few boys. They drank vodka--Russians drink a lot--we used to go together to swim in the Sungari River in Harbin, during the summer time. Afterward we would drop in a Chinese restaurant and eat pilmeni. The boys always used to drink. My father had a little drinking problem, not because he was an alcoholic, but being in very poor health, he would drink a couple of small hosts and he was feeling drunk. The nature of his organism was such that he couldn't take much of any liquor. He was very frail. I never enjoyed it and I didn't like the taste of it. I might have liked some wine but they used to drink a Chinese drink, hanzha; rather potent stuff. One drink today and the next day after, drinking some water, a person would be drunk again!. But I didn't enjoy this and just as I mentioned, they had money, so they used to go without me; I couldn't keep up with their company on many occasions. But they were the boys who had wealthy parents. Like in the case of my friend, his auntie was very wealthy, and she used to give him money frequently so he could do whatever he wanted. Finally he ended up as an alcoholic, and contracted all kinds of venereal diseases.

So this was a sad story. He was a good looking boy, of an aristocratic family.

That was when we were living in a place of about 1,500 people. His father was a big shot, the master of the depot where they serviced locomotives and prepared [railroad] cars. They had a beautiful home, and servants. A Chinese cook prepared their meals. Meals were simply served in our place, but when I went to his home for the first time, boy! There were so many forks, and so many knives and spoons on our dining table. He used to have a meal in our place, where we ate in a simpler style, so before we sat down he said, "Now don't get disturbed at whatever you see. Look at me, and see what fork or spoon I pick up, and then you pick up that particular spoon and eat the meal which is in front of you." Of course, there were napkins, and you had to learn how to use them. So actually through him I learned table manners and how to behave myself. From then on, I could be on my best behavior at the table, with no problems. It was just through my association with this boy.

Pierce: How did you look upon your family? The family you have described would have been well off, and genteel. Did you look upon yourself as being poorer than they, but just as good as they were?

Ushanoff: Just as good and maybe better in some ways. I still liked the life we led. We might not have everything, but I liked the way we lived. I was up to par with him in everything, and better as far as grades in school were concerned. There was no particular enmity between any one of us; we were friends, we rode horses, hunted and fought together against another bunch of boys. Finally, we would stop fighting and laughingly both parties would go swimming together. It was the same relationship as among youngsters--even here, in the United States, I think it's about the same.

Pierce: Did anyone look upon himself as of lower status, a peasant for example?

Ushanoff: Well, I think the peasants might have felt that way, but Ican say that many of our family friends were common people, working like I mentioned in the depot or station, or switchmen. He could be a common fellow who didn't even know how to read and write, but yet he was one of the people who lived there. Our folks were very kind to all of them.

The exceptions were a few big shots. Of course they would have looked down upon them; and they would have looked down on us. There were not very many of them and they kept together. They were the intellegensia. We were very unimportant, we were members of the working group; we were the people. Again, with exceptions, there were some wonderful heads of departments who were loved by everyone, but socially there was no communication. We had communication among the middle class, which we were part of, and with the very common people, the uneducated people working there. There was mutual interest and happy contact between the two.

Pierce: How about marriage? Where would the lines be drawn? What would be regarded as a bad marriage?

Ushanoff: To answer that question I have to refer back to Russia and some of the customs there. Earlier, many marriages in villages were arranged by the parents of teenagers, but gradually this went out of use. However, on the Chinese Eastern Railway, as I have mentioned before, people were of a better status, because they had higher salaries, they lived in better houses, and had good educational facilities. Efforts to get couples together didn't work out. People got married because they loved each other. There probably were a few very wealthy people, that could have married a poor girl who was good looking, but just because of her parents' lower status in society, they wouldn't dare to marry her. It would not have been possible to make a happy inter-family relationship.

It could be, of course, a question of intellectuality and upbringing. A wife had to be on par with the rest of the ladies and think the same way her husband did, otherwise she would be rejected by the rest of society, by the four hundred, as we say here. She would be an outcast because she was a switchman's daughter. She wouldn't be accepted in society; it wouldn't make any difference how beautiful she was. So a man might offer "Would you like to be my mistress?" They would go that far, but no further. Otherwise, people would marry whomsoever they pleased.

However, despite the fact that the Russians had been living there for so long, there was no intermarriage with the Chinese. Russians would marry Russians and Chinese would marry Chinese. The only exceptions I ever knew was a woman who lived, as they say, with a Chinaman, in a station of about 1,500 population, a former prostitute. Possibly she was even married to him, but I know that she was looked down upon by the other Russians. She was an old woman; he used to accompany her to church. Evidently he was baptized into Orthodoxy; she wouldn't have it any other way. He had a little grocery shop there and she helped him. But that's the only case I have known. However, after the revolutionary period and when I was already here, in the 1930's, Russian women were being married occasionally because of need, just to survive, to wealthy Chinese who had some sort of important position and could support them.

Pierce: So the Chinese, as a group, were considered to be beneath the Russians?

Ushanoff: They were considered to be. However, from what I have read about the rough treatment given the Chinese by the British, the Russians were rather friendly. They looked down on the Chinese, but they didn't despise them; they were on rather friendly terms with many of them. For instance, a Chinaman would come around to sell his wares. He would display his goods to the lady of the house. She would buy from him what she needed and would say "I can't pay you very much now, I can give you one ruble. If you sell me three rubles worth, then next month you come and collect the rest." He would come next month and become a friend and they would treat him to tea and pies. Again, that would happen among the type of people with whom I lived. Simple folks would do that. The big shots wouldn't think of doing such a thing. They would go to the fanciest stores, order the best and have their own seamstresses to do the sewing. They were people of a different and interesting world altogether; that's why I mentioned to you in one of our conversations, Dad said many times:

"Be an engineer. See how well they live! Get your education, it's very important! Without education you can't get anywhere! So you've got to get as high an education as you can!" He was right, and I thank him for his advice. Our parents kept themselves in debt trying to educate us. My sister-in-law belonged to the same type of family as ours; they lived in the same way. Her parents never got out of debt. My wife, Lisa, relates that when she used to go to school in the winter time, she had only one dress and some kind of sweater or coat which was very thin. By the time she got to school she was half frozen. There was no transportation for kids to school and back. We had to walk to get to school. I walked about three miles to my school. Many of the children of today would hate to do this, but, personally, I think, it was good exercise.

Pierce: Did you have any athletics at the school?

Ushanoff: We had, but not enough. We had an athletic field, and once a week we had gymnastics. There was a teacher, a former army sergeant, who would lead us in all kinds of calisthenics. We would play soccer, run around and climb on the stairs, and climb on the poles, only during our recess period, but not to such an extent as here. The contention of educators was, we want to educate these children so that they will be good members of society when we get through with them. And, by golly, they did it too, in most cases.

The money that might have been spent on athletics was put on other activities, which they considered more important, because one could run around after school and get all the exercise that he wanted.

The discipline in school was very strict. For a small infraction of the rules the parents had to be called and a pupil had been reprimanded. There were no elective subjects, with the exception of languages in the later years of the gymnasium. We had to take subjects as they were given to us. If you flunked the subject this year, I believe it was two subjects, a chance was given to make it up during the summer, and one had to pass an examination in the autumn. Then a person would be admitted to the next class. However, if the pupil flunked more than two, then he had to repeat the courses. And if he flunked again they gave him a third chance to repeat the courses. After that a pupil was asked to leave the school. It was as simple as that. They didn't monkey around.

Pierce: Were there a few, then, who still weren't able to keep up with it?

Ushanoff: Yes, I knew of several. One fellow I sat with in the school--he was directly behind me--was expelled. The director told him to learn some kind of a trade. If a person could not get a scientific education he had to learn a trade of some sort. He had to attend a machine shop. Educators promoted that idea. In Russia they had technical schools for students who were unable to keep up with their education. They would make machine operators out of them and teach them other crafts. It is still being carried on by the Soviets, but it is not their invention. The Soviets considered, after they finally got Russia in their hands, that they wanted modern education for their children, that the tsarist education was not for them; it had to be liberalized. As a result, what happened? What we see going on today in the United States; colleges are saying that the material they are getting from high schools is far below the standard. Many students do not know how to spell and write. Some of them do not know how to read. Exactly the same thing happened in Russia. Students came into the colleges unable to write in Russian. So they thought that there must be something wrong with their liberal education, that they would have to have better preparation before being allowed entry into colleges. They gave them special courses and taught them how to read and write. The Soviets made a complete turn-around and began to teach them in the same way as they did in tsarist Russia.

I remember when I was on the staff at the University of California, once the freshman class was given the exam, I had to be on the floor. As a rule, starting with the sophomore year, students selected honor members from a class to prevent cheating. I had to be present when freshmen were writing their exams, and as they were turning in their blue books, I began to correct them. One question was: "What is plaster of Paris?" The answer was "Plaster of Paris is the subject which could be poured over objects." Now, when a question of that type is asked, it should be answered by presenting a chemical formula, its properties, etc. Well, the more I corrected the worse it got. After every question I had to put a zero. And it ended up in a zero. The professor came along; I was the clinical assistant. I said, "Doctor Hughes, I want you to see this blue book. I would never have answered a question like this. I might make mistakes in English, but I would make a scientific description of plaster of Paris, of its properties, etc."

"So what do you think of that?" he said.

"I would give him zero," I said. "Do you agree with that?"

And he said, "By all means. You see the Dean of the Dental College passing by there? Show it to him."

So I took a blue book over to him. "Doctor Fleming"--he passed away, a wonderful person--"what do you think of this?" I gave him the blue book. "Here is a student who is going to spend five years in the Dental College. I consider it a disgrace if we let people of this sort take a dental course."

He glanced at several pages and said, "My God! I intend to see him." He called me by my first name, "Basil, I am going to see him. I am going to talk to him, because a man of that sort couldn't continue in dental college."

This just shows you how even at that time, at the end of the 1930's, we began to have a kind of people that shouldn't enter college. And now--it's worse.

Pierce: Could we return to your parent's house in Manchuria. What were the furnishings? Floor coverings, for instance. Were there rugs?

Ushanoff: The floors were of wood, painted a brown color. No rugs. Oh, there were occasional rugs made by the women of the house by using all kinds of rags. They might do that and put it in front of the bed when they got up in the morning, so that it wouldn't be cold for their feet, but that was very seldom in that kind of a household. Of course, in a wealthy household they had Persian rugs, Chinese rugs and what not. The furnitute was very simple, wooden, made by some local craftsman, a Russian. Occasionally there were iron beds, with iron springs; I remember I had one like that. A wooden frame sometimes, with an iron spring, high on one side. I don't recall double beds; I think they were single beds, but fairly wide.

Pierce: Were there curtains?

Ushanoff: Oh yes, curtains.

Pierce: Embroidered?

Ushanoff: Most times the lady of the house would make her own, out of some sort of cheap material that she would buy. They didn't have time for embroidery; the only embroidery was on towels, for icons. Of course, there were different kinds of women, some were interested in embroidery. My mom never was, she did some fancy work on a Singer sewing machine, when she bought it and paid a ruble a month. A Jewish fellow, who was stopping at every station, sold them and he taught her how to do fancy embroidery, but she didn't use it very much. He came around every month to collect his ruble and how in the hell he made a living, I don't know. Even if he got fifty percent from each payment, it must have been a very precarious living.

Pierce: You mentioned an embroidered cloth being used to embellish an icon. Was there an icon in every room?

Ushanoff: It was always in a corner of the dining room, in the kitchen, and in the bedrooms definitely; but in the dining room there could be more. As a matter of fact, if you come to our place here, we have one there right now, but it's not mine; it belongs to my wife. She is not very religious, but she holds on to her beliefs; she's Christian, and its a custom.

Pierce: Could you tell something about the customs regarding the dead? What routines were followed?

Ushanoff: Of course, there was lots of crying going on, during the church service. Then they buried the dead. Then they gathered at a relative's house, where they had eats and drinks to pay the last respect to the deceased. Once a year, relatives went to the grave and decorated it with flowers, sometimes flowers were planted on the graves during the summer time. There was a memorial celebration once a year, which again has roots in old Slavic custom. People go to the graves and bring food to the dead. They will arise one day, so they leave the food there. At Easter time they bring colored egg s, even kulich and paskha and place it on the grave together with the flowers. In Manchuria, usually, the Chinese people went around and gathered up everything which seems to me was a good idea. Sometimes the Russians sat around the grave and ate and drank and got merry. So the death was not considered to be such a dreadful thing. Their thought was, we are going to be in heaven, where many of those who are gone will arise. Maybe some would go to hell, but most everybody thought they were going to be in better spiritual conditions. As a matter of fact, most of the common people were of the opinion--when I die, I will be in heaven. What sort of heaven they imagined, is very hard to say.

Pierce: What about Hell, is this put forth as something which one should avoid?

Ushanoff: Well yes, of course; you have to be a good person, and treat everybody in a Christian way, and many do follow the precepts of Christ, particularly women. Women are more religious than men. They always have been. So they attempt fairly well to follow the teaching of the Christ. Occasionally one wonders when meeting such pious people in Church, and then afterward they cuss and criticize each other when they are out of church; that happens too. So there are different people, and different complex individuals.

Pierce: What higher education did you receive in Manchuria and when did you decide to emigrate?

Ushanoff: I attended gymnasium in Harbin. We were living in a small station and I had to spend my winters away from the family, so I was put on my own from the time I was twelve years of age. That helped me a lot in future life, to be self reliant.

I graduated from gymnasium, the equivalent of junior college here, rather early in the spring of 1921. I was the youngest in the class, 17 1/2 years of age. I wouldn't say I was an outstanding student; I was just a little above the middle of the class. After graduation, because of the conditions in Russia, and revolutionary movements here and there, with nothing stable, I didn't want to go to Russia. There was communism there so Russia was out of the question. For a whole year I wondered how I could continue with my education. As I said, in our family, our parents used to instill in us the idea that education was something everybody should stive toward. Particularly because of the way eucated people live in Manchuria--such as engineers, physicians, etc. Dad always used to say, "when you graduate you must go to an engineering college."

Pierce: So education was the key to good living and a profession?

Ushanoff: That's right, self respect and everything else which was connected with it. And actually it is the truth! In the schools they used to say "Ucheniia svet, a neuchen'ia t'ma"--"Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness". That brought an idea, that you'd better strive to get as much knowledge in school as you can, because that opens up your horizons in every way. It was correct, of course.

There was one college in Harbin, a technological institute opened by professors who had run away from communism. I could not go there because of the financial standing of my parents; they couldn't afford to pay for my schooling. So, for the first half of the year I roamed around the countryside of the small station there, riding borse-back and hunting. Then we moved to Harbin; Father had to retire because of his health, on a very small pension, 30 rubles a month, paid by the Chinese Eastern Railway. I was sorry and upset that I couldn't continue with my education, and there was no job available; you couldn't get one there at that unsettled time.

A few of my classmates had gone to Soviet Russia.

Pierce: Even in the early 1920's?

Ushanoff: Oh yes! "We are going to Russia," they would say. "Why don't you come along?" No. Not me.

Pierce: Did you ever hear of any of them?

Ushanoff: No, I never heard what happened to them after they got there. There were no letters from them whatsoever so anyone could learn of their fate.

One day I met one of my classmates, who had graduated from the gymnasium with me. "How's everything?" he asked.

I replied, "I am not doing anything. I am roaming the streets so to speak, going swimming, and that's about all. Seeing girls naturally."

"Well," he said, "I am going to America!"

"How come?" I said.

"Oh," he told me, "there is a possibility that you could work your way through college there."

"That's what I would like to do," I said. "How do you go there?"

He explained, "If you go to the YMCA there is a group of students being formed. They are going to go very soon now. Two groups have already gone there. This one will be the third."

I went to the YMCA right away and found the people who were organizing this emigration. A fellow named Dmitriev was very active in this field. He was in a commercial venture of some sort in Harbin. I am not quite sure of his background. I told him I would like to go to America.

"Fine," he said.

"When can I go? How much will it cost?" That was again a big question for me.

"We're forming a third group here," he told me. "You wouldn't be able to get into that because they are leaving very soon, but you can join the next group."

I went home and announced to my parents, "I am going to America if you can provide me with the money."

Mother started to cry, but Dad was all for it. "Well, if you can get an education there," he said, "that's fine! That's what you should do."

Pierce: What was the idea of bringing over these groups of immigrants? Was it felt that there was no future for such people in Manchuria?

Ushanoff: I think originally that was a little different story. There were quite a few young cadets and young officers who had been fighting against Bolshevism in Siberia and other places in Russia. The son of this particular man, Dmitriev, was one of those, and they had to find some sort of a haven for them. They had to get away as far as they could because people knew that some day the Reds would take over. I think this was the original idea, to save the young military men. Of course, they could not refuse to let youngsters like me go with them because it was supposed to be a student group and so they welcomed anyone who desired to emigrate to America.

Another reason was that a person could work in America and continue with his education. Out of all that came here, probably 75%, if not more, received higher education, a variety of professions, but mainly as engineers.

Pierce: What role did the YMCA play in this?

Ushanoff: I think the YMCA had something to do with helping the Russian youth, because the meetings were held at the YMCA. I can't say any more about that, because I was interested only in coming to America, and that was all.

Once when I was out hunting ducks and geese, I returned to a small substation on horseback. There I met a Chinaman who was passing by and was predicting futures for our friends living there. The woman of the house told me, "Sit down, he is going to tell your future! He is amazing! He told the future for all of us."

"I haven't any money to pay him," I said.

"Oh, never mind," she said, "I'll pay him, just ten cents, that's all."

Mind you, I was dirty and unshaven and looked like a laborer, but he told me interesting things. He said, in broken Russian, "You think very, very hard, very hard; you want to study." That was a fact! I was surprised with this particular statement. Then he said, "You going to go across big, big river!" That was before I even thought about leaving for America. "When you cross that river, you going to work and you going to study." At that time I dismissed all that because I thought it was impossible and that was about all. I didn't think about it until, actually, I was residing here for a few years and I said to myself, "By golly, that Chink was right!"

Pierce: There was no need for a sponsor in those days?

Ushanoff: No, there was no need. We were allowed in as a student group, and if we wished we could become American citizens. The question was asked: 'If you like the United States, and the life here, would you consider becoming an American citizen?' Why, of course.

Pierce: There was evidently no barrier than, except to orientals. Russians were admitted freely?

Ushanoff: I know the Russian quota was not filled, because of World War I and all that revolutionary movement, so that was the reason they were allowing us to enter.

Pierce: You didn't think in terms, then, of emigrating to any other country?

Ushanoff: It was just the United States. That was the country! The main reason for all newcomers was the possibility of working one's way through college.

Pierce: How much did you know then about the United States?

Ushanoff: We had had a very extensive education in geography and history. We studied the history of all the countries in the world, and their geography too, states and governments. As far as that was concerned, it was just like any other country. A few youngsters who graduated in Manchurian schools went to Germany to study. A friend of mine went to Germany--his dad was able to support him. Several children of the wealthy people went to Germany, France and so on. But for poor people like myself and others, the United States was the country of choice, where it was possible to work and study, and there was no question about it. The first group departed, then the second group, and the students went to college. They worked, and they were able to take courses in universities. It was definitely established that great possibilities were there. Canada? Nobody even thought about it; nor South America.

I don't remember exactly what the trip cost, but it was rather minimal because we travelled on a Japanese cargo vessel, and there was a question of whether to arrive in San Francisco or Seattle. It was cheaper to go to Seattle. Possibly it was twenty or thirty dollars or maybe a little less to go there. So that was how I cam to land in Seattle.

Pierce: Which vessel, and what was the date?

Ushanoff: The Kaga Maru, and I think we landed on December 22, 1922. First of all we touched land at Victoria. That was quite a pleasant sight for all of us, to see snow covered land, after nothing else but stormy water. In those days we could not even see the town. We stayed there for a day and then we were on our way into Puget Sound and Seattle. We were interned for a day or so in the immigration house for a physical examination and then they let us go.

I knew a little bit of elementary English, so I was able to read and write somewhat, and knew a few words. When I heard the very first word in English, I asked our leader, "My gosh, I heard the first American word, what does it mean?" He placed his fingers to his mouth and whispered "Shhhh, Quiet!" The stevedores had come aboard and were cussing!

We went from the immigration house to the church of Father Aleksandr Viacheslavov. He was a very interesting person; he met us and took us under his wing and gave us a place to spend the night. We didn't know anything about the place, where to stop. He took us to the old church that used to be there--it is gone now. There were 18 in our group and he let us have a room under the church, where they used to hold meetings. We slept there on the floor and the table until we got acquainted with the town. We had a little money - $40 or so, that's all [most of us] had. That much had to be shown when we arrived in the States.

As we crossed Second Avenue from the immigration home, I was alarmed. It was one of the main avenues in Seattle. There were many people on the street, and many girls. I was surprised that there were so many prostitutes around. The reason was this: in Manchuria the girls didn't use any makeup, and at the time I arrived in the U.S.A. it had just come into vogue here. They used to color their cheeks, like apples, and their lips were also colored. This sight we had only seen occasionally on our streets, and everybody would say "That's a prostitute!"

Then, of course, there was the question of what we were going to do. Where we were going to find a job. Father Aleksandr Viacheslavov was very helpful to us.

My first job was on a sawmill, with the Fairfax Lumber Company. That's close to Mount Rainier.

Pierce: How much English did you know?

Ushanoff: Very little.

Pierce: Could you read it?

Ushanoff: Oh yes. We had studied it, but it wasn't a very thorough study. I studied it just as I had German. I took English for three years, but my knowledge was weak. That's why I say, I was able to read, and I knew a few words. The very first book I bought to read, because I loved to read, was The Alaskan, by James Oliver Curwood. I would sit down with that book in the evening. I would read it and understand about half a sentence, then I would look up the rest of it in the dictionary. At first I could not make head or tail out of the sentences. But, anyway, I would write down English words, and the translation. The next day I read more of it. First I was able to make half a page, then again half a page. The next thing I would sit and read it over again, and consult my written words. And trying to make sense out of it. That way I was able to go through the whole book. By then it was a little bit too much to do the back reading, but by doing that every day, of course, I built quite a vocabulary. I was able, at the end, to understand better what it was all about, with the exception of a few specific expressions.

The first firm I worked for was the Fairfax Lumber Company. There were about ten of us Russians. I was very husky those days and I enjoyed living in the fresh air, working with my muscles, and I forgot about my education for awhile. I was making my way here in the new country, and I gradually learned English.

Pierce: How was the pay?

Ushanoff: The job paid four dollars a day. I was working on the table, as they used to call it, pulling boards out as they passed me on the chain. At the Simpson Company in Seattle, I was working on the carriage, the one that passes by the big saw. I was the choker, holding the log in place. It was 8 hours, back and forth, standing by the big noisy saw.

Pierce: So this was about 50 cents an hour. Was it dangerous?

Ushanoff: The first one wasn't but the last one was very dangerous. Sometimes the saw would hit a spike--if it was not discovered in time. One man looked over the logs but once the saw did hit a spike and was shattered; it was a good thing it didn't hit us, but pices were stuck in the timbers holding up the roof. Another time that happened, the log was split slightly on one end. It was a good thing it was just a thin log. A man who sent the log down into carriage was tired by the end of the day. Everybody gets tired--I was adjusting the choke, juding the size of the log which was coming in, when the log rolled over and a section of it slipped off, and hit me right on the back; it was a good thing it wasn't on my head. Stunned, I had to sit down. The sawyer told me to take a half an hour off. Of course everything stopped for a time. I was sore but all right. I finished my work and went home. I asked a friend of mine where I stayed, a Russian, to examine my back. It was blue and red, but it could have cracked my skull.

Pierce: There was no Workmen's Compensation?

Ushanoff: No, there was nothing of that sort in those days. Nobody paid any attention. Unless you cut your finger, then they gave you first aid and sent you to the hospital.

Then I worked in a logging camp at Snoqualmie Falls and, I recall, in a few other camps, as a chokerman.

Pierce: What is a choke?

Ushanoff: A choke was something like your hand; it was made out of metal attached to a heavy steel cable. The logs had to be dragged out of the forest where they were cut and trimmed, and that's the chokerman's job. The line goes from the donkey in a sort of semi-circle, and from that cable a choker hangs down. There were certain signals being given for the cable to stop, and then our job was to put a choker under the log, and hook it on the other side to the cable. Then everybody had to run like hell, because when the donkey begins to pull on the cable, any other logs which were in the way begin to rise up and tumble. Many times people were killed if they weren't careful. As a matter of fact, after I quit--I got a longing for Seattle, to see some Russians--two people were killed in my particular group. Actually the reason to quit was this; when I went to the United States mother blessed me. I'm not a religious person as I made mention, but she blessed me with that little icon, and as I was working there I lost it. Being slightly superstitious--aren't we all to a certain extent--I said to myself, my gosh, it doesn't look good, I lost the icon with which mother blessed me. So I took off, and two people were killed. So that's the story.

Pierce: What was the composition of this crew? Eight or ten of you who were Russians, had they come over just recently like yourself?

Ushanoff: You are speaking of the group of students who came over here? Well, yes , they were young people mostly.

Pierce: Were the others immigrants?

Ushanoff: No, there were no immigrants, they were just student groups, that's what they used to be called; student groups to continue their education.

Pierce: Was there no thought that the people would settle down there? Or was it thought that most of them would be going back after they had finished?

Ushanoff: Personally I had no idea of where I was going and what I was going to do. Later on, a few elderly people, immigrants, were coming in, like former capitalists and generals and even common people. Their story was different. They didn't come in as students; the United States let them in as immigrants. They had different thoughts. They thought that Russia would recover after the blood bath and throw the communists out. They intended to go back. They were going to get their estates back, their titles, and their former positions. I didn't entertain any thoughts on the subject because actually I didn't know Russia; my place of birth was

Manchuria. But we considered it a part of Russian territory, and it was at that particular time.

Pierce: Those who were employed with you on the logging operation, what was the composition there?

Ushanoff: They were mostly Swedes, Norwegians, different nationalities. In some places there were two Russians, and in others five or six. The workers were a sort of common bunch. For instance, two Swedes cut a huge tree--in those days they used axes, and they cut it by hand; now they use gas saws. It took them a couple of weeks; it was a very large tree. When they felled it they received pay by so much a foot, according to the size of the tree. They quit their job right then and there, collected their pay and went to Seattle. In a couple of weeks they were back again, broke. People were asking them "What did you do in Seattle?"

"We went to whore houses; we had lots to drink, played cards, and had a hell of a time. Now that we are broke, we're back again."

This environment, of course, I didn't like at all. There was nothing stimulating about it. No improvement in the way of life; it was rather degrading, and that I didn't like. That's why occasionally I would change my jobs--we used to live in special railroad cars--people were nice, but there was no incentive in any way to improve one's self.

I believe it was in 1923 that I got a little more knowledge of English. First I'll tell you a very interesting thing. When I was working in Seattle, we Russians used to eat in a cafeteria; after work we took showers and walked about 15 blocks. I would ask invariably for the same thing: "mash-eed potatoes" and they would say "What?" I had to point my finger. I was disgusted that they didn't understand perfectly spoken English. I always laugh when I think about it.

I enrolled in the University of Washington, majoring in civil engineering. I stayed there for two quarters, and when I had to register for the third quarter I received a letter from my folks. I never thought that I could bring them here. I imagined my brothers and sisters were still like little children. Then I found that my mother and my young brother were ill with typhus. "Please help us financially!" they wrote. I had already registered. I hadn't done very well, but I had B's and C's--all passing grades.

I thought for about half an hour. I had another

Russian with me. We both were working in a sorority house. When I told him of this particular predicament that I was in he told me "Disregard all that! Continue with your education! You're crazy if you quit now!" He had done that, to his wife.

"No, I'm not going to contiue my education," I told him. "If they need my help I have to help them out. I must go back to work." So I went back to the same sawmill where I had been employed before. They hired me right away; I was a good worker. I had 70 dollars in the bank. I took that out and I sent it to my family.

Then there was a question of getting something better to do than riding in a carriage. I couldn't continue working the sawmill. The next job for me would be that of sawyer; I could gradually progress and in 20 years I could be a head sawyer. Big deal! So I spoke with a friend of mine, and told him "I have to find something better to do than work in the sawmill, but what?" There was the airplane factory, Boeing. There were a few Russians working there, but I couldn't see it somehow. They were just beginning to develop it and the airplane business was in such a state that I couldn't think of it. Secondly, I wasn't mechanically trained in any way. I didn't know that I had the possibility to learn to do things with my fingers, very easily.

So I worked as a dishwasher in a cafeteria for about a week, but that was enough! I couldn't stand it any more. 12 hours a day, for $3 a day. I said to myself I had better go ahead and work on the sawmill. At least there is fresh air, four dollars a day, and I'm using my muscles instead of handling all those dirty dishes; I couldn't stand doing this.

Then I worked for the Frye Company, a meat packing company; I washed intestines for sausages and hot dogs; I did all kinds of jobs there.

Pierce: None of these jobs were unionized?

Ushanoff: No, not in those days. Another thing, I began to develop an exematous condition on my hands and on my skull; that's the reason I lost my hair. I went to a Russian doctor and I told him about it and asked what I should do.

He advised, "I could give you some medicine to put on your sores, but if you are going to continue with that work, it's still going to develop, and the condition may get worse."

In order to change jobs, I went to digging ditches for the City of Seattle. My hands were rather tender from constant water. I had to use pick and shovel, and by the evening my hands were all bloody, because they were too tender for that kind of work. So I went back to the sawmill again.

I was in Seattle about 3 1/2 years. Then, in 1925, I heard that there were possibilities of finding work of a different kind in San Francisco. There I worked as a stevedore. You would stand at the pier and a boss would come and see who was the huskiest guy to hire. I was husky in those days, in comparison to what I am now. My muscles are probably one third of what I had then. I never had any trouble being hired. Whenever I wanted work I got it.

While I was in Seattle, I wrote occasionally for the Russian newspaper Novaia Zaria in San Francisco, short stories and articles, under my name. So when I came to San Francisco I went over to Novaia Zaria and got acquainted with the editor. They asked me if I could type in Russian. Yes, I could I said. They told me, "Well, we need a man to work our linotype machine. Do you think you could learn?" I worked there for about three months, ten hours a day, but then they changed management. Someone else, a relative of a new boss, wanted that job.

Pierce: How much did they pay?

Ushanoff: Very little--two dollars a day! Then I found that there was a possibility of working on the ferry boats that paid fairly well. I applied for a job with Southern Pacific Company. I was working there all the time until I went to college.

Pierce: Were you helping your family all this time?

Ushanoff: After I came to San Francisco, then I was helping them right along. Checks had to be sent through a special Nippon bank; I had a pile of receipts. In the meantime I met a girl and I got married. She was a Scotch-English girl. Then I thought, I couldn't continue helping them indefinitely; I had to get them here somehow. Suddenly it hit me, they have grown up by now, why am I still thinking of them as little children, like I left them. I was the oldest in the family. It never occurred to me that so many years had passed.

So I said to my wife, 'I have to get them out here.' We sent them money. At first we got my sister and brother, then we got my mother, my father and youngest brother stayed there; we couldn't get them out. None of us had any money by then. My mother was a healthy, strong woman. I got them together and told them: "I don't know what I am going to major in, but I am going to college. Try to get Dad and youngest brother here. It is your turn now."

In the meantime Dad died; he was in very poor health, he was just about half of me, very thin and scrawny; I took after Mother. We borrowed the needed amount and brought our youngest brother here; he went to high school. Until retirement he was a salesman for a hardware company and quite successful. He speaks fluent English, better than I do because he went to high school, and that makes a difference or perhaps his linguistic abilities are better than mine.

I couldn't make up my mind what to do. It happened that my brother-in-law--my sister's husband--told me of a Russian who was working as a dental technician, and making very good money. It so happened that I had met him in Seattle; he had arrived there as I had and then moved to San Francisco. One day I dropped in to see him. I was interested to find out what he was doing. There he was working with teeth in his own lab. I asked his permission if I could visit him whenever I had time. He said, "Sure, come in!"

A few weeks after I went there again.

"How long does it take to learn to be a dental technician?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "you have to start as a sweep boy and do all kinds of jobs and then gradually you will learn by helping a technician in his work."

"How long will it take?"

"Oh, maybe five years."

"Are there any schools?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "there are schools, you can find out about them."

I looked up those dental technician schools. I went over there but I didn't like them. For some reason I didn't care for them; I couldn't tell you why.

One day one of the dentists came into his office--he had his office next door--and he brought some work to do. I asked him, "Doctor Knopf, how long does it take to become a dentist?"

"When I graduated years ago it took me three years, but I think it's longer now."

I asked, "Do they have any dental colleges here in San Francisco?"

"Oh sure," he said, "there are two, P and S, that's private, and the University of California."

"Which is the best?"

"The University of California. However, I graduated from P and S."

"Where is the University of California located?"

"It's on Parnassus Avenue," he said, and told me how to get there.

When I came to the Dental College and saw the secretary to the dean, I told her I wanted to enroll in Dental School.

That was around November. I thought as with the rest of the university you could enroll any time after December, but she said, "We can't take you then. In our Dental College the year begins in August. What sort of education have you had?"

"I have finished Russian gymnasium and I also was attending the University of Washington majoring in Civil Engineering. You could get the papers from them."

"Well, that's fine." After a couple of weeks I went to see her--when the papers had arrived--"You'll have to take a one year pre-dental course, *then* you'll come in and take four years here." I also had to take a few courses in Berkeley.

I didn't like that; I had to wait a half a year before I could enroll in Berkeley, study a year, and then go to dental school. Well, precisely, that's what I did. In order to go to college and get higher education and still work I changed jobs from seaman to night watchman. I was two nights one and one night off, working twelve hours a night.

Previous to that I said to my wife, "Now you haven't been working. I am going to college, whether you like it or not. You have to find and learn something, so that you'll be working and supporting yourself, probably whatever I will be making will be just enough to pay the tuition, fees and other expenses. In the meantime, while I am waiting for the 8 months before I go to college, I want you to learn something."

She took a beauty course. She had a little artistic ability, but there was nothing to do in that field. She started to work in her profession while I went to college. In the morning I would come in, change my clothes, take a shower if I had time, eat something and go to college. At 5 o'clock I would get home, change the clothes and go to work. And that was going on for the next two years.

I had finished my pre-dental courses very well. It was very hard to study because so many years passed by, my brain had lost the ability to assimilate. I had to sit and force myself to read and yet retain nothing; I had to repeat and repeat, but finally the time came when the brain was like a sponge. Everything that was coming in was registered. I read once, or twice, finished! and that's all I had to do. I had and still have a wonderful photographic memory, and retentive powers. When I had to recall something, I could visualize the page, see the illustration and recite verbatim. I lost the job, which was a blessing as I was putting up so much without sleep and drinking so much coffee that my kidneys began to function badly. We paid about a dollar and a half for medical insurance in our college. I went to see a physician. He examined me and he said "Well, your kidneys are functioning only 70%". He didn't know why. I told him my life's pattern. It was a blessing in disguise he told me; if I had kept it up I would have kicked the bucket. I knew of one Russian who did the same thing and by the time he graduated he was taken to the hospital, one kidney was taken, and the other was partially infected; he survived three or four years and died. A wonderful person, a very good scholar, but he burned himself out.

I went to school for two years and the first year in the dental college. Everything was fine but then I lost my job. It was the depth of the Depression. I didn't know how I would continue my education. I tried everything I possibly could and couldn't find anything to do . Our school started and I still didn't register for several weeks for my second year. I went to see Doctor Sproul; he was the dean of the University at Berkeley. Twice I went there and he wasn't there! He was attending a meeting or somewhere else. "When is he going to be back? I asked his secretary.

"He will be in on Wednesday," she said. "Why don't you make an appointment?" I did.

I had good grades. We had a special card with grades. I had A's and B's in dental college, and also in my pre-dental. I had more A's than B's actually. It happened that I had unusual ability; I am not bragging about it by any means. Most of the students were either very good at theory or very good with their hands, but I was good in both, with my hands and also in the theory, so when I graduated from the university I had the highest grade points in the class. After my graduation I was retained on the faculty. I taught prosthetics until we moved down to the south. I never thought about all those things that I am telling you know.

On the appointed day I went in to Dr. Sproul. Finally I had got hold of him. I was boiling mad. "Dr. Sproul, I cannot see any reason why a person with grades like I have can't continue with his education because he hasn't got any money to pay his tuition!"

He looked at me, he looked at the grades, and then he said, "Yes, I see what you mean. I'll tell you what, you go and see your dean, Dr. Millberry. I'll see what I can do. You'll find out from your dean."

From Berkeley I crossed the by on a ferry boat and then rode on a streetcar to our college, where I reported to our dean. He said, "Fine, I have already heard from him. It was the best you could have done."

Pierce: Your college at that time was in San Francisco?

Ushanoff: Berkeley was where I took my pre-dental course. The University of California Dental College was part of a complex system, so Sproul was over everyone. Our dean wasn't able to do much; Sproul had greater authority so he was the man to see. So when I reported to our dean, Dr. Millberry, he said, "Yes, I heard about it already, and Dr. Sproul was very impressed with your audience and go right ahead and attend the classes."

He called me up the next day and said, "We have to send a report to Dr. Sproul about how much money you need."

I said, "I don't need any money, what I'd like is if he would pay for this year's tuition. Next year I'll find some way to take care of it, but this year is very important."

They figured in the office, and I got a check for $170.00 I came to the Dean. "It's neither here nor there; it's only for half a year, and I need tuition to be paid for a whole year."

"Yes, there was a mistake," he said. He sent it back and then I received a whole year's tuition. Of course, after I graduated I paid it all back.

In the following years, because I was an outstanding student, I was given a job in the labs. I would get up in the morning and at 6 o'clock I was there doing all kinds of things. Washing equipment in the vats, as I mentioned. I also cleaned up the professor's lab. It was a good paying job, 75 cents an hour. The Anatomy Department required some work during the summer, and that was very well paid. So, in that way I was able to continue my education.

I finished in May 1935. That was a tough period in which to graduate, because the Depression was still on.

Pierce: And then you were taken on the faculty of the University of California?

Ushanoff: I was on the faculty for seven years. And I gathered, from the information which I received from students, and also from Dean Fleming, they were very sorry when I left. But the reason I left to go down south was that I couldn't make a go of it financially. A filling was $3, cleaning was $3, and I couldn't make any headway with it. I was just barely trying to pay the debts. The youngster came along, and that was very tough. There was no way that I could raise the prices, I had to get out and start anew. Then the War started. I was on the faculty and would be automatically excluded from military service, but in the questionnaire I said that if my services were needed I would gladly go. I passed the examination in the Presidio; everything was perfect. I thought, I am going any time now, so I will just relax before I go in the Army or in the Air Corps. Then I received a letter: "We have enough dentists in the armed forces at the present time' and I was overage. In 1942 I was already 38. I intended to sign up for the Navy, but then my youngster got ill and had an operation. I said to myself, as long as the brass may take me later on I might as well wait. I finally decided that I might as well move down south; they could just as well get me there, because I hated to live in San Francisco.

Pierce: Oh, you had never liked it there?

Ushanoff: No. Occasionally I would go south for a visit. I liked the sunshine, and little cottages here, lots of greenery, so I thought, it's heaven compared with San Francisco.

So I said to myself, "Well, I'll just go down south and wait until they call me."

I came here and was established at Hollywood and Vine, which is a very good corner. I made a round of dentists, and I said, "I'm a newcomer here, I have such and such qualifications, and if you wish to send any patients to me I will be glad to take care of them." I knew they might be overloaded. They responded very nicely, and gradually that small number to start with built up to quite a large clientele. I think one of the reasons was that I did all the work myself. I didn't give it to the technicians, because while I was teaching students I required a good job to be done. When work is given to a technician it is impossible to know what you are going to get. I got inferior work from them a few times. I thought, that's not the way to do it. When I received an inferior job and had to do it over, I said to myself, "I am going to do it myself." I did denture work, I did crowns, and bridges, and partials and inlays. I worked a bit too much, actually rather long hours. I met my present wife--my first wife was a fine woman, but it just happened. I don't care to say much about that. Sometimes a psychological turn comes in men's lives and they change mates. When I met my present wife, I said, "When the youngster is 18 years of age, then I will marry you."

My son is a very nice fellow. He is a psychologist. He has turned into religion, and I am very sorry about that; I don't agree with it, but he is an awfully nice fellow.

Pierce: Which religion?

Ushanoff: Jehovah's Witnesses, of all things! Because of his mother's influence. So that's why I say there were a few things I don't care to discuss. She influenced him. I was very much against it. I did not want to have friction over this all the time.

I worked very hard, and gradually my present wife, Lisa, made me come home a little earlier; I used to come home at 9 o'clock. At 10 o'clock I would have dinner, at 10:30 I would be in bed, at 6:30 I would get up, and Sunday I would be busy. She said, "That's no way to live!" I was not used to raising my voice at any time. I was very calm always, but then, gradually because of all the load I had to carry--I couldn't refuse a person if he was my patient; I had to see him--my nerves began to go. And then my wife said, "No, you can't keep that up, you have to cut down."

"How can I?" I said.

"You simply must," she said.

Finally, when I reachied the age of 62 she said, "We have a little money; quit!" In those days it was just enough for us to live, but not now.

I stopped working; I was very sorry, because I loved my job. It was creative; when something is done very nice a person gets a great satisfaction. I worked to please myself and her. I had too many patients, more than I wanted--the word gets around. I could not only construct fine things, very minute things, with gold. For instance, I built this cement block wall you see [here in the garden] with my own hands; I am not afraid to work with my hands. It was very interesting. One woman told me once: "I look at you, at your hands, they are just like a hammer. At the same time when you work in a patient's mouth, or you work in my mouth, they are so gentle and delicate!" I thought that was a rather cute way of expressing it.

And that's about the story of my life.

Pierce: When you were in the San Francisco Bay area, going to school--you had your work, of course--how much did you associate with the Russian community?

Ushanoff: While I was attending college there was not much association. I never attended any of their gatherings--that was out. [My work prevented that] and also my interests didn't lie in that direction. Before that I used to write for the newspaper, and also I used to play on the stage occasionally. But when I went to college everything was taboo for me. I couldn't afford to spend the time on niceties of that sort. Of course, I met some Russians, but I wasn't interested in what was going on in the Russian colony.

Pierce: Did you read any Russian newspapers?

Ushanoff: No, I never did. When you go to college you have so much reading assignments that your head begins to swim, so there was no time for that. And they were so far removed from my particular world that I couldn't be bothered with what was going on in the Russian colony. And secondly, of course, the wife being English and Scotch, she wouldn't mix well; she liked Russians, she was a fine woman. I wouldn't say she was a very good mother, but we were two different poles brought together.

Pierce: So you came over in your late teens, and then you adapted. But you have always considered yourself a Russian on foreign soil, have you not?

Ushanoff: No, no I did not. That's a strange thing. In 1927 I became an American citizen. And as we have a saying in Russia, "It is not the mother who gave you birth, but the one who brought you up." Russia was always so far removed from me and always was because we lived on the Chinese Eastern Railway. My Russia was Manchuria. There was a predominance of Russians in that particular area. Of course, we came in contact with the Chinese, but anyway we considered it to be part of Russia, and when the Russians sold the Chinese Eastern Railway to the Japanese, I had actually angry tears in my eyes--they had sold my land, the land where I was born.

I am very proud of my Russian heritage--but again, they are strangers to me. You see I am more American; the land where I am living is more important to me than Russia. Let's say that even if there was an Imperial Russia, it wouldn't make any difference to me. I would never think of going back there. My wife thinks the same. And she was also brought up in Manchuria. That must have something to do with it; I don't know!

Pierce: It might be a little easier to adapt in that circumstance than it was for those who came out by way of Constantinople, particularly those who were in the Civil War.

Ushanoff: Yes, that's true; they may feel it more so than I would, perhaps. Yet it all depends on the individual. I know some other people that came from Russia, and they are more American, and they act and think as Americans rather than Russians. But, yet, at the same time, they are quite proud that they are Russian born. So the majority of them, you may say, are that way, and if you examine the family life of Russians, I would call them a silent minority. You never hear about Russians demanding this or demanding that like, say Jewish people, Mexicans, or Negroes or any other nationalities. They don't march with any red flags or any kind of flags. They would march in a parade with American flags, but that's a different story. They forged their way in this country actually by themselves, and they made life better for themselves, and they contributed a lot to the United States in many ways. In that respect, they didn't even ask for any help. They are quite satisfied with the life that they have here. Many of them had a very tough life--I had a very hard life myself; I'm not sorry I had it; I worked my way through, and the rest of them did the same, and many of them are occupying wonderful positions as scientists in every field of endeavor in the United States; they worked their way through.

Now, when it comes to the children of those Russian immigrants, of our children, they are Yankees! Through and through. When my youngster was little I used to ask him "What do the Yankees say?" and he would reply "Business is business!" He knows a few Russian words, very few. He likes to know about Russia but he is an American. We breed them as Americans. We don't tell them, you will have to go to Russia eventually--they are Americans!

Pierce: That is clear. And yet there seem to be many who come and who somehow do not get out into American society as quickly as others, or perhaps they never do. They don't quite adapt. Like those closely affiliated with the Russian Center in San Francisco.

Ushanoff: Well, those are mostly elderly men and women. They were a different breed than us youngsters who came in. In this respect quite a few of them used to have good positions back in Russia. Some of them didn't have, ut they say they did. Those elderly people, immigrants, they came in here to find temporary shelter, and then they intended to go back to Russia. As we have a saying: "Oni sidiat na chemodanakh"--they are sitting on their luggage, ready to move at any time. They reminisce about what used to be in Russia, how they used to live, and so on. I spoke with Alex [a friend] on this subject. I said, the aristocracy are to blame for all that happened there, and those that expect to get back and find that they will be welcome will be greatly disappointed. If anything, people will hang them. The people will say, "We had communism on our necks, and now you come in here and tell us how we should rule ourselves. No! We are the people who will decide what governing body we should have!" They are really scum now, actually, they are neither here nor there. Those are the people who have affiliated and they are trying to be close to each other.

Pierce: Did he agree with your ideas?

Ushanoff: He agreed. I said, "They will hang them," and he said, "I personally would not want to go there. I love Russia, but as it used to be."

But again, from my standpoint, in Russia as it used to be many things were not quite right. Had the old regime continued to the present, even under the Tsar, it is quite possible that changes would have been made, and working conditions of the people in Russia would be much improved. But to think that there was something wonderful there [then], no, it was just for a few, actually for the aristrocracy, not for the workers or people in general.

Pierce: The efforts through church schools to keep the next generation Russian seem doomed to failure. Would you agree with that?

Ushanoff: Yes, they are. Because of the way the children are brought up. Mexican children talk only Spanish at home and nobody can understand them. Now in a Russian family, a somewhat similar thing occurs, but in a different way. The Russians talk with their parents in English and the parents talk to them in Russian. So that's something! Not that they are ashamed of Russian, but it's easier for them. Why should they bother finding Russian words when it is simpler to express themselves in English? So they are fully immersed in American life, part of America, and they will never by anything else. But those elderly people, that class of people, they are already dying out.

Pierce: How many did you know who went back? You came over, and stayed, but did many return to Russia, or to Manchuria?

Ushanoff: If any of them went back it was just for a short visit to see their folks. After Japan took it over most of them went to other parts of China. After WWII Russia gave it to China and most of them were out. Many went back to Russia then. You have heard how they used to coax them to go there. When the war started, many Russians from China were interned in the Philippines, quite a few from Shanghai and after the war they were allowed to come to the United States, some to South America, and probably some to Canada. They were a sort of motley crowd, of different kinds and types, some of them questionable characters; of course, the U.S. immigration tried to sort them out. Now there are hardly any Russians left in China; if there are any, they are old people who are ready to die.

Pierce: And now a more philosophical question: what, in your view, constitutes a Russian? What are the qualities of their national character?

Ushanoff: The Russian is a more outgoing person.

Pierce: You mentioned for one thing that the emigration is not as vocal about its rights and organizing.

Ushanoff: They hate politics; that is probably instilled in them by the Revolution.

Pierce: Why do they split so much? Why so many little factions?

Ushanoff: That is the Russian character. We can't agree very well on many things as a rule. You'll find that in a certain section of a large city or even in a small city, there will be two churches, because they couldn't agree with each other on certain things, and so they split. It's the Russian character. And you can trace it all the way back to Kiev [in 862 A.D.], when the people asked the Variags [Varangians or Vikings] to come and rule over them because there was no order among them. So there you are.

Another thing, they are more hospitable than any other nation I know. Again that is a Slavic trait and that comes again from the old days. It was even allowed for the Slavs, if a guest came to their house and they didn't have anything to treat him with, then they can steal something from their neighbor and bring it home. That was all right if you were treating guests. Great hospitality.

Another trait was great adaptability, and you can see that throughout their whole history, even in the conquest of Siberia and down to Alaska and so on. They adapt themselves to conditions that exist in any countries.

Pierce: What is the role of the church? Do you attend church?

Ushanoff: No, I don't. I am not a religious person; I am an agnostic. My wife does attend; she is a religious person; I don't argue with her about her beliefs. I may take her to church, but I don't have to attend. As far as religion is concerned, I think women are more religious than men; they always were. As far as men are concerned, there is less [religious feeling]. I don't believe in it on reasonable and historical grounds--why should I?

Pierce: How do you account for the great devotion to the Russian land? It seems to be the key to Russian patriotism, which would seem perhaps more intense than in other countries.

Ushanoff: It's very hard to define this. It must be the conglomeration of quite a few things that a person comes in contact with while living there. Don't forget, the most important thing in olden times for a peasant was his land. And he received his sustenance from it, and naturally that was very dear to him. If you are going to touch my land I am going to fight you. So this is inborn partially. I wouldn't say that it was built up by the tsarists or anyone to be patriotic. Then again, it's a spacious land, and if you take European Russia, it has wideopen spaces--bol'shoi prostor (great expanse).

And that again develops certain qualities in a person. You take a Caucasian, who lives in the mountains there, he is of a different character altogether. But here they have a wider nature to begin with.

Pierce: Could you see anything of that sort in Manchuria, among the Chinese who were there?

Ushanoff: Well, yes, to a certain extent. Not probably to a greater extent than it is in Russia proper, because after all you have two cultures in Manchuria, the Chinese culture and the Russian--three cultures, with the Mongolian. But you take any gubernia in Russia, they're all brothers, that sort of thing. It's a different approach altogether, they are all alike.

Pierce: The immigration that you were part of, would you characterize this as a more select group than one would find coming from other countries because of the skimming off of the upper classes of society due to the Revolution?

Ushanoff: No, I wouldn't say so. Yes, some of them were selected, but don't forget that many of the people who fought communism, many of them were common soldiers who came over here, were common people.

Pierce: But were not many of them former military cadets and officers?

Ushanoff: Yes, but they were common people. They were peasants, they were workers. You take, for instance, there is an organization in San Francisco--there are not many of them left--of the Votkintsy and the Izhevtsy. Here are the working people from two of the largest munitions factories. There is an example right there; many of them were not educated. They made their way in their own way. Now, for instance, I know of one person who was living in San Francisco, a patient of mine, he was a common persons, he could hardly read and write. He started a very small grocery business. But when people would come in and say "Do you have this or that?" He would say, "Yes, I do; I'll deliver it."

He didn't have it, but he would write it down and find a place where he could obtain it, and then deliver it. Finally, it happened that he gradually built his business so much, a telephone order business, that he was serving a wealthy clientele in San Francisco. Whatever they would order he would get it for them. He knew where to go and to get it for them. Despite the fact that it was during the Depression, his business was booming. That's one example, but there are many others, of people without any education.

Pierce: That is a good example of how the immigrant often comes to the United States or to Canada, and sees some opportunity which the natives just don't perceive or take advantage of, and then gets ahead.

Ushanoff: I'll give you a good example, although not of a Russian. When we visited Great Britain, and stayed in a hotel in London, we had steaks in the hotel (a steak house). The hotel was one of the chains of hotels and steak houses belonging to a Turk. He came to London, opened up a very small shop and started to serve steaks. Gradually business increased more and more and he had to open a larger place. Then he opened another place and then a third and a fourth, and then he bought and built hotels. "What happened to the British?" I asked. "Why didn't you people start that kind of a business? Why was it a Turk?"

So the same thing happens here. They come in and start a business of some sort on their own which native born Americans couldn't think of. Although in America they are very inventive and they think of businesses that never exist anywhere else. And yet some [immigrants] come and make a living in their own right.

Pierce: Can you now tell something about your trip to the Soviet Union?

Ushanoff: After my retirement from dental practice, it was easier to travel in Russia, so, in 1974, my wife and I decided we might as well take a trip there, to Mother Russia, as we Russians call it. I was particularly interested in seeing the ancient historical cities of which we had read in the literature, and which we had studied in the history books, Kiev, Moscow and its Kremlin wall, and Leningrad, which used to be St. Petersburg, and which, during World War I became Petrograd, and then Leningrad. I won't go into many details of our trip there, just a few things which stand out in my memory.

I was excited, of course, to see all those ancient towns and to go along the River and see the place where Prince Vladimir baptised all the Russians. His statue is standing there on the shore. Moscow was very interesting, with the Kremlin, and we went inside. But a few things happened there which I thought were rather unusual.

Zhukov died while we were there (18 June 1974) and his interment was to be in the Kremlin. We were staying in the hotel right opposite--I think it was called the National. The guide took us on a trip around different places and we were supposed to see a few things in the Kremlin wall, but because of that particular ceremony we weren't allowed to. We had to find our bus somewhere, and I was surprised to see, as we passed by the Kremlin wall, there is a little park in front, and there were soldiers standing there, armed, every so many paces. There was nobody on that lawn there, and so we passed that by, and then when we came to the corner of the street we only had to go right around the corner and into the entrance to our hotel. There were KGB men standing there, everything was closed, all the streets were closed because big shots were coming there and so on, and empty, entirely empty, and they had a cordon of KGB men and all kinds of things standing there, and officers. The guide went over and said, "I have a group of tourists, if you will allow me I would like to take them over to our hotel, it is time for them to have their lunch." They wouldn't allow it! We had to go way around and it was just across the street. That was surprising.

Well, anyway, I found that the people were sullen, there were not many smiles on their faces. They were concerned about their way of life. The children, unlike our American children--happy-go-lucky kids that you see running around freely in the streets and smiling and laughing and having a good time--were as if they were under some sort of pressure and neither the children nor the adults seemed happy.

Pierce: Did you notice that it was any freer in the other places you visited? Did people look any different in Kiev than in Moscow?

Ushanoff: I would say just about the same; there wasn't much difference; you could see that they were subdued; they were not pleased with what they had, but of course they couldn't do very much about it.

I went to Beriozka to see what they had to sell. I wanted to get a special stone from the Ural Mountains. It's a golden sparkling stone, semi-precious. My wife has one. But it was strange; they didn't have it at all. Whether the supply was exhausted, or whether they were sending it to the European countries where they could get more money for it than they would in Russia, I don't know.

Well, anyway, I started to speak Russian to her. She was a fairly intelligent woman--and she said, "Where did you learn to speak such a beautiful Russian?"

So I told her, "At the University of California, in America."

"Oh!" she said, "They teach you so well there."

"Yes, they do!" I said. So I pulled her leg a little bit.

But I noticed that the former beauty of the Russian language, the Russian language of the intelligentsia, of Pushkin and of Turgenev, of Dostoevsky, and so on--the language which we were taught in our Manchurian school, just isn't there any more. It was the language of the capital, of St. Petersburg. We were taught to express ourselves in that way so naturally our language developed according to the literature and the teachers. But I found out that the communist language that they used there--we have just as if, to use a Russian expression, they are cutting with an axe. Its expressions are rather on the crude side, and not that beautifully flowing tongue. However, there are exceptions. I won't say all of them like that. There are intelligent people who speak a very good language, but I think their parents must have been intelligent, so that they were brought up in a very good family atmosphere.

After Moscow we flew to Volgograd. Now it happened that in Volgograd, of course, we had to go and have dinner as soon as we arrived--but after dinner--we had to see the Volga--Volga matushka rodnaia. That was quite exciting. It was evening and as we walked down the steps to the river it was already getting sort of dark. There were a few Russians in our group, and a woman in black started to talk to my wife and another lady that was there, and I was walking with another Russian fellow, and sort of discussing different things that we had seen. On the way back, she approached us and started to talk to us. I was sort of careful not to express my thoughts in any way, but in the conversation that followed, I asked "Are you working anywhere? What is your position?" She was fairly intelligent by the way. But she said, "No, they don't employ me because I tell them the truth!" And she told us, "Do you think the life everywhere is just as good as it is here, as what they show you? You go 30 miles from here and they won't let you in. They are in mud up to their knees!"

Pierce: She was probably right.

Ushanoff: She wanted to continue with the conversation; she even invited us to go to her place, wherever it was, but I had to decline that because I didn't know who she was. She could have been one of the KGB you know, who wanted us to express our ideas on what we had seen there and to criticize what we had seen, and so I just had to be rather careful. But that, at least, that's what she said.

Pierce: Most people are more cautious.

Ushanoff: Yes, that's what I have noticed. When I was speaking one to one, that was a different story. As happened on occasion, and I expressed my opinion freely because I knew to whom I was talking.

I have written a story about our visit there which I am going to send to a Russian magazine. Volgograd was formerly Stalingrad, where 800,000 people lost their lives during World War II. It was practically all razed to the ground by the bombs by the Russians and the Germans, and their planes. But it was rebuilt, and on the Mamaev kurgan, a sort of raised mountain, a memorial was constructed to all those dead. It is very impressive. We had to climb many steps and as my wife wasn't feeling very well that day she decided to stay in the bus. So I went by myself. Being a little more sprightly than the rest of our companions--there were about 12 Russians in our group--I reached the top quicker than they did. My camera was swinging around my neck and my felt hat was of a different kind than what the Russians would wear. So I walked there alone--I won't describe many things because the story would be too long--but anyway, as I got to the top there was a big square, a long trough filled with water. The water was overflowing the sides of the trough. On one side there were sculptured figures of fighting men and workers made out of brownish stone. Quite beautiful sculptured, naked bodies.

As I walked slowly, looking all around, a woman with a child passed me. She looked me over and said to me, "They overfilled their cups--it's a saying--they did everything they could for Mother Russia."

I said, "That's interesting" and took a snapshot. As we walked, I asked "Where's that music coming from? What's that round building?"

"When you reach there..." she said, and she looked me over again, "You're not a Siviet citizen?"

"No, I am not," I said.

"When you reach there," she continued, "You will find tears, and there you can communicate with your creator."

Her answer amazed me. So when I reached the top --there were lots of people walking up the circular ramp--two uniformed guards were standing at the entrance, and a crowd of people was slowly filing past them. On the wall were names of all the soldiers and officers who were killed there, written on red banners, which are of brownish color. Beneath was a grave of the unknown soldiers. A big arm stuck out from the gave into an opening in the roof where the blue of the sky was seen. The stringed instruments were playing a very sad melody. It was amazing to walk with a mass of Russian people through this memorial. One say tears of the people as they walked slowly up the ramp, old and young. In my article, I describe some of them as I saw them, there was a big husky man with medals all over his chest, in civilian dress, wiping his eyes. An old woman was crossing herself; many of them crossed themselves, they didn't pay any attention to anti-religious propaganda. The woman with the little girl was right, these people communicated with their creator. Despite the atheistic propaganda in Russia, God was still alive in their hearts. That's what I got out of it.

The melody of stringed instruments was very sad, as if it was coming from heaven itself. It was the most marvellous monument I have seen and was built by the Russian people. It was ordered by the government, but was actually planned and put up in what they had there by the Russian people. It makes a terrific impression. After I saw all this I rushed back to the bus, to Lisa. "Lis," I said, "you must go and see it", because I was so moved. I practically had tears in my eyes. We had to hurry because we had to be back at the bus at a certain time so I rushed her down the hill to that round building and it made a terrific impression on her also.

I noticed another thing. I wanted to take a picture of a dam on the Don River, so I asked our guide, "May I take a picture of this?"

"Oh no, that's not allowed!" she said.

But when I went in the Beriozka I could see that they had postcards with pictures of the dam, and also of the airport. I said to myself, isn't that crazy? So I told her a few things that I shouldn't have. I said, "Well now, in America you could take pictures of anything; we don't mind. And furthermore, we have much bigger dams than you have here, so its nothing new to us."

In Leningrad they were showing to us the graves of the emperors, in the Petropavlovsk fortress in Leningrad. Well, anyway, we went here and there was the grave of Alexander I, his sarcophagus, you know, covered up. I said to the guide, "You know, it's empty; Alexander I isn't there."

"What are you talking about?" she said.

I said, "Well, first of all, don't you know anything about the legend of Taganrog, of Fedor Kuzmich, and how he lived in Siberia and all that?" She had never heard of it. And I said, "Furthermore, I remember reading in the newspaper--Russian newspapers here in the United States--that Soviet scholars opened up the sarcophagus and there was no body there!"

Another interesting thing happened in Leningrad. While we were on the bus, one of the member of our group asked our guide, a girl, "Of course, you weren't here during the siege in Leningrad?" All of a sudden tears filled her eyes; she was in her 30's I guessed, and she turned away. We had a Russian woman in our group and she kept talking to the guide. I said, sternly, "Keep quiet; she has seen so many awful things in her early life; leave her alone".

After a while she wiped her tears and a thought crossed my mind; maybe she is just a very good actress. The second day we had another guide, and another somewhat similar question was asked. There was the same reaction. She said, "I was a little girl; I lived through all that horror." She had tears in her eyes, running down her cheeks.

And, when I was in Leningrad I listened to TV, which is not much to listen to. They had announcements: Victor Petrov was taken out from Leningrad in 1941 or whatever it was, by such and such a group; he resides in Odessa, and he is looking for his relatives; if anyone knows where his relatives reside, please contact him. And: Lena Ivanov was taken out at the same time; she is looking for her relatives, and so on and so on. Every day they mentioned different names, of people looking for their lost or dead kinfolk. It was sad even to listen to them.

Pierce: I visited the cemetery in Leningrad with someone whose grandparents had died in the siege, and she even claimed that she knew which mound they were in, and at one point I saw some little candies, wrapped in paper, which someone had put on one of the mounds. I wondered if this was meant as an offering, as if it was something which went far back; someone had had this feeling about the particular relative who was there.

Ushanoff: Yes, that's right! It was a tribute to them, just like I said to you, how on certain days, in the summer, Russians hold a Memorial Day for their dead. They gather and put food on the grave. You have mentioned the same occurrence; simple folks do bring candies to put on the graves.

Yes, some of our customs are strange, but they all have their beginnings somewhere. Most of them go far back into the ancient Slavic times. They used to burn their dead, with their horses, their wives and servants, and then they covered them with earth, and then, on top of this "kurgan", they held what they used to call in Russian trizna. That's a seldom used word, but a very interesting one if you come to think of it. They would sit on top of that mound and bayans--minstrels--would play instruments--stringed instruments and maybe the flute--sing, drink and eat. Why was it done? Maybe the thought was, you are dead, we respect you, but we are still alive, and we drink to you and your afterlife. I don't know the words; I wish I had attended one of those triznas, but it was so far back in our history.

When we went to Sochi, I was quite surprised at the beauty of the mountains--the Caucasian mountains are very beautiful. I took a dip in the Black Sea there. The water was rather cold and the seashore is not like ours; it was covered with fairly large pebbles, so it was very uncomfortable, but anyway I decided to take a [specimen] and I brought back a stone from there.

From there we had to go to Leningrad and from Leningrad to Moscow, and then we flew over to Italy to see our stepson, because he had an office there. I know one thing, after we had travelled all around Russia, when we arrived at Kennedy airport in New York I had to go to the toilet, and when I came out I said to my wife, "Go and see the kind of toilet room that we have in our America! You can eat off the floor it is so clean!" You know how the Russian toilets smell like hell. When we arrived I felt like kissing the ground that we landed on. Because you couldn't find any better place to live than the United States of America, in spite of all the troubles that we have. I would suggest to all the youngsters who are not satisfied with the life here, and who criticize everything so much, that they go and travel, not just to see the best places, where they will get the red carpet treatment, but to see some of the country, and learn how the people live.

INDEX - USHANOFF

Chinese bandits (hung-hooze), 2
Chinese Eastern Railway, 1, 11; sale of, to Japan, 44
Class distinctions, 1, 19, 20, 55
Customs, funeral, 25; marriage, 20-21

Dmitriev, YMCA worker, Harbin, organizing emigrant parties, 28

Education, 2; high quality of Russian schools, 3, 12; gymnasium, 15-16; 22-23; 26-27; athletics, 23, discipline, 23; moral upbringing of youth, 18, 19;USA, faulty education standards of, 23, 24; at Univ. of Calif., 37-41
Gobi Desert, 1

Harbin, 2
Houses in railway settlements, 1,3, 4; barn, 7; furnishings, 24, 25; stoves, 7-8; toilet facilities, 8-9; gardens, 9, 11; fishing, 6; animals, domestic, 7; hunting, 11

Kaga Maru, steamship, 30

Manchuria, abundance of wild life, 5
Millberry, dean, University of California Dental College, 40

Russia before 1917, faults of, 45, 46
Russian characteristics, 1, 46, 47; superstitions, 16
Russian community, Manchuria, 3, roles of men and women, 10; holidays, 13, 14
Russian community, San Francisco, 43, 44; children, 45
Russian emigrants, enterprise of, 48, 49
Russian language, beauty of, deterioration in Soviet period, 51
Russian newspapers, 36, 43
Russian Orthodox Church, 1, 14-15, 17, 18.

San Francisco, 36
Seattle, 30, 31, 35, 36
Sproul, Robert Gordon, dean (later President), University of California, 39, 40

Ushanoff, Vasilii, birth, 1, emigration, 27, English language study, 31, 34; marriage, 10, 21; work in lumber, 31, 32, 33, 35; in meat packing company, 35; ditch digging, Seattle, 36; for Southern Pacific Co., S.F., on ferry boats, 36; as stevedore, 36; dental technician, 37; night watchman, 38; in laboratories, University of California Dental College, 41; USSR, trip to, 1974, 49-56; retirement, 43; upbringing, 11.
Ushanoff, Vasilii, father, 1, 19, 22

Votkintsy and Izhevtsy, andi-Bolshevik workers groups, 48

Washington, University of, 34
White Army, 3

Vasily V. Ushanoff

Written Recollections

VASILLY (VASELEI) V. USHANOFF

To write one's own life story is a trying assignment. Particularly for a person who is not a public figure and of humble origin. The general tendency would be to glorify oneself. This glorification could not give a true picture, but false portrayal of an individual. The presentation of statistical data often raises many questions. They remain unanswered and open to conjecture.

One has to view himself as if from a distance, or like a sleuth compiling facts on a total stranger.

To clarify a few, otherwise obscure, specifics, we should start with his parents.

* * *

His father, Vasilly Alexandrovich, was a station master on the Chinese-Eastern Railway, which ran on a straight line across Manchuria, China, to connect borders of the sprawling Russian land of Siberia.

The Chinese-Eastern Railway was built by the Russian Government, on an acquired portion of the China territory, as a reparation payment after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The Boxer, or anti-foreign rebellion of the Chinese nationals, was squelched by the combined military forces of several European nations with the United States included. Evidently his father had an adventurous spirit to travel so far from his hometown, Lukoyanovo, which is located in proximity to what is now known as the city of Gorky on the great River Volga.

His distant ancestor, who started their family's name, was a baptized Tatar, (Ushan - talking, or whispering waters). The infidel's conversion to Christianity was a requirement of the Orthodox Church to be married to a Russian woman.

His family belonged to a social class of petty bourgeoise. His father's education was of four grades in the only educational institution in their small town.

Bright and intelligent, Vasilly Alexandrovich learned Morse Code and in his teens was employed as a telegraph operator on the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

The better working conditions, larger salary and various benefit attracted him to the then started construction of the Chinese-Eastern Railway. When he reached the age of 21, he had to report to his hometown for induction into military service. There was a definite quota set for the number of men to be drafted. They had to draw lots. His was an empty one. This automatically excluded him from the army. He courted a blue-eyed girl with golden hair, married, and took her on a long journey to Manchuria.

***

The Russians came to China to stay. In essence, Manchuria became a part of Russia in China with a formidable military force to guard their interests and nationals.

The permanent buildings of brick and stone were constructed, churches and hospitals were built; and the schools with high educational standards, strict requirements and discipline were opened for the growing generation of the Russian-Manchurians.

***

On February 7, 1904, a son was born to Ushanoff's couple. He was named Vasilly after his grandfather and Vasillevich automatically became his middle name, e.t. Vasilly the son of Vasilly (Alexandrovich.) While growing up on the small stations of the railroad, his playgrounds were wide open spaces, mountains, rivers and lakes. Untouched by human habitation, they were abundant with many varieties of fish and game. At thirteen, he rode horseback like a cossack, and knew how to handle rifles and shotguns.

The summers were devoted to horseback riding, fishing and swimming. When not in a school, in the spring and autumn, he ventured on the hunting trips alone, occasionally riding a horse, but mostly walking several miles to the nearest river and lakes. It was not the idea to supplant his family diet with game which was salted and smoked for the long winter months, but the adventure itself and beauty of the Manchurian land was the primary interest, which attracted him to walk for miles up or down the river. These solitary adventuresome trips taught him self-reliance and independence.

***

After completing four years of preliminary education in the school of their small station, he passed an exam and was enrolled into a third class of Gymnazia, which was located in the administrative center of the railway, in the City of Harbin.

In the spring of 1921, at the age of 17½, he graduated from the eighth class of Gymnazia, not distinguishing himself in any particular studies of many non-elective subjects. He was the youngest in their graduation class, while the average age of the students was nineteen. In the same year, because of poor health, his father was retired from the railroad on a small pension.

In the spring of 1922, their family moved to Harbin for a permanent residence.

***

The bloody, prolonged revolutionary period in Russia did not affect the lives of the Russians in Manchuria very much. The influx of the intellectuals, and common people with their families and then White Army combatants, greatly increased population in Manchuria. The eyewitness accounts of the Red terror turned most of the employees and civilians into anti-communists.

The continuation of higher education for most graduates, from several educational institutions in Harbin, was a problem.

A small contingent of radically minded idealists left for Russia, but their fate was unknown to their parents.

The well-to-do sent their youngsters to European countries, where they enrolled in famous universities.

Vasilly was restless; there was no way out for him. All the roads were closed.

***

In the early autumn of 1922, Vasilly met his classmate. He told Vasilly, that soon, with a student's group he would be leaving for America. America was the only country in the world where one could work his way through a college of his choice.

That same day, after finding all the particulars about formation of the students' group, he surprised his parents with the statement that he wanted to go to the land of opportunity to work and study.

The Russian immigration quota in the United States, unfulfilled since the start of the World War I, was wide open. The students were the first to take advantage of the only open gate to realize their dreams.

***

With a student group #4, in a steerage of the Japanese freighter, Kaga Maru, he crossed the Pacific Ocean. On December, 1922, he landed in the port city of Seattle, Washington.

His first job was on a sawmill in a small lumber town of Fairfax, Washington, with a beautiful view of Mt. Ranier, jutting its snow covered peak straight up into the sky. For the youth of eighteen years of age, with a strong back, the hard physical work was fun; a pleasure to be outdoors and breathe with an aroma of pine trees and freshly cut lumber. Furthermore, psychologically it was uplifting. He was able to stand on his own feet, and not to be a burden to his family. From then on, he always preferred to work in the sawmills, or logging camps. In between these jobs, temporarily he was a dishwasher in a cafeteria, dug ditches on the city streets, and washed pigs' intestines for the hot dog department of the Frey Meat Packing Company, in Seattle.

The first must on his agenda, was to repay his debt to parents; second- to perfect his English, the bases for which were laid in his former studies in Manchuria.

But languages were not his forte. He still speaks with a heavy Russian accent, and gropes for words. He keeps low profile, does not talk much, but likes to listen.

***

At the age of twenty-one, to realize his father's dream to become an engineer, he enrolled in the University of Washington in Seattle, to major in Civil Engineering.

For his board and room, he worked in a sorority house in close proximity to the campus.

It was invigorating to merge into a different, vibrant, dynamic life of a student, leaving behind, as if it never existed, the dirty overalls and mentally inactive, dull existence. To use head instead of muscles. To be hungry for knowledge and strive to reach a far away gleaming light of wholesome living.

And, as the years went by, he has never forgotten that exhilarating feeling of being a student.

***

When [illegible] registration for the third quarter in the University was completed, Vasilly received a letter from his dad. His family was in dire need of financial assistance.

He was stunned. His dreams were shattered. He had to discontinu his education. It was his duty to help them. He withdrew all his savings from a bank and sent them to Manchuria. He was back on his job in a sawmill at the Simpson Lumber Company, which was then located on Lake Washington in the City of Seattle. He was a chokerman on a carriage, which ran by the main saw and cut logs into boards.

To help his family, he had to work as a common laborer, with no perspective in sight to improve his status.

An idea to learn some kind of a trade, was behind his move to San Francisco, California.

For a while, he worked as a janitor in Y.M.C.A., then as a stevedore on the docks of San Francisco, finally as a deckhand on the ferry boats which transported passengers and autos across the bay.

***

To relieve the strain of continuous financial aid and responsibility for the well-being of his folks in Manchuria, he formulated plans to get them all into the United States.

It took time, but he accomplished what seemed to be an impossible task. At first, his brother and sister came, then mother arrived.

In the meantime, his father passed away, and on borrowed money, the youngest in the family, Anatoly, joined them, and was enrolled in a high school.

***

One day, Vasilly told them, "I am glad to see you all here and gainfully employed. Please, from now on, take care of yourselves and Anatoly. Don't expect anything from me. I intend to continue on with my interrupted education."

By this time, his ambition was changed. He had no desire to be a Civil Engineer, but a Doctor of Dental Surgery. A fascination for this profession developed as he watched his acquaintance, a dental technician, at work.

An education in Dentistry was expensive. He asked his wife, a Scotch-English girl, whom he was married to for the last two years, to learn some kind of a trade and be gainfully employed, so that she could take care of herself financially. That was all the assistance he wanted. She became a beauty operator.

***

At the age of twenty-six, he enrolled in the University of California for five years of study. One year was pre-dental at Berkeley, and four- at the Dental College in San Francisco.

For two years, he worked as a nightwatchman on ferry boats. Two nights on and one off, twelve hours each shift. This job gave him an opportunity to attend classes in the daytime and study at night after the boats were tied up at the end of their runs.

After his final exams in a freshman class of the Dental College, he lost his job. It happened during the worst time during the depression years. With the exception of occasional work as a manual laborer, there were no jobs available.

***

The autumn came. He could not register. He had no funds to pay his tuition fee, which amounted to $278.00. There were no loans available. His classmates were studying. Time was running out.

In desperation, twice he crossed the San Francisco Bay on a ferry boat to Berkeley, and only on the third time was he ushered into the office of Dr. Sproul, President of the University of California, who had just returned from his vacation.

He shook Vasilly's hand, and asked him what he could do for him? "I am a student in Dental College. Here are my grades." He handed him his report cards of predominant A's and a few B's. "I am unable to pay tuition fees for this semester, but... I can't see any reason why I shouldn't continue with my education."

He informed him of the loss of his job. And, it was imperative that his tuition be paid, only for this coming year, and from then on he would manage somehow.

Dr. Sproul promised him, "I will see, what and if I can do something for you."

As he left the President's office, he suddenly realized that he did not ask for the privilege to continue on with his education, but demanded it. He was ashamed of his impertinence.

The next morning, he walked into the Dean's Office of Dental College. Before Vasilly was able to say anything, Dr. Millberry, greeted him with a wide smile. "I know, I know! Dr. Sproul called me yesterday. He was impressed with an interview he had with you. He promised to arrange a loan to pay your tuition for the entire year. I give you my permission to attend your classes."

As he left the Dean's office, tears of joy filled his eyes. He turned to the wall, away from the glances of passers by, and wiped his eyes. Now, he had to make up for one month of missed studies in theory and lab work. It was a hard task, but he did not mind it. It was a pleasure.

Vasilly is of the opinion, that this was the worst crisis he had to face in his lifetime, and he likened it to the question of "life or death"?

***

The physical examination conducted the same year, in the Medical School on their campus, revealed that his kidneys performed only 65% of their normal function.

The examining physician inquired about the mode of his life, and remarked, "I grant you, you were upset about losing your job, but it was a blessing in disguise. Your system, overtaxed with a continuous intake of food and coffee, to keep you awake for long periods of time, was unable to remove all the metabolic wastes from your body. Continuation of the same life pattern, in another year, or two would have caused considerable damage to your kidneys, ending with a partial or complete removal of the organs. And, you know what the end result would be - caput."

***

He was blessed with a rare combination, which placed him above many students of his class, he excelled in theoretical subjects and digital skill.

The college authorities and his professors provided him with enough work in and around the campus, so that he could meet his financial obligations until graduation.

For his meals, during a lunch period, he washed dishes in the Students' Cafeteria.

His day started at six in the morning and ended around ten at night, attending classes and being gainfully employed on the campu

***

At the end of his senior year, the California Study Club held their annual contest for the Best Gold Foil Operator in the Senior Class of 1935.

Vasilly, the oldest, was awarded the First Prize, and with more grade points accumulated to his credit than any other student, this placed him at the top of his graduating class.

He is a member of EPSILON ALPHA, University of California Dental Honor Society; Omicron Kappa Upsilon, National Honorary Dental Society; Past Member of American Dental Association, and a member of Alumni Association of the Dental College, University of California

***

After his graduation, he was retained on the teaching staff at the University, as a Clinical Instructor in Denture Prosthesis.

In the beginning of the World War II he refused to be placed on an essential for defense list of teachers in Dental College. Twice he was called by the Induction Center and passed his physical, but eventually was rejected, because of his age. Army Air Corps had more than enough younger dentists to fill their ranks.

The youngest, Anatoly, repaid their family's debt to their adopted country. With General Clark's army, he was with the first wave of landing forces to secure the Anzio beachhead in Italy. He survived the long and incessant bombardment of their positions by the German Stukas and their long range guns. After victorious American forces passed the City of Rome, he was badly shell-shocked. He recovered in the Army Psychiatric Ward and was honorably discharged. Since then, he was employed by the large wholesale supply firm and became a very successful salesman.

***

Plans formulated before the start of War, were carried out. Vasilly and his family (his wife and son of five years old) moved to Southern California and he opened his office in Hollywood.

His real estate involvement and desire to bring their youngster into better surroundings than the sidewalks of Hollywood, eventually ended with his wife and son living in Santa Barbara, where her relatives resided.

This temporary separation, aggravated with clashes on religious subjects, Vasilly's reason and his education against his wife and her kin's ignorance and fanatism, who for some time before embraced Jehovah witnesses cult, became a permanent one.

However, to argue on the subject which was not in his realm and prove to himself that he was right, he acquired scholarly books on the ancient history and religious beliefs of mankind.

***

He met a Russian woman, Elizabeth, culturally more compatible with him. She also was born in Manchuria and educated in Harbin. She waited several years to marry him. And, when his son turned eighteen, then Vasilly was ready to tie the knot of matrimony for a second time. By his own volition, he left his real estate holdings and cash in the bank to his former wife and their son.

With his new mate, he started life over again only with his knowledge, his capable hands, and rented office with his dental equipment.

Their marital association was a very congenial, wholesome and happy one. She had a son by a former marriage, Boris Mishel, an engineer, a master of several languages. He is employed by the Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle, Washington, as one of the directors of sales. He is married, and they have two children, a boy and girl.

***

In his office, Vasilly was strictly a one-man operator, a habit he developed since the depression years.

However, he welcomed his wife's help in a darkroom, and in his bookkeeping. She found it in a mess. He did not send monthly statements to his patients. "I had no time! They know what they owe me. They are all good people and one of these days, they will pay."

Being a practical person, Elizabeth improved on his collection system and "good people" paid their bills when they were due.

***

Being a good worker, he lacked any business sense, and lost thousands of dollars on his inventions and other impetuous ventures which did not pay.

Vasilly and his wife financed his son's education at the University of California in San Diego. She took better care of him than his own mother, worrying about his well being and providing all the essentials for his life away from home. As the years went by, he became increasingly fond of her.

After his graduation as Psychologist, his son, Wm. B. Arthur, a well built, six feet two, bright young man with a wonderful personality, easily obtained employment as a Social Worker with the State of California Youth Authorities. He got married and made admirable progress.

Vasilly also contributed to the support of his mother, until she passed away at the age of 93.

***

A perfectionist, Dr. Ushanoff was not satisfied, since his graduation days, with the work submitted by the dental technicians. He preferred to make himself all the intricate gold appliances and dentures.

The heavy load of patients, laboratory work and long hours in the office, Sundays included, affected his health and nerves, not bein aware at that time that hypoglycemia in his system was the main cause. His wife, concerned for his well-being, insisted that he should retire, or he would not survive the strain of his profession for long. He had worked hard all his life, why not enjoy a few remaining years of their life together. Their two sons were doing fine. They don't have to worry about them, and they are proud of their achievements. They have two wonderful grandchildren to brighten their life. They had enough investment for their simple mode of life, not expecting that later on the inflation spiral would affect their plans.

Vasilly was faced with a difficult decision. Should he stop what he loved to do the most in his life, or continue on and die in his office with his boots on.

***

He did retire in 1966, and his wife still claims that she prevented his early demise. Perhaps she did.

He read all the books he always wanted to read, but had no time before. He was mainly interested in history, and gained a superficial knowledge of the ancient civilizations of the world.

They traveled, and when in London he spent most of his time in British Museum where the Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Egyptian artifacts were well presented.

For their trip to Italy and the Greek Islands, he brushed up on the history of Rome and Greece, the subjects he enjoyed in his early studies in Manchuria. They stayed with his stepson, who had his office in the Eternal City, and for three weeks they walked the streets of Rome. They visited the ruins of Pompeii, and Athens. They marvelled at the achievements of the ancients on the Island of Crete. On mules, they climbed steep steps of the Island Santorini, and looked down on a huge crater filled with sea-water, where their steamship was just a speck in the middle of it. Vasilly told his wife, "You know, I missed my true vocation. I should have been an Archaeologist."

***

His intrusion into a journalistic field was not successful. Having a vivid imagination, he enjoyed writing. He wrote two fairy tales in verse for his two grandchildren. Then an adventure novel, and finally with an acquired experience and better use of English, he composed a dramatic and psychologically emotional story of a white man's tribulations, when overnight his skin turned black. His acquaintances praised it, but editors were not interested.

***

In 1970, they sold their place in Hollywood and moved to Laguna Beach, California, a small resort town, to be close to the ocean and enjoy clear, fresh air in their lungs.

To modernize their newly acquired residence, Vasilly was a carpenter, cabinet maker, plumber, bricklayer, cement worker, painter, tile setter, and gardener.

***

Their self-sufficient, simple life unexpectedly was shaken. His son, Wm. B. Arthur, under continuous bombardment with Jehovah literature by his mother, succumbed and joined their cult. And, he demanded his wife to follow in his footsteps. Heartbroken, she refused and sued for a divorce.

Nothing could change his decision. He made up his mind to dedicate his life to God, live by the Bible, and in return to be granted an eternal life on earth, soon, in the coming Kingdom of God.

He quit his position as an assistant to the Supervisor in San Diego, California and resigned his commission as an officer in the Reserve Corps. One could praise the ideals of a man, but one does not have to agree with the superstitious and ignorant preachings of their cult, which wreck a man's life and people around him.

Vasilly, in his previous review of several years back, was not convinced of the rationality of their cult, however idealistic it sounded. His superficial knowledge of the ancient and Jewish history came in handy in his intensified quest for the truth and origin of the Biblical writings.

The books he acquired previously and hundreds more from libraries were searched for a concrete scholarly material of diversified nature. This search introduced Vasilly to more sciences, than he learned in his life. The ancient civilizations of the world and particularly of the Near East and Mediterranean area were fascinating.

The history of the people living there and their accomplishments in various fields of human endeavor, with their vast contribution to the Judaic-Christian religion and humanity as a whole, are in the rea of scholars and not known by the average person.

The voluminous material which he collected was incorporated into two books. His largest treatise was titled Satan, Gods, and Armageddon, The Flood, Noah and His Ark, where the origin of the Biblical story was traced to the Sumerian literature, many centuries before the Nomadic Jews were civilized and been able to read and writ

Also, a short critique on the Velikhovsky's pseudo-scientific writings, that the celestial mechanics were responsible for the miracles recorded in The Old Testament.

The books were intended to be read by his son, but brainwashed by their cult, he was not interested. He became a fanatically minded individual, rejecting scholars and sciences as the tools of Satan.

Vasilly never submitted his writings to the publishers, because of their controversial subject and with a limited appeal to a small number of readers.

Neatly typewritten, his books are on the shelves. Perhaps, his son will be curious enough to read them some day.

Vasilly consoles himself with an important fact, that his quest for the truth was not in vain. It opened broad horizons of knowledge and answered his questions, which every intelligent individual asks: "Where are we from? Why are we here? Where are we going from here?"

***

With the assistance of his brother-in-law, the late A. Dolgopolo an authority on Russian History, and his large library, Dr. Ushanoff' interest focused on the Russian Culture in the U.S.A. He studied penetration of the Russians into Alaska, California and Hawaii.

At the age of 72, purely by accident, he found himself in possession of a large old canvas, tubes of paint, and brushes.

By trial and error he learned to mix colors and apply them on th canvas. Painting soon became his hobby and main interest.

His knowledge of anatomy, gained in the Dental School, came in handy in portrayal of his two sons and their grandchildren from photographs. Then an idea came to him to paint Fort Ross, on a large old canvas, from a pamphlet published by the State of Californi Parks and Recreations Department.

His early training as an engineer gave him an understanding of perspective, proportion, form, light and shade.

From then on he depicted on a canvas a few historical scenes.

After obtaining satisfactory results and exhausting all the available material at hand, he decided to expand his subject matter to encompass the Russian Period in the early history of the United States. To fill large gaps in his pictorial story, a search for the needed historical drawings and engravings was conducted, by writing in the evenings to the historical societies, museums, libraries in the States of California, Alaska, Hawaii and private individuals.

Strangely, very valuable and rare material was obtained through casual contact with the people.

His studio was their spacious garage with good, even lighting, where the walls and ceiling were getting crowded with his paintings. His wife had an enviable distinction of having her laundromat and dryer in the picture gallery. She asked him on many occasions, what he was going to do with all these paintings. He answered: "I really don't know, and have no idea!"

When his work produced around seventy paintings and there was no end in sight, he told her, "I hope the historical societies will recognize their educational and historical value and acquire them for their exhibits.

If not, that means my work is not good enough. Presently, I have buyers for several of them and I'll sell these. I know our sons would like to have a few of them... But, the rest... I suppose, I will order destroyed, when I am gone. Remember that!"

She thought he was crazy to waste his time in a futile effort to collect widely dispersed historical material into one unit and using his imagination reproduce it in color.

But as far as he was concerned, his time was not wasted. He knew all the people intimately, whose faces became alive on the canvases. They were his friends, and he was amongst them building their settlements and living in the remote corners of Northwestern part of Alaska, on the foggy shores of California, and picturesque Hawaii.

It took him two full years of concentrated effort to complete his project and present a well rounded pictorial story containing 120 paintings. He is of the opinion that the material is plentiful and if he comes across something unusually interesting, then he will spend days portraying it in color.

He did not and does not claim to be an artist, but is of the opinion that someone guided his hand to achieve the desired result.

Next year he will be 76 years of age. He still is strong and physically active.

His hobby was waterfowl hunting, with annual travel to Tule Lake in the Northern part of California, but he had to discontinue this sport. His hunting pals of many years now are residing in the Happy Hunting Grounds.

***

In retrospect, as he views his life, he does not regret his actions, or decisions he made and carried out, and with his head up, he can look straight up into the sun and not be ashamed for anything he has done in his past life.

In his heart he carries a great gratitude of his adopted countr for the opportunity he was given to acquire his knowledge, to advanc culturally and spiritually, and develop his talents freely.

This opportunity is wide open to anyone in these United States who has the guts to fight his way in life, to become whatever he wants to be, but not to those who sit on the sidelines of human progress expecting a manna from heaven to feed their intellect and improve their way of life.

This is the story of the humble man's life. The man of an inquisitive nature and stubborn tenacity, who took delight in his achievements and fully enjoyed his life of hard work.

***

Perhaps, one day, someone may add a few more lines to this story and will finish it with THE END.

October 1979

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Nikolai Nikolaevich Khripunov

Recollections of Emigré Life

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
July 16, 1981
at Monterey, California

Copyright © 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH KHRIPUNOV

About 1978, a stroke left N. N. Khripunov totally paralyzed. When Mrs. Vera Elischer, of Monterey, California, a friend of many years, visited him in a convalescent home, she found his morale low and his rate of recovery unsatisfactory, so offered him quarters at her home. The county paid for two small rooms and a bath, located off her kitchen, and the services of a woman who came in daily to bathe him and prepare his meals. He had a color television, but used it only when there were concerts. The local newspaper was supplied him daily, though read cursorily, but he read and reread Russian novels and short stories, particularly those of Chekhov. An elderly Russian lady from next door came in every day or so to chat, and sometimes the two of them studied English together, though seemingly with little benefit for either.

In this friendly environment, Mr. Khripunov by the middle of 1982 had recovered to a point where he could hobble about with the aid of a walker, but one hand remained paralyzed. With his trim beard, courtly manners (especially with the ladies--he kissed their hands), a limpid, artless gaze, shy smile, and gentle, naive speech, it seemed that he himself might have stepped from some work of 19th century Russian literature. A tendency toward indolence, to be careless about his dress, and to forget his exercises, was held in check by Mrs. Elischer, who kept a watchful eye on him.

Our interview, translated here from Russian, revealed a man who had seen and endured much, but without any particular thought on matters, or even a sense of humor; he had not delved deeply into anything, even the literature or music which he enjoyed. In normal times he could have fitted into a niche in society already made for him, but the Revolution had cast him out, unprepared to begin a new life.

He lost this haven late in 1982, when he had another stroke and had to be taken to a nursing home. He died there in 1984.

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1985

Nikolai Nikolaevich Khripunov, Monterey

[Interview: 16 July 1981]

Pierce: First of all, Nikolai Nikolaevich, can you tell me something about your early years?

Khripunov: I was born in 1901, in Orlovsk gubernia, named after the main town of Orel. My father was a landowner. There were five of us --four girls and myself. Two of my sisters were older than I, and two younger. Two of them still live in Moscow. They write occasionally.

Pierce: Do you recall much about the life you led there?

Khripunov: We had a good life. We had a fine big house, stables, horses, and hunting dogs--borzois.

Pierce: What did you hunt?

Khripunov: Hares, mostly. But after the Revolution they took it all away from us.

Pierce: As a child, were you educated at home or in a school?

Khripunov: I will tell you how it was. My mother had five children, and it was difficult for her. We always had German nurses and French governesses. So, in the beginning, I spoke better French than Russian. Therefore, I knew French and German from childhood. We always had German nurses. They were nice; we liked them. My mother had a French governess who remained with her her whole life. She taught my sisters French. She disliked the Germans very much calling them "les sale Boches"! She did not want to return, and she finally did so only after the Revolution. She had saved some money, and she lost everything. She had relatives in Switzerland, and she left. She later found my address and we corresponded.

Pierce: You didn't study English?

Khripunov: In the last year before the Revolution, while living in the country, we had an Englishwoman. My sisters studied but I refused --I liked my freedom. We had horses and I liked to ride; there were nice neighbors, and we had a fine free life, so I said that learning English was for my sisters. Therefore, they learned and I didn't, unfortunately.

Pierce: Did you have many friends in the country?

Khripunov: We had relatives, also landowners, as neighbors. So there were many young people, and there were frequent visits; they came to us, and I went to them. I very much liked that village life, and the peasants and I was interested in farming and liked to see the people at work in the fields. They were good people, but they were poor, and of course they had a hard life.

We lived in the country during the summer, and in Moscow in the winter. In the city I studied, and my sisters studied in the institute. We went home only on holidays.

Pierce: What was your school like?

Khripunov: First I went to the Moscow Lyceum. It was big, and more privileged than other schools. Not everyone could attend there. There was another one in Petersburg, where my father attended, and my uncle. The one in Moscow was simpler. Then I went to *realschule*, like a gymnasium, with seven classes.

Pierce: What was the difference between a realschule and a gymnasium?

Khripunov: A realschule was like a gymnasium, but more for engineering, and mathematics. When my father finished the Lyceum he went in the guards regiment, the Cuirassiers, for military service.

Pierce: Did your father work mainly in Moscow?

Khripunov: He was in military service in the horse guards. He was in the German War. But he was young. He himself volunteered from patriotism, but in the Hussars. And then he was wounded. He recuperated in the Caucasus, at Essentuki, near Piatigorsk, and Mineral'nye vody.

Pierce: Did you want a military career also?

Khripunov: I wanted to enter the same regiment, but my father didn't wish it. He wanted me to become an engineer. But later I did serve in a guards regiment, the Cuirassiers, in the Volunteer Army.

Pierce: Where were you when the Revolution occurred?

Khripunov: In Moscow. I was still in the realschule. Then we moved to Poltava, in the Ukraine. We had relatives there, and there were no Bolsheviks, because the Ukraine was occupied by the Germans.

My father had an estate in the Poltava gubernia then, but after the Revolution we lost it all. But then, because there were no Bolsheviks, my father sent my mother there, and my four sisters. I followed later because I had first to write my examinations. But the times were abnormal; they kept delaying and delaying, so finally I left too, and then my father came.

My father served in the horse guards. He was at Poltava--you know [Ivan Ivanovich] Stenbock-Fermor [of Palo Alto]? His cousin, Sergei Stenbok-Fermor, was also in the horse guards in the Volunteer Army. He was at Poltava, and saw my father.

Stenbok-Fermor then took me with him, and with him I entered the regiment. I was not an officer but a *vol'nóupredeliaiushchii* --like a soldier, but you can become an officer. So I served in that capacity in the squadron in which Stenbok-Fermor served, and Ivan Ivanovich Stenbok-Fermor was also there. I remember him from that time. [Shows me a picture of man in uniform, with saber.]

Pierce: So you knew Ivan Ivanovich [Stenbok-Fermor] then?

Khripunov: He was once my commander, and led me in an attack. I served in the cavalry.

Pierce: That was dangerous, was it not, against machine guns?

Khripunov: Yes, it was. That was a very cruel war--Russians against Russians. And it wasn't good for the population because the army always requisitioned things from the peasants--fodder for horses, food for the men. They plundered sometimes, both sides, so the population suffered very much. And don't forget, that this followed the 1914 war years. First there was the war with the Germans, and after that the Civil War.

Pierce: How many battles did you go through at this time?

Khripunov: Every day there was something. From morning, the whole day, then tired we sought lodging somewhere in some village or hamlet and the next morning again the same.

Pierce: What uniform did you wear?

Khripunov: I had a Russian uniform, with shoulder pieces [pogony], but later, when the English helped us, we were dressed in British uniforms. The French did the same.

Pierce: How many years were you in that service?

Khripunov: I was in the army for one year, under Denikin, and then when it finished, when Wrangel continued the struggle in the Crimea, I became ill with typhus: there was a great epidemic there. Everywhere we lay in the train carriages, and had voshi [lice], small bugs - they bite. The epidemic went from one person to another. The trains took away many sick people. They took us to Novorossiisk, a large port, and I didn't know what to do. I was alone, sick, and very weak, and we didn't want to fall in the hands of the Bolsheviks. Because it was a very cruel war. In Novorossiisk I walked around, not knowing what to do. The English evacuated us. They helped the White Army, giving us guns, uniforms, and medical supplies.

I was already unable to fight, so they put me on a hospital ship, a former Austrian steamer, the Baron Beck. At the outbreak of the war, in 1914, the English took it and made it into a hospital ship. They had hammocks instead of beds. So I was put in a hammock, although I was very sick, and they took me first to the island of Crete. But they wouldn't take us. I don't know why; it was probably because there was no agreement; Crete belonged to Greece. We stayed a long time in the roadstead, and then went on to Alexandria, in Egypt, which was a British protectorate. There the English put me in a military hospital. This was in 1920.

The doctors and sisters in the hospital were Hindus, very good. There I lay for a long time, and then they sent me to the military hospital at Cairo. I was there a long time, and then began to recover.

I didn't know what to do. I had no money, no father or mother, and I had to eat. I understood that I had to undertake some kind of work, but I had no specialty. I hadn't finished gymnasium in Russia, hadn't taken the final exams. It was very hard to seek work. I didn't know any foreign language except French. So I looked and looked.

There in Cairo was a Russian club. It is interesting that the director was a Jew, a very nice man. He had been a lawyer [advokat] in Russia. They looked after refugees, and we of course went to this club. There was a library there, and a general, his wife and two daughters had organized a little snackbar, where they sold drinks and zakuski. Even the Egyptians went there, because they liked the Russian cooking, and it didn't cost much there. Of course, the emigrants took over this club. There were more of us, of the tsarist regime.

I was in Egypt about two years, in Port Said, Alexandria, and then Cairo. Then I was in a camp for refugees, Tel-el-Kebir, between Cairo and Port Said. There we lived in tents, not in barracks, and nearby there were two English cavalry squadrons. They played polo, and we went to watch them. We had no money, and we were given British uniforms, so that I looked like an English soldier, with coat, and warm shirt.

We Russians were always in good spirits, lively. We had artists among the refugees in the camp, including some young women, some of them singers.

The English didn't like the Egyptians, and they told us not to go into the town, saying it was dangerous to go there in British uniforms--the ordinary people might attack us. But we went there anyway, to sell our things because we needed the money to buy vodka and other things.

So that's the way we lived. I was there about a half a year, and then returned to Cairo. There I found work for the first time. I was in a Russian restaurant and met an Egyptian judge. He had a mixed tribunal there, as they called it, because foreigners were not under the Egyptian tribunal.

The judge's father, mother, wife, a son and daughters lived in his house. It was not in the center but far out. The father and mother lived upstairs and his own family and an Arab servant downstairs.

The wife was a Christian--a Copt. She was nice, but he was very miserly. He took me as a teacher of his son and daughter. I took them to and from school; that was my work. In the morning I had breakfast. Always beans, beans--the cheapest food.

I didn't sleep in their quarters, but instead they put me on the roof. In Cairo all buildings had flat roofs. On the roof there was a little house, with one room. Earlier they had kept chickens there for several years. It was dirty, but he said "This is yours." It was smelly in hot weather, and slippery when it was wet. There was no way to clean it. There was a wooden trestle [podmost], and he said, "That is your bed." It was winter, and the nights were cold. The one small window was broken, so that made it colder, so I lay there under my English army overcoat [shinel'] and slept somehow.

I went to school every morning with the boy and girl. He had a car, but it was out of repair, and he was very tight, and didn't want to spend the money to fix it. So I found a Russian who had served in a tank division; he said he could repair it, so I brought him. He bargained and bargained, but was always told it was too expensive. Finally the mechanic got tired of it and dropped the matter and took other work, and so it ended. But he had a little carriage pulled by a pony, and I sometimes went to town with that to fetch the children, though mostly I went about on foot.

During all the time I was there he never paid me. He promised but never did. But he gave me a fez to wear--a tarboosh. "They don't like the English here," he said, "and without this they may take you for one. Therefore, you had better wear this." I took it, but never wore it. I kept it in my room.

Pierce: What food did he give you?

Khripunov: In the morning the young Egyptian servant fixed my breakfast. The food was poor. For breakfast there were beans, the cheapest food.

I was there for two years. There was a big park in the center of town. Near it were two big hotels, Shepherd's, where most of the English stayed, and the Continentale, where most of the other foreigners stayed. Shepherd's was a good hotel. Not far away was a club, and there in the center of the town was a big park where there were big trees. I used to go walking there and sometimes you could pick up figs. They were very sweet and tasty and you could gather them where they had dropped.

And then I went in this park to a canteen for English soldiers. I worked there sometimes. They delivered food and I sorted it out. That was my work--it wasn't important.

Then I also danced in the ballet for a time [laughing ruefully] --but now I can't!

Pierce: How long did you do that?

Khripunov: Unfortunately, not long. It was very interesting. A Russian ballerina arrived, with her husband, her partner. She was a good ballerina; she organized a ballet at Cairo. She collected young boys and girls from among the emigrants. There were four girls and three of us boys. I went there. She was strict; you had to study and practice, every day.

She put on only one ballet, Rimskii-Korsakov's _Scheherazade_. She played the leading role, her husband was her partner, and we were slaves.

The first night it went well; many people were interested, and there was a full house, but then it dwindled, so that after the 3rd or 4th time there were not enough to continue .

Pierce: Who made up the audiences?

Khripunov: Mostly Egyptians. It was new for them, and at first many came, but not for long.

An entrepreneur then proposed that we go as a troupe for several years, to India and other places, but nothing came of it, because the girls' families didn't want to let them go. We were supposed to go to Port Said and there form another ballet, so we practiced and practiced, and the entrepreneur waited and waited, but time passed and he finally dropped the matter. I was very sorry because I had looked forward to travelling to other countries.

And I, frankly, thought all the time that I would not be there much longer. We were then so naive; we were firmly convinced that the Bolsheviks would not last long, and then we could return home. I even had relatives who didn't put their children in school, saying that the Russian schools were better, and when they returned they could learn there.

Therefore, I wanted to live closer to Russia, in Europe, in order to be closer to home. But at that time it was impossible to obtain a visa because of the evacuation of the Denikin and Wrangel armies, and the European countries didn't want to accept emigrants. I didn't know how to get to Europe.

This ballerina, Zinaida Shubert, was a very nice person. A Russian steamer, the Kavkaz, arrived at Port Said. It was chartered by a French company, but it was formerly Russian. The captain was a Russian, and the representative of the company to which the ship belonged was a Russian, named Liamin. In Moscow he had known the ballerina well, and they often met. Liamin and his wife lived in a cabin aboard a ship in Port Said. I asked Liamin if it would be possible to go to Europe on that steamer.

"The captain is an unpleasant, crude fellow," he told me. But I thought it might be possible to speak to him.

The ballerina Shubert invited us to dinner at the hotel in Alexandria, to which she had invited the captain. I sat beside him; we got along well, and I asked him: "Nikolai Nikolaevich, would it be possible for you to take me somehow to Europe?" And he agreed.

The Kavkaz was a trading vessel; it called at ports along the

Asia Minor coast--Jaffa, Haifa, Smyrna, and back to Constantinople. It came back from Constantinople with goods which it carried wherever there was a call for them.

I got on the steamer, but it stood a long time in Port Said because the Company didn't want to send money for fuel. They wanted the steamer to earn its own way and buy the coal itself.

So we stood a long time at Port Said. It was a freighter, not a passenger vessel, so there were places for four passengers. There was a Russian girl, she was a friend of the first officer, an Englishman. She would spend time with him, and then he would take her back at night on the launch.

I had a Nansen passport. I decided there was nothing to do with the captain, for he was unpleasant, so I went to the French consulate, because the ship belonged to a French company, and asked permission to return to Constantinople. They took me as a seaman, and issued a visa so I could return in legal fashion.

This was a good time. The Captain was Russian, and the crew. We ate well. Once we didn't carry goods, but livestock--sheep, cows, and oxen--all in the hold, and we had plenty of mutton. I had to stand watch at night and strike the bell, and wash the deck every day, and that was all.

Smyrna was full of troops--there was a war on between the Greeks and Turks.

When we arrived at Constantinople I found my uncle, my father's cousin, also named Khripunov. He and my father had attended the privileged school, the Lyceum, in Petersburg, and the former Lyseiists had an organization. Through this, my uncle learned that there was a Khripunov at Budapest and when he wrote there, we found that he was my father. He had been in Yugoslavia and then went to Hungary.

My uncle lived well! He was a practical man. He said, "You need to study, finish your education, get a specialty." At that time there was an organization of Russian emigres, the Soiuz gorodov [union of towns]. It formed a Russian gymnasium in Constantinople, and I went to this gymnasium and then the Czechs took the whole gymnasium to Czechoslovakia. The Czechs liked the Russian youth. They took the whole gymnasium--girls and boys--and sent it to a small town in Moravia, Cebovo. There, in barracks was the gymnasium, the director, the teachers, and students, and there I studied and finished.

The Czechs helped the Russian emigres very much; they gave us everything free, all of our gymnasium and university educations. In Prague was the Svobodarnia, a great dormitory for students. I lived there for only a short time. In a small room. I didn't learn to speak Czech, and I soon went to Hungary.

There, in Budapest, I saw my father for the first time since I had entered the army in Rostov.

It was a joyful meeting, and I stayed on. I didn't want to leave my father. It was difficult for him to find work. That was in 1923. There was a small Russian colony there and I met Vera Aleksandrovna [Elischer] and her mother and children.

Pierce: How was life in Hungary?

Khripunov: The country was in economic ruin. The money fell in value, prices were in millions, there was much unemployment, it was hard to find work. I worked in a factory, making cloth, at a big loom, with a shuttle, which flew back and forth, and I always had to clean the thread.

I worked in the textile factory for awhile and then was laid off. I lived in Budapest, in a barracks near the center of town. There was a number of such barracks. They belonged to the city. During the 1914 war they were lazarets for sick or wounded soldiers. When the war ended the city took them over and gave four to our Russian emigration, so we could live there. They were simple barracks, with plain beds. There were very many people; it wasn't very pleasant. Vera Aleksandrovna [Elischer] came once to see me there.

There were different Russians there, other officers, not cavalrymen, but infantrymen. Very nice. They often came to my room. They had no work, so they gave me tea and helped me in those barracks. Later they got work and through them I got a job too, unloading boxcars. It was on the bank of the Dunai [Danube]. The trains went along there, and barges with foodstuffs. This work was not paid for by the hour but by the job, for one boxcar, two, and so forth. We worked together; it was heavy work.

Then Vera Aleksandrovna [Elischer] gave me advice. She taught French. "Why don't you do the same?" she said. She gave me a Hungarian boy pupil, and so I began to teach French, and did that for the rest of the time I was there. By working, I could help my father.

The Hungarian people were very good to us. They helped us very much, even under Bela Kun, when they had communism. They knew that we had suffered from communism and the society, even the higher society, helped us very much. Aristocrats, rich, with big estates, invited Russians like Prince Galitsyn, Prince Obolensky, and my father to stay with them. Galitsyn lived that way for 12 years, free. They gave him a house, a servant, food, everything, free. My father was also acquainted with a count. His wife was a Countess Esterhazy, and they had a hunting estate, and my father stayed there. Not in the house of the count, but in that of the head forester. When I arrived, I also lived there.

Obelensky and Galitsyn lived like that for many years, but my father didn't want to, and after two years he left.

But in Budapest, it was very difficult for him to find work. I got him a job in a factory, far from town, as a watchman. And then the estate owner, the count, invited him to stay there during the summer. And then I got acquainted with Mr. D----(?), the director of a very large enterprise, Hanji (?) in Hungarian meaning "arts". A great economic enterprise. We got along well, and when he left he said, "If you need anything, any time, come to me."

And when my father had no work, I wrote him and he took my father in his office of this Hanji firm. It was easy work, as he was inside and warm in the winter, and later he got a pension, until his death in 1938, of a heart attack.

I remained in Hungary for 23 years. I left when the Russians--the Bolsheviks--approached Budapest near the end of the Second World War. All the other emigrants were leaving; they didn't want to remain there, but I was tired of emigration, always emigrating, emigrating. I thought that the Russians, my own people, were approaching, and I might perhaps remain, but then I met people with the Swedish Red Cross. They occupied several villas. They helped mainly the Jews, hid them, and saved them from the Germans. The director was a Swede, a very nice man. He said that if the Red Army comes I can hide you.* For awhile I thought of remaining, and entering the service of the Swedes, but then the Germans gave us transportation; they supplied trains and took families, priests, and everybody--they liked the emigrants.

---

* Note: this was probably the well-known and tragic figure Raoul Wallenberg, who was soon arrested by the Russians. He was said to have died in a Soviet prison in 1946, but repeated rumors ever since have indicated that he may still have been in confinement in the Soviet Union much later. The most recent report, in December 1982, was given by a former camp inmate, in Israel, who said he had talked to a man about 1972, who may have been Wallenberg.

I had a good friend, also a Russian, and we went together, through Vienna, then to Stuttgart, and later he also went with me to America. He was ten years older than I, and he is dead now, from a heart attack.

I came to America in 1947. I had good documents. In Budapest I had a Nansen passport, but the Swedes gave me a Swedish Red Cross passport. When the Americans saw this in 1974 they regarded it as a valid document and I quickly obtained a visa to go to America. All the emigrants wanted very much to come here. They stood in line, asked, and wrote, but with my documents I quickly received permission. From Stuttgart, I went to a camp, and from this camp they sent me to a German town where I boarded a ship for America, the General Exelman.

While in Europe I always wanted to live in the south, because the winter was always cold, we were very poor, and needed fuel. We had small rooms and the cold, rain and snow came in. I dreamed of settling somewhere in the south of France. Therefore, when someone suggested going to California I agreed.

The ship landed in New York. I didn't stay long there, only a day, and then set out for Chicago by train, and from there to Los Angeles.

Here again it was the same story as in Hungary. It wasn't easy to find work, and what to do?

[There followed a difficult time. Mr. Khripunov and his friend were picking fruit, and not doing very well at it when his friend, Vera Elischer, again helped him with timely advice and he was able to obtain light work in Santa Barbara, California, and eventually an old age pension. With relative security, he was able to make two trips to the Soviet Union.]

Pierce: What was it like to go back?

Khripunov: I was in Moscow for two weeks in 1972. I saw my sisters there and many relatives. It was a pleasant visit for me. My relatives took good care of me. Every day there was a program of some sort. I was invited first by one relative and then by another. So I got along with them well. I stopped in the hotel Metropol. In my time, the Metropol was the most fashionable in Moscow. There the artists usually stopped. Now after the war it has grown older and is not the same, but I had a good room, with a carpet, and a bathroom. I didn't want to stay with my sisters, because if you stay with relatives it is much harder to get a visa. Therefore, I went as a tourist, entirely independently.

When I arrived in Moscow I didn't know where I would be staying. Intourist decided that. They said I would stay at the Metropol, and took me there, by car.

When I was there the second time I stayed in a large, fine new hotel, the "Rossiia", near Red Square. Everything was fine. I had no unpleasantness. Everybody was correct in their attitude and service.

Pierce: Even though you had fought against them in the Civil War?

Khripunov: They no longer have any interest in the old emigration. It was different after the 2nd World War, when they didn't like the old emigres. Some had served with the Germans. I read of one case, a Russian-Ukrainian, who wanted to go back with his wife and children. He went and it appeared that he had worked with the Germans. They arrested him, and I think they shot him. They went in a group of tourists to Moscow. Some went to the Baltic, and some to other places, and he remained in Moscow. They arrested him, questioned him, and shot him. Perhaps he only worked in the kitchen with the Germans, but that didn't matter. But [when I went there] they were no longer interested in us, the old emigres.

Pierce: You didn't visit Orel?

Khripunov: I was only in Moscow. I was interested only in seeing my sisters and relatives, so I wasn't in any of the museums or anywhere else. Once I was in the Bolshoi Theater. I had a young niece and I thought it would be nice for her, because as a tourist it would be easier for me to obtain tickets. They have to stand in long lines for tickets, all night sometimes. The Intourist people asked if we wouldn't want to go on excursions. I refused, but then I thought that my niece might like to go.

And when I went for tickets to the Bolshoi Theater they said there were no more tickets, because all the artists had gone on tour, to America, Western Europe and other places. And then after a week or so they came and said, "There is an extra performance, because at this time the King and Queen of Afghanistan [?] had arrived as visitors, and for this they had organized a special performance of the ballet "Giselle". I asked for five tickets and got three, so I could take my niece and another relative. It was a very fine performance. Between acts we went to the foyer for refreshments.

Moscow is full of people, there are great crowds and traffic. Moscow draws the tourists, not only from Europe and America, but from India and Pakistan. People had to stand in line just to buy a magazine.

INDEX - KHRIPUNOV

Baron Beck, hospital ship, 4

Denikin, White Army leader, 4

Elischer, Vera A., friend, 9

General Exelman, steamship, 11
Germans, in Ukraine, 3

Kavkaz, steamer, 7, 8
Khripunov, Nikolai Nikolaevich, upbringing, 1; Revolution, 3-4; emigration, Cairo, 4, Czechoslovakia, 8; Budapest, 9; USA, journey to, 1947, 11; USSR, visits to, 1972, 12
Kun, Bela, Hungarian Communist leader, 9

Novorossiisk, 4

Stenbok-Fermor, Ivan Ivanovich, 3; Sergei, 3

Ukraine, 3

Tel-el-Kebir, Egypt, refugee camp, 5

Wallenberg, Raoul, Swedish diplomat, 10 n.

World War I, 2

Wrangel, White Army leader, 4

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Adolf Idol

Recollections of Russia Before, During, and After the 1917 Revolution

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
August 1, 1979
at Carmel Valley, California

Copyright Ⓒ 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

Interview with Adolf Idol,
at Carmel Valley, California,
1 August, 1979.

I met Adolf Idol (known to Russian acquaintances as Adolf Adolfovich) in Monterey, California, in June 1979. Tall, still handsome, belying his 74 years, he was pleasant and unassuming. A Baltic German, born and raised in Estonia when it was still part of Russia, he had been a keen observer of relations between the Baltic countries and Russia on the one hand, and with Germany. In 1940, before the Soviet occupation of Estonia, he emigrated to Germany, where he was soon taken into the Wehrmacht.

When Iakov (Svanidze) Stalin, the son of the Soviet dictator, by his first wife was taken prisoner by the Germans in 1941, Idol was with an anti-aircraft unit. Because of his knowledge of Russian, he was transferred to the German airforce to interrogate the prisoner. He showed me a photograph of Svanidze, looking down, with Idol on his right, in profile, and a young German captain, in propaganda work, on his left. The latter did not even speak Russian, but had the interview recorded. He later cut Idol out of the picture and had the remainder, of him with Svanidze given to the press. The picture was widely publicized, with uncomplimentary remarks Svanidze made about Stalin and the alleged murder of his mother. In 1942 the Germans offered Svanidze to the Russians in exchange for General von Paulus, but Stalin refused. Svanidze, fearing repatriation at the end of the war, died by touching the electric fence of the camp he was in. After the war, the Soviet secret police hunted down the young German captain who had been pictured with Svanidze, and sentenced him to ten years in a labor camp, but as Idol had been removed from the picture, they did not know of him.

Idol told of another Soviet prisoner, a friend of the Stalin family, whom he interrogated soon after he was captured. Saying to himself "This one I will hide." he kept him sequestered. He got much information from, liked him and finally put him with Soviet airforce PW's. At the end of the war, when these were repatriated, the man was immediately sent to Moscow, where he was reinstated with the Stalin family. Later, Idol heard that the erstwhile prisoner, now a general, and in Munich, was looking everywhere for him, but Idol decided to remain in hiding. Perhaps the Soviet merely wanted to see him out of gratitude. (Or, I suggested, to get rid of Idol as sole witness to his special status during the war and the circumstances of his return? But Idol said it would not have been in keeping with his character.)

Specializing in intelligence work, he worked closely with the Vlasov army, made up of Red Army prisoners of war who had volunteered to enter a special corps, to fight on the German side. They were not pro-Nazi, but rather anti-communist, and desirous of a free Russia. Idol said that he had devised a way to have men of various Soviet nationalities, Russians, Turkestanians and others, in one air force unit, by having all wear the same uniform but with arm insignia indicating their respective nationalities. This worked, and they all got on very well. He saw General Vlasov many times, also General Maltsev and others of the Vlasov air force. He had pictures of himself with Vlasov and subordinates, and one of General Maltsev beside a plane. He had had many more, but at the end of the war destroyed them, so had got them since from various individuals. He had one of Vlasov in civilian clothes when he was being hidden after he had surrendered to the Germans. Idol had drafted a memo, signed by Colonel Halters, proposing a separate air squadron for the Vlasov forces. This was given to a high officer of the Luftwaffe. This officer had a quarrel with Hitler and shot himself. The memo was found in his safe. It seemed important, so Halters was asked to take the necessary action. He agreed only if Idol was given him as an assistant, so he was thereafter with the Vlasov air force.

After the war he came to the United States and taught for some years at the Defense Language Institute at Monterey, until retirement. He had a great store of information, so I asked him if I might tape his account, but he refused, saying that it was still too soon, and it might bring harm to people still living. He was also, in all likelihood, in the habit of maintaining a low profile, instilled especially under conditions at the end of the war. However, he had evidently enjoyed our chat, and the chance to talk of many things which he said he had not discussed with anyone for over 20 years. He agreed that I might tape an interview with him about the abortive communist putch which took place in Estonia in 1924.

Two days later, on 19 June, I visited him at his home in sunny Carmel Valley, on the outskirts of the village of the same name. The rambling old house, at the foot of the hills on one side of the valley, was almost hidden by oak trees and chaparral. It was one of the first to be built in that part of the valley, as a hunting lodge for a wealthy San Franciscan and his guests.

Inside was an interesting collection of objets d'art. Mrs. Idol was a member of the wealthy Uxküll family of Estonia, which at one time had had the equivalent of 200,000 acres. When the country became a republic after World War I, the estates were confiscated, leaving only thehouse and the farm buildings. Her father took "many box cars' of furniture and art objects to Germany. Much of what they took was sold at auction, but the proceeds vanished in the German inflation of the early 1920's. Objects they still possessed included two larger than lifesize busts of the Emperor Nicholas I and his consort in Roman dress, presented to an earlier Uxküll by Nicholas in gratitude for hospitality; a little porcelain thing showing a young man and woman in 18th century garb, embracing. This had been made for the Empress Alexandra, who said it would not do at all, and ordered that it be broken up, but it was not. There were some old portraits of 18th century vintage; and one probably of the 17th century, of a child, with a big dog. Stowed away in a drawer were several dozen books of the 17th and 18th centuries, of considerable value.

All over the house there were pictures of the East Indian leader of a Vedanta sect, Sai Baba, to which Mrs. Idol adhered.

Idol liked to walk with his dog, an Alsatian, and their cat, Ocelot, thus named because of its markings. He indulged a small eccentricity, collecting hats, using different ones for his walks and visits to town. His Germanic orderliness contrasted with his wife's Russian carelessness and impetuosity; both were warm and hospitable.

After the interview of 19 June, given on the following pages, there was no opportunity for another that year. I saw him again on 27 July 1980, the following year, during a short visit to Monterey, but there was no opportunity for another interview at that time. I hoped to have one or more later on, but toward the end of 1980 he died of a stroke.

Richard A. Pierce

Interview, with Adolf Idol,

at Carmel Valley, California,

1 **August** 1979.

Pierce: Mr. Idol, you agreed to talk today about your experiences in Estonia during the abortive communist putsch in 1924. Since very little is known about this, anything you have to say about this will be of interest.

Idol: One of the most knowledgeable individuals regarding Russian history is Georg von Rauch; he is from my own fraternity. You know his book, A History of Soviet Russia; it is now translated, a standard source, a really dependable source. Therefore, I was astonished to discover in the chronological listing at the end the note "Communist putsch in Reval, October 1924" But it was really on December 1, and not in October. How could it happen? Von Rauch is accurate in relations with France and other things, but slips up in this extremely important occurrence for Estonia and in the history of Soviet foreign policy.

Now to talk about December 1. I have thought about it since we talked last time, and I am sure that you can find very good, even excellent reports about all these happenings in Toronto among the Estonians living there, especially the older generation. There will certainly be somebody still living who was there at the time. I myself can't tell you much about it, only about when it happened; I remember it so well.

I was just 19 years old, and I had just matriculated in the University of Tartu, but I happened to be not in Tartu but in Tallin. I was in a German club, the Black Hats club (Schwarz Holcke ? Klub), a historic, Hanseatic club there. It was quite late, and there was some kind of a party or something going on there, and it was in the middle of the night, maybe between one or two o'clock or something like that, when I went home. Everything was deserted and quiet, and I just walked through the city to the place where I lived, passing by the main railway station. I crossed the railway tracks, maybe 200 meters from the main buildings. It was very quiet there and nothing was happening. When I got home, I went to sleep, but one or two hours later I was awakened by the sound of shooting. When I heard machine guns I knew that something was going on. I dressed quickly and went out. At this time the battle had begun. I found that the communists had occupied the Baltic central station, so that when I passed by, they were already inside, waiting for the signal to begin. I was probably lucky that I passed by when I did, and not later.

And then they occupied the Ministry of War, and across the street the central police, and all police stations including the detective police. And then they occupied the center of Tallin, the central post office, which means telephone and telegraph also, and the radio station. They occupied, or stormed, you could say, the officers school on the outskirts of Tallin, which was maybe three kilometers from Tallin, and two or three more places.

All this in one night. It was well planned. The Communist Party existed officially, but all this was done in the underground. In a few preceding months they brought in a few hundred Estonian communist revolutionaries and instructors from Soviet Russia. They crossed the border illegally and prepared everything. They brought in weapons, and so everything was arranged with the idea that the so-called proletariat of Tallin would join them, because in Tallin there was big industry. But they made one mistake; everything they did in the beginning was right; the only wrong thing was that the proletariat didn't come out, so practically nobody joined this uprising, and so it was just a relatively small group of revolutionaries who couldn't succeed against the military. One of the heroes of the war of independence in Estonia, General Tudeh (?), a former Russian officer--they were all former Russian military officers--commanded the military which fought the battle for the Baltic station--the central station. It took quite awhile before they recaptured it. The shooting went on for a day or two or even more. Then they began to try to round up the revolutionaries who went underground in Tallinn and other cities.

It took quite awhile before it was fully liquidated, and then they had the military courts and everything proceeded through them. Both death sentences and imprisonment were imposed. The general prosecutor was a Baron Knorring, of a very well known Baltic German family. There were still a few Baltic Germans in the government apparatus then, especially the military.

After that, probably a month or two later, the Communist Party was forbidden. All this had been initiated from the center, from the Estonian section of the Comintern. As far as I know, it was the first time that a revolutionary uprising was initiated on the outside in this way.

RP: They really believed their own propaganda?

Idol: Oh yes! They realy deceived themselves, and there is no question that they were all idealists--always the most dangerous.

RP: Up to then everything had been very quiet?

Idol: Yes, at least nothing like that.

RP: So this was just an episode?

Idol: Yes, but early in the morning of the same night I went to the headquarters of an organization which was founded just before the war of independence, a kind of civilian guard. Probably you would compare it to a certain degree to the National Guard in the United States now; it was a kind of militia. So I went there immediately and volunteered, and they gave me a rifle and some ammunition.

RP: And a brassard?

Idol: Yes, and I had to go and make patrols. It went on for a month or so, patrols regularly at night everywhere. Our headquarters was on the Surtatumante, the road which leads to Tartu, a big central

central street. For a few years after that they organized this unit more and more until it became a real national guard, with uniforms promotions, and leading officers from the military and so on. Later, anyone who was a member was very much a persona non grata after Estonia was taken over by the Red Army. It is understandable, because this was the hard core /of possible resistance/.

I mentioned that it was a turning point in my life, because until then I had never actively joined anything. Now I became automatically a member of something, an active body, the goal of which was to resist or to fight communist takeover attempts.

RP: What were your motives/ Were you primarily anti-Bolshevik, or pro-Estonian, were you patriotic and desiring to preserve the status quo?

Idol: That is an interesting question, and an individual question, because it wasn't the same with everybody. In my case it was a little bit different. With regard to this I have prepared the following short manuscript for you:

"There were several turning points during my life, but I think that the one which determined my entire future life took place exactly 65 years ago, on August 1st of 1914. I was then almost 9 years old, and lived with my parents in St. Petersburg, Russia, where my father was an official of the Imperial Treasury Department. My mother, being an ethnic German, from Estonia (Deutsch-Baltin) spoke other languages beside German with a distinctly recognizable German accent. Inside the family we spoke only German. I attended a German secondary school (gymnasium), the St. Aunen-Schule, we belonged to a German Lutheran church, St. Aunen kirche, etc, etc. You could say it was an almost 100% German home. At that time about 5% of the two million population of the Russian capital was German.

"I remember this particular day, it was sunny and warm. The morning papers were already delivered, as usual. They contained the shattering news of the beginning of the war with Germany. It was very exciting for me, as a nine year old boy, to read the big headlines about the start of the hostilities. As I felt, we, our country, had been attacked by a vicious enemy, Germany.

"After awhile I left our home and went, as usual, to a playground to meet my playmates, with whom I played almost every day during the school vacation. They were already gathered together, but I immediately noticed that something must have happened meanwhile between yesterday and today. They stood in a closed group and watched me approach them. Then, spontaneously, they began to sing a Russian childrens' verse, jeering at and ridiculing the Germans. The content of the song didn't make any sense, it was just gibberish, but it was used by children and is probably known to them to this very day.

"The effect on me was tremendous. For some reason I was absolutely unprepared for this situation. In spite of our "German" household I never felt myself to be other than an integral part of my Russian environment. I spoke Russian like a Russian, I loved Russian literature, music, songs, and was, thanks to my upbringing, absolutely at home in the Russian culture. My friends were Russians and Germans, not to mention children of Jewish, French, English and other origins. As I later could understand, I was brought up in a truly cosmopolitan atmosphere, accepting the Russian monarchy, state and people as the given environment of my place of birth, without narrowing this fact to a nationalistic allegiance to all Russia. On the other hand, there might be an important difference between me and my Russian friends and playmates: I had hardly any connection with the Russian-Orthodox Church. Everybody who knows "Old Russia" knows how deeply rooted were all Russians in their church, and how much this influence determined their entire life.

"I could say today that I was "thunderstruck" by the unexpected attitude of my playmates. I remember that I stood awhile and felt like crying. I turned around and slowly left the playground, going home.

"I don't remember that I told my parents about what had happened, but I began to think about myself and everything that happened after this day in a new light.

"Very soon the government issued regulations prohibiting the use of the German language in public. That meant that everywhere, in offices, stores, shops, etc., posters were put on the wall prohibiting the speaking of German.

"In our German school all books had to be changed to books with Russian texts. Very soon our school was confiscated and an officers school and a military hospital were established there.

"One German school was still allowed to exist (St. Petri-Schule) on the Nevsky Prospect. Their students attended the school in the first half of the day, and our students from the St. Aunen-Schule began at 3 p.m. and finished at 8 p.m. in the late evening every day."

RP: So at the age of nine you became aware that you were part of a minority...

Idol: Exactly! That was somehow a turning point for me, as was December 3rd, ten years later.

I had more such points. Another which very much influenced me occurred in 1940, after I arrived by ship in Gdynia, which we called Gotenhafen, in the former Polish Corridor. From there we were transported to the city of Poznan, formerly the Russian Posen, which after the World War was Polish. That was where I had to settle.

One spring day I was walking on the street in Posen. My only thought was how to begin building up a new life. I had to take care of my family. Because of my business and personal connections, that was not likely to be very difficult. I had a good reputation and people wanted to have me, so that rather than having to look for a position, I was looked for.

Now that day, as I was walking, there came marching a small unit of the black uniformed SS. For the most part this black uniformed SS consisted of ethnic Germans who lived in Poland. After they were, so to say, liberated by the National Socialists, they were given every opportunity to join these sub-organizations of the Nazi Party. Now such a unit was marching there, a small unit of 20 to 25 people, not more, and in front of them was marching an NCO of the SS, somebody with very small sub-officer rank.

Then I saw Polish children, they were looking on with much interest, as children always do when something military is passing by--they didn't know what it represented. Suddenly a small boy, with bare feet, ran on the street just in front of them, to the other side of the street for some reason. And then--I couldn't believe my eyes--this red-haired SS NCO ran after the boy and with full force kicked him with his big boot so that the boy was just thrown against the wall. It was a shock to see it. Then he immediately returned and marched again.

It was a shock. Suddenly I really understood what was going on there. It was good, because there was pressure on all immigrants or refugees of German origin to join something. You had to join just to show your loyalty, and I was in an especially dangerous position because I had been an editor of a German newspaper in Tallin which had been constantly in opposition to this upcoming National Socialist pressure. I had not only been the editorof this paper, I had been the co-founder of one and then a second political organization to resist this pressure.

/This, by the way, will indicate the position I had in Estonia./ I have mentioned my talk with the prime minister before I left Estonia. The reason I had such connections was because these people knew that the Germans whose families had lived for 700 years in their country were not like those of Germany; it was an entirely different aspect. But I don't want to talk about that right now.

But this small episode immediately told me 'Careful, careful!' and I balanced between all the things, so as somehow not to be pressured into something /I didn't want to get involved in/, and to survive, which wasn't very easy. Then, suddenly, I was drafted, and sent to the front. Once in the military, my political affiliations were no longer in question, so I didn't need to do anything; I was not under pressure anymore.

Except that now, if you believe in coincidences, I just happened to land in the center of the people who later tried to liquidate Hitler. It was the 4th Army of Field Marshal von Klug, who later had to take his own life, and many officers of his staff were later killed after the 1944 attempt. It was a center of enemies of Hitler, so it was a dangerous spot. I just happened to fall in the midst of these people, and being a Balt was immediately accepted by them.

RP: Were they predominantly Balts?

Idol: Oh no! I was the only one in this particular group, but there were a few Balts who were killed after the July 1944 attempt. Not many, but a few. The Balts mostly had another policy. Most Balts were friends of the anti-communist Russians, worked with them, were good to the population, and so on. Such as Strik-Strikfeld, who was with Vlasov--he was a Balt from Riga, with some British ancestry.

RP: Now, to return to the question of why you joined the militia group in Estonia in 1924.

Idol: Yes! And that is why I gave you that passage to read. You see, I couldn't identify myself with a narrowly national point of view. Even today I cannot. Impossible. It is my fourth citizenship right now. What can you expect from me, you see. I am glad it is America; I can say "Oh, its so multinational"; its not a particular nationality.

RP: So, when you were nine years old you became aware that you were a German living on Russian soil.

Idol: Right! The basic culture in my house, the language that we spoke at home was German, but I was not German in the sense of a German from Germany. I had never been in German. Germany was a foreign country for me; my roots were in Estonia.

RP: Then later, as you have just described in the episode about the SS NCO, that again, even though you were now on German soil, German speaking and in culture, still you were different from those people.

Idol: Right! It sounds like a joke, but I am probably the only German officer who never took an oath to Hitler, which everyone had to take. And only by a mistake, of which I was very much aware. You see, it happened through a series of circumstances, and although I don't believe in coincidence, I never took an oath. Never. It was overlooked. It was supposed that I had--it was so self-evident--but sometimes such things can happen. I got so many medals and everything, and had some very interesting key positions, and was in top secret situations, but I never had what I was supposed to have had, the oath to the Führer. By the way, all the Stauffenbergs, and the others, all of them had to take this oath, but they broke the oath. It is a curious thing.

RP: So you never had a feeling of commitment which might have come if you had taken an oath.

Idol: No! I never felt that I was committed.

RP: Now back to 1924, you remeined in the militia for some time?

Idol: I remained!

RP: Did you go up in the ranks?

Idol: No, I didn't. You see, I didn't go with the trend, you had to go all the time for maneuvers and so on, like many of my friends, but I didn't, so I never advanced in this thing; I didn't have the time. I had to divide my time between my studies, and later

I needed money so I had to go into business life, and thirdly, I had to go into politics, and edit the newspaper, Neue Zeit (the New Time). I simply didn't have time, and wasn't very much interested; I knew that I could do very little there, and that I could do much more for the cause in a different activity and not just trying to play at military life on a very low level.

RP: How did you see the cause?

Idol: That's a difficult question, and I am very careful. I would prefer not to talk too much about it right now, because I have to organize my own thoughts [on the matter].

RP: We are speaking of the 1920's, of course.

Idol: Yes, its easier then. In the 1920's there is no question that I saw simply that the enemy number one was in the East. And then I began to look more from a higher point. I thought there are two forces coming out. I never believed seriously in the so-called Western democracy, especially the American and so on; I never believed that they would be able to resist these two big movements, powers and so on--Germany and Italy, with Fascism, and the USSR and communism. I never believed that it was possible to crush communism in the western way. I never believed in it, and I believed more that it was possible to crush what they now call fascism, let's say this entire complex. And by the way, fascism and everything in this sector came from Moscow, it bears a Moscow stamp. So I thought they could be defeated, the communists could be even more affected in fighting this upcoming fascism. And so I didn't feel myself committed, either to one or the other. Nor believing, you see, in the old style democracy, or parliamentary democracy as it existed. I thought some new ways must be found. By the way, the Estonians tried, although its very much misunderstood; they had some movements, but they tended too much toward the fascistic side.

RP: They were trying to keep a middle road?

Idol: Right! but they wanted to fight. But they are a rare people, like their last president, Petz (?), who by no way was a fascist, who fought the Estonian fascists--let's call them that, although it isn't the right word, but just to use a cliche--and he and the prime minister Einpanu (?) had to find the routes and the way in this direction, you may call it a middle road, without giving up freedom, without going into a dictatorship, but governing something like Euro-communism. They tried something like that, but against the communists. And so I never felt committed.

RP: How did the Estonians regard you and other Baltic Germans who were living in Estonia in the 1920's? Were you accepted or integrated, or did some of them look upon you as the Russians did in 1914, as a people apart?

Idol: It wasn't easy. There was an upcoming new young nationalism, of Young Turks, but it was not so with the old leaders. The real leaders, Petz, Einpalu (?) and Tenison (?) and many others. They were not antagonistic against the Balts; they recognized them as a useful part of the population; they recognized their right to live there. They didn't recognize their ownership of 70% or so of the entire country, but after the war of independence and after the agrarian reforms these problems were mainly solved. They were absolutely ready to accept them as full citizens, without prerogatives of aristocracy or other privileged status.

RP: How many remained in the government?

Not many, but as an example, I remember the commander of the third cavalry regiment, the only cavalry regiment of Estonia, was a Baron Buxhoeveden, of a very old family, seven hundred years old. The commander of one squadron was Baron Nolcken, and you could see, at parades and other events, the regimental commanders, Baron so and so, etcetera.

In Latvia it was the same, the first admiral, and commander of the fleet was Graf Keyserling. Everywhere you could find them in the judiciary, and in the economy, old firms and old names. But new firms had Estonians. Because there was already an Estonian intelligentsia, and a very good intelligentsia. The center of this intelligentsia was in Petersburg. My own father, who was of Estonian origin, was one of the early leaders of the renaissance of Estonia, but he died before that. If he had not died in 1916 he might have been one of the leading government people in Estonia. He was the chairman of the Estonian society in St. Petersburg, and his best friend and my godfather was Alexander Tomba (?), who was minister of finance in Estonia after independence. He was already in finance in Petersburg; he was the jurisconsult of the Volga-Kama bank, one of the leading Russian banks, but at home he and his wife, who was Estonian too, spoke German.

When I grew up, after my father's death, I could have gone into Estonian life. They offered to send me to France, to the Sorbonne, with all expenses paid. But no, I wanted to go to Berlin, because I had grown up in this German culture, and all my wife's relatives were German.

Then I went to Tartu and joined the German fraternity, and that determined my /life/. I asked my friends, "What do you want Do you want me to go with the Estonians, and be a friend of the Germans in Estonia, or do you want me to remain here to be with you?" "Oh no," they said, " you have to be with us! and be an active fighter for Baltic Germans as an integral part of Estonia..." For me the 700 years were more important, the history of the past which formed the entire culture, the history and so on.

And it was funny, in our circles they talked about the Germans in Germany, about the Reichsgermanen--the Imperial Germans--as different from other Germans. I think it was the same way as many ethnic Germans might have felt in other countries. But who had such a long history? Nobody! Because if a family went to South America or somewhere, maybe it was a second generation, or a third, but not more, but here you had 700 or 800 years.

RP: The only thing like it would have been the Swedish minority in Finland.

Idol: Right! And you can see what happened there, through integration; you can see today it would be ridiculous to talk about some conflicts between Swedes and Finns; it has all passed by.

RP: What higher education did you obtain in the 1920's?

Idol: In 1925 I interrupted my law studies in Tartu to go to the University of Berlin, which was one of the few universities which had what they called Staatswissenschaft, a department of State science. Today you would call it political and social science, but it was together, one complex. They had something similar in the universities in Vienna and in the Sorbonne.

In the 1920's I had something more. The Pan-Europa movement arose, led by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi in Vienna. I was very much interested in that. I felt that a united Europe was something worth fighting for.

RP: This was an early forerunner of the idea of a Common Market?

Idol: Right! Very early. Led by Stresemann, Gaspari and others. And I still have deep sympathy for everything which is going in this direction, and I believe that maybe if it could be realized it could help to solve the world's problems. That's what I think, because I am so disappointed by the foreign policy here right now.

The United Nations was an opportunity for this, but it has followed the same trends as the League of Nations.

INDEX - IDOL

Baltic Germans, 7
Buxhoeveden, Baron, 12

Carmel Valley, California, 3

Defense Language Institute, Monterey, 2

Estonia, communist putsch, 1924, 3, 5-6; civilian guard formed, 6;
    anti-communist movements, 11

Fraternities, student, 5, 12

Gdynia (Gotenhafen), 7, 8

Idol, Adolf, education, 13, emigration to Germany, 8, death, 4

Keyserling, Count, 12
Klug, Field Marshal von, 9

Maltsev, General, Soviet officer in airforce of Vlasov army, 2

Nolcken, Baron, 12

Poznan (Posen) in 1940, 7, 8

Rauch, Georg von, historian, 5

Stalin, Josef, 1, 2
Strik-Strikfeld, anti-Hitler Baltic German, 9
Svanidze, Iakov, son of Josef Stalin, 1

Tartu, University of, 5

Vlasov army, 2

World War I, outbreak, Russian prejudice against Germans
    in Russia, 7

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Oswald Kratins

Recollections of Life in a Southern Russian Factory Town During the Bolshevik Terror, 1917-1918, and of Latvia During the Soviet Take Over, 1940

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce
February 1983
at Monterey, California

Copyright © 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

OSWALD KRATINS

A Latvian by nationality, Oswald Kratins was born a Russian subject, his country being then a part of the Russian Empire. Early in World War I, facing a German advance, the Russian government evacuated hundreds of thousands of Poles and Balts from the threatened western areas to points in the interior. Mr Kratins and his parents were settled in the Don region. He describes life in the region after the October Revolution, the Bolshevik terror, and successful departure with a transport of hundreds of Latvians for their homeland in 1920, in which they bribed officials along the way with salt, tobacco, and flour.

He then tells of the Soviet acquisition of basis in Latvia in September 1939, annexation of the country in 1940, followed by another terror and wholesale deportations ended only by the arrival of German forces in June/July.

He concludes with a few anecdotes about getting established in the USA.

Mr. Kratins has white, wavy hair, a ruddy complexion free of wrinkles, and an erect bearing. For years he has been an avid reader on international affairs and history. As an avocation, pursued with zeal as a patriotic duty toward the lost homeland, he has gathered all manner of information about Latvia, to be placed on file or published by an organization of Latvian emigres in Toronto, to inform generations yet unborn.

The interviews were taken in the Kratins' home in Monterey, which they have occupied since his retirement from many years of service with Holman's department store in Pacific Grove. The living room had many books, a study and guest room had many more. Since the interviews were made, however, Mr. Kratins has had considerable trouble with his eyes, requiring surgery, and forcing him and his wife to dispose of many of their possessions and move to the settlement for the elderly, "Rossmore".

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1985

Interview with Oswald Kratins
Date: February 1983
Interviewer: Richard A. Pierce
Transcriber: "

Pierce: This will be an account of boyhood experiences in Russia, and your experiences later on, within your own country, Latvia, when the Russians annexed it during World War II. Could you tell, first, of how you happened to be in Russia?

Kratins: I was born in Riga, on 29 March 1904. Riga was then the capital of the Lifliandskaia gubernia, or province, of the Russian Empire, and later, after 1917, of the republic of Latvia.

In the spring of 1916 my parents and I travelled from Tver, on the river Volga, to Nakhichevan-na-Donu [on-the-Don, as distinct from another Nakhichevan, in Armenia] adjoining Rostov-na-Donu in the oblast [region] of the Don Cossack voisko [host]. After a harsh winter, with many snow storms, it was very pleasant to settle in a town full of the fragrance of acacia trees. Nakhichevan was a medium sized town [1896 census: 32,174 inhabitants], with two factories. The Aksai factory was the larger, formerly an agricultural machine factory. The Tikhomirov factory was smaller, manufacturing plows and smaller farm equipment. During the war both were converted to the production of war materiel. Rostov-na-Donu had many small factories, some of them merely workshops, employing three or four, or a dozen workers.

In 1916 the mobilization was getting full swing, calling men up to 50 years of age. My father had a relative working in the Aksai factory, and one day we received a letter, that there was an opening in one of the factories in Nakhichevan-na-Donu. The previous manager had no knowledge of how to handle production, and my father got the job because he had worked in similar conditions in the Krupp factory in Germany.

We had a good life in Nakhichevan, with pleasant surroundings. The managerial staff and engineers lived in factory houses, pretty spacious for our needs, and we lacked absolutely nothing. You could buy everything. The market was full, and food was cheap. When we arrived in 1916 a vedro (bucket) of grapes cost a grivennik, or 10 kopecks. On the river Don there were barges and boats full of arbuzy (water melons). The biggest melon cost 5 kopecks. The dynia, another kind of melon, very sweet, weighing from 3 to 5 pounds, cost a grivennik. Meat was the same. A goose cost a poltinnik, or 50 kopecks. Sometimes it was funny; when the first Latvians came they did not know Russian, and when they went on the market they said allright, to taste, and so the vendor would cut a slice, and they would eat and then go to another, tasting as they went along.

Pierce: Those old terms were still in use in this cossack area?

Kratins: Yes, when we arrived we didn't know what they meant, but the ordinary people still thought in those terms. If you asked at the market how much something cost, it was a grivennik, or poltinnik.

It was a good life for everybody. The unskilled workers got about 1 ruble 50 kopecks per day, but even they could live well, by their standards. That was for someone with absolutely no knowledge, employed only at sweeping, or checking coats and caps, or things like that. A tram ride from Nakhichevan to Rostov, for example, cost 2 kopecks. But those who were a little skilled got 2 rubles, or 3 rubles per day, and that made a big difference.

Living around our factory were many of the unskilled workers, a mixture of Russians and Ukrainians, called khokhli. They had a primitive life, but they were also not poor. They were living in huts, living under the same roof with their cows, goats, sheep and other animals, but they were certainly not starving.

The cossacks had a very free life. In the winter time they came to work in the factories; in the summer time they departed into their steppes, where they hunted, leaving the women to work in the fields. It was dishonorable for a cossack to be seen working in the field. No, he was on his horse, he was the army, loyal to the Tsar and that was it. In the winter they came to the factories to work because they needed the money, but in the summer they were away from their stanitsa (settlement), away from their women and so on, that was a completely different life. They were free men, not so much tied to their families as to their vintovka (rifle), their horse, and hunting.

There were Don cossacks, Kuban cossacks, and Terek cossacks in that part of Russia. They were completely different establishments from the army. My father said they were somewhat like the Tsar's guards; they had their own rifles, horses and so on from the army; they were always on duty, ready at any time; they could never be taken out of duty.

For them, that was freedom. When you could earn a little money, so you were satisfied, what other kind of freedom was needed? In Petersburg and Moscow the students were killing the Tsars, and bombing and so on, but it was different in Nakhichevan. There no one even -thought about such things.

To the common Russian freedom meant simply that you could change jobs when you wanted, you were not tied to your factory. You could go to the office and say: "I am leaving. Give me what I have earned," and that was all. They did not have to give two weeks notice before leaving. He did not think of this as freedom; it was his own will; he did not want to work and that was it.

Pierce: Their freedom, then, was just living their own life?

Kratins: Living their own life. A man could work for a week or two, or maybe a month, and then quit. He could say "To hell with it; I have enough!" and go to his hut and sleep on the stove and drink, while his wife worked.

Cossacks and Russians were two completely different peoples, though not with different cultures, but maybe you could even say culture too. The cossacks were loyal to the Tsar, and they had big reason to be loyal, because in the cossack settlements, called stanitsy, when a boy was born he got a hundred rubles in gold, a horse, ammunition, and a hundred desiatins of land. But when a girl was born the cossacks beat their wives and drank for a week; it was something like Sodom and Gomorrah!

Otherwise they followed the same routine. For instance there was something we once saw at Easter time. At Easter all the Russians went to church and took a piece of kulich [a special Easter cake] as they call it, to the priest, and got some kind of blessing, and then they came out and kissed each other. But when one man came out, and he kissed a girl, suddenly the girl fell down - he had stabbed her! For nothing at all! It is an example of the Russian nature, its mysticism. As they say, Tartar blood is always the same in Russia. They arrested him, of course, but that is just one example of how the Russians behaved.

Pierce: Could you describe the life your family led?

Kratins: Rents were cheap. The three of us, my father, my mother and I, and his relative who was the plant manager in the other factory, about seven people in all, occupied a five or six room house, for which we paid 25 rubles a month. It really was a good life. Every summer you got one month vacation, and you could go to Kislovodsk, Zheleznovodsk, Armavir and other places where there were kurorts. There were many Latvians there, and we had many friends. Or we could go to the cossack stanitsas, or Novocherkassk or Staryicherkassk, in cossack territory.

Pierce: What social contacts did you and your parents have? Were they mainly confined to people in the plant? Did you know many Russian families?

Kratins: On the outside we were in contact with my uncle, who was an accountant in the meat packing plant, and we were very good friends with some of the engineers there and their families. Then besides we had the staff in the factory; there were over a hundred engineers in the factory and higher staff and bookkeepers and their families, all living in the factory area. Besides that my father had connections with some of the families of cossacks who worked in the factory. Some were pretty rich people in the stanitsa, and because of our friendship with them we always had a good supply of food in our house, even later on when there were shortages. In addition, there were about 200 boys around the plant, whom I could associate with.

Pierce: Were these the children of the staff and workers? Were they actually employed in the plant?

Kratins: Some of the biggest ones, from 15 years and up, wore working in the factory, but those of us who were 13, 14, or 15 years old were not working, but living at home. There was a special playground for the children, and schools.

Pierce: How much education was provided?

Kratins: I attended the srednoe uchebnoe zavedenie tsarevicha Alekseia (middle educational institution of the Tsarevich Aleksei). That was like a high school, with some kind of military education in one of the higher classes, so that from this school you could go to any kind of cadet corps in Russia, to the artillery, cavalry, and so on. I was there when the Tsarevich came, at the end of 1916. He visited the school because it was named after him, so we were lined up in front, and of course we greeted him, and he greeted us. He was small, a boy of maybe 12 or 13 years, and one big man was carrying him on his shoulder. He was closely guarded because if he got the smallest cut he would bleed, and the bleeding could not be stopped. We had a very good education there, and it lasted while the Denikin army was there, until 1919. Of course, when the Bolsheviks came in there was no education at all. I did not go to school at that time.

The students in the school were from ten till 18 or 19 years, and as I said it was a half military school. After graduating from this school you could get in every military school in Russia without an examination. There were compulsory religious courses for those who were Orthodox. When the batiushka came to give us the religious blessing we went out. At first he called us back, but we said we were Lutheran so there was nothing he could do. Of course we had other courses with the Russian boys.

Pierce: Did you hear much about the war?

Kratins: Of course, when the front soldiers came back they told about the war, and how badly equipped the Tsar's armies were. My father told later how some officers who were quartered in our house for awhile once told him that there were only three rifles for every seven men, so when Samsonov's army went into East Prussia [1914] and got trapped, the whole army was destroyed. General Rennenkampf, who was a German but was commanding our army, once said "I will cut off my right hand rather than be defeated." He did not cut off his hand but he lost a whole army.

Many other Latvians settled there at that time, to escape the mobilization. There was no mobilization in the Don, Kuban, and Terek cossack regions in war time because they were semi-independent; they were forces by themselves, although loyal to the Tsar. So when the mobilization was proclaimed in inner Russia, most of the Latvians there, in Petersburg or Moscow and other cities, took their families and went to the south. There they were in a good position to get jobs. For instance in our factory Father was always going to the Nakhichevan and Rostov stations, where the trains came in, and asking "Are there any Latvians here?" When there were, he would ask "Where are you going" "Oh, we are going to the south!" "Do you have anywhere to stay, or some kind of job?" he would ask. "No, we are just going somewhere to escape the mobilization!" "Allright, get out; we have jobs for you!"

Because as I told you, the cossacks worked in the factories only in the winter time, so there was some kind of worker complex, but you could not count on them; they came and went, and there were always vacancies. So there were jobs for everyone who came to Rostov. Some had never worked in a factory before, but they were hired too. "Allright, we can give you a job; we can teach you," they would be told. And once they were in the munition factory, making war materiel, they were safe from everything, they escaped mobilization, and were assured a food supply and everything, because they were working in an industry which was necessary to the war effort.

Revolution

Life went smoothly until March 1917, when rumors started circulating that the Tsar had abdicated the throne, and that there had been some disturbances in Petersburg. At first no one believed such rumors, but then soldiers, mostly deserters, started arriving from the front. They told us the war was over, and there was freedom.

The units which were stationed in Rostov and Nakhichevan were not large, they were maybe of battalion size. From them was formed the Red guard. Units were formed in our factory and then in other factories, and they got all the munitions and rifles.

We were living in the factory. The first incident there was when a small detachment of the Red guards came to the factory engrance. An officer was guarding the factory grounds with his unit, as it was a munitions factory. I do not remember what he did, but it must have been pretty harsh, because someone then took a bayonet and killed him. That was the first killing on the factory grounds.

Pierce: He was killed by his own men?

Kratins: By his own men. As far as I remember, he was very brutal, a highly egotistical man, but he was only a poruchik, or first lieutenant.

At the same time, there were many meetings. The first signs of "freedom" were huge meetins on the 3 kilometer border between Nakhichevan andRostov. People were singing, dancing, kissing each other - freedom, freedom! Agitators were standing on barrels explaining what freedom was: "We are all brothers and sisters, there are no more locks on doors, everything belongs to the people!" On one corner was a black flag (like pirates) and a big sign: Anarkhizm - mat' poriadka! (Anarchism is the mother of order). Everyone was free, including thieves, there would be no punishment. Wealth was to be distributed among the poor, and so on and on. There were red flags, and no police.

I remember one speaker, on a pedestal of some kind, saying thatnow all of the thieves should unite, "because now we have freedom, with no more closed doors, nor closed windows; everything in all the houses will be open, so we have to make a coalition and unite," and so on, "and we can go into every house because what is in it is yours!" That really came later, when the Bolsheviks said: "What is mine is mine, but what is yours is mine!" In other words, when some rich bourgeois had many things, I could take anything because it belongs to me! That was freedom! Everything belonged to the people, to the nation, and therefore to me. But then the thieves said that all the houses should be open, with no more locks on the doors, and all the contents should be distributed. "We will not take everything that belongs to you," they said, "but we will take that belongs to us."

Even after that there were no big changes, until October 1917, when the Rostov garrison mutinied against the order to move to Petrograd to suppress the revolution. They killed some regimental officers, and came out of their barracks with red flags, and on the parade ground they swore loyalty to the revolution.

> [7 November 1917: Bolsheviks seize power in Petrograd.
> 25 November: "power to the workers" in Rostov-na-Donu.
> 26 November: Ataman Kaledin of the Don Cossack voisko sent a force to retake the town, accomplished after a six day battle. The tide went in favor of the Reds, however, and on 29 January 1918 Kaledin shot himself.]

[In February 1918] delegates from all the cossack territories - the Don, Kuban and Terek - gathered at Starocherkassk to decide what to do. [They met from 4 to 12 February o.s.]. The so-called Red Army avantgarde surrounded Starocherkassk and dispersed the delegates. They killed some, or hanged them in the town square

> [Donskaia letopis', 1923, no. 2, gives the text of letters of Ataman A. M. Nazarov, V. M. Chernetsov, and Voloshinov, written before their execution.]

Delegates who escaped called all cossacks to arms. [In May 1918] a strong army under the command of General Krasnov pushed back the Red Army avantgarde to the outskirts of Nakhichevan. The battle continued a couple of days. The Red Army was crushed, but there were big casualties on both sides. The Red guards did not have any military training or experience at all, so they could not do anything against the cossacks. Various Red officials [including Chairman of the Don Sovnarkom,Podtelkov, and member of the government Krivoshlykov] were hanged.

As our house was on the outskirts of the factory grounds, we were the first victims of the cossack uprising. Mother and I escaped with the aid of foremen, under the whistle of bullets, and we settled with our cossack friends in the middle of town. My father was at that time in Rostov, and we saw him only when all was over.

When we returned to our house, it was bullet-ridden, ransacked, and furniture was damaged. The factory could start working only after a couple of months of major repairs. Some plants were completely ruined.

Meanwhile, father was offered the post of plant manager in one of the Rostov factories, so we moved to Rostov. There conditions were the same. We had a house in the factory. A new life started. The Latvians were about 1,000 strong in Rostov, we had our own club, gatherings, etc. The war moved to the midland of Russia, and seemed far away.

Under the White Army, May 1918 - Dec. 1919

Until he could conquer Moscow, General Denikin, the White Army commander, made Rostov his main base, supplying it with everything. Huge warehouses were full of grain, flour, sugar and other necessities. They thought that when they got to Moscow the supplies could be distributed to the starving people, but the opportunity never came.

Pierce: Why did the Red Army win? If the white forces had experienced officers, and ample equipment and supplies, they would appear to have had major advantages. What other factors were against them?

Kratins: At least one reason was the attitude of the officers toward their men. For instance, when an officer came along the street the gorodovoi, or policeman, was supposed to salute him. If he did not, and maybe his attention was somewhere else, the officer came and beat him! When you met an officer on the sidewalk, you had to give way to him, you had maybe to step from the sidewalk to the street. They were the same toward their troops. Latvians who were in the White Army said that it could not be very far from the end because they treated the soldiers very badly, beating them for small mistakes and so on, so there was already a kind of hatred against the officers.

The officers also led a much different life than the soldiers. Of course there are always differences, but there is not so much in the American army. For instance, when I was at Fort Ord I noticed that the soldiers got the same food that the officers got. It was not like that in the White Army. There the soldiers were on limited wartime rations, but the officers had everything. My father had some good friends among the officers, because some of the company headquarters were located in our factory, and once I accompanied him when he was invited to the officers club. They had everything there, whereas at the same time there was a shortage of bread because they were keeping it in the warehouses.

Besides that, the officers did not go in the front of their units, but remained somewhere behind or in the middle. It was the sergeants and corporals who were in the front, and they bore the brunt of the fighting. This was especially noticeable when Denikin was retreating. Rostov was then full of officers, who should have been in the front line, but were sitting in the sidewalk cafes. You could not see any soldiers; they were all officers. For instance, when the Red Army was taking Aksai, and the front line was only about 25 miles from Rostov, there was artillery fire all the time, but the officers were sitting there.

For awhile the front was without movement, but then in late November the Don was frozen deeply and some Red Army units began testing weak spots. Just before Christmas the White Army retreated from Rostov without a battle. Day and night the army units left the town and suddenly there was no more noise, no firing, and we waited for what would come.

The Red Army

On the third day of Christmas, Budenny's Red cavalry crossed the frozen Don and entered Rostov. [25 December 1919 o.s., or 7 January 1920 n.s.]

The first day, nothing happened. But then the order was given that there could be two days of pleasure and plunder, and then it started. All the shops were broken into and their contents were thrown out on the street. The mob trampled flour, sugar, rice and groceries. There was a mixture of everything on the street. The Red Army was giving provisions to the starving people of Rostov. As Rostov was a rich city, there was plenty of loot.

In those three days the city was ruined. Bolts of fabric lay smeared, torn and mixed with everything on the street, presenting a scene of unheard of destruction. Streetcars were overturned, and some burned.

Pierce: Who did this, the local Red guards, or the people who had come with Budenny?

Kratins: They were the new ones, from inner Russia. I suppose they had been mobilized in Russia, and you see, when a conqueror enters a city they can take everything they need, and of course the slogan "Take it, and do what you want with it" was some kind of signal that you had to loot everything.

The same thing happened in the factories. There under the theory that everything belonged to the workers, they cut the belts on the machines and used them as soles on their boots or sold them in the market, and the factory stood still.

Later, when the comrades came in they were astonished to find what had been going on. "What are you doing?" they said, "You are sabotazhniks!" and then started shooting the workers who had done this. "One, two, three, four, five...ten - come out! Sabotazhnik!" Because that was an ammunition factory and everyone needed rifles, and ammunition, and armor plate, and the factory had no belts! So now the workers said "Gee, what comrades! These are not comrades, they are oppressors!"

Along with the destruction, terror ruled the city. You had only to mention that someone was a White Army sympathizer, and the man or woman would be killed or shot, without judges, without sentencing. The chrezvychaika, or Cheka, worked night and day founding up officers and their families who could not escape, and taking them to the Balabanovsky grove (Balabanovskaia roshcha) outside Rostov, where they were mowed down with machine guns. There were arrests every day. My father was arrested twice, because he was the plant manager, and in some way bourgeois, but the workers rescued him.

Pierce: How many people would you estimate got shot in this manner? A couple of hundred?

Kratins: Oh no, many more than that. Our factory was on the outskirts of the town, pretty close to the border line, and every day from our windows we saw them taking 10, 15, 20 and so on, and that was only what we saw in that particular place. My uncle, who was an auditor in the meat packing plant, which produced sausages and so on, said most of the engineers from the factory were taken and never returned, so of course they were put in jail or shot.

The Balabanov grove had been a nice forest, a small one, where we used to have picnics, but after Budenny came, under the Bolshevik regime, it was forbidden to go closer to it than 1 kilometer, or be shot, so there were big graves there.

The Red Army started the cannonade from Bataisk about Christmas Eve, and two days later they came in. Many of the officers could not retreat, and went into hiding. I would say they got pretty nearly all the officers or their families who were hiding in Rostov. They got everyone and because they were enemies they were taken right away to the Balabanov grove and shot. Once we saw about two hundred white prisoners being taken there. They were guarded by only three or four Red guards, yet no one tried to escape. We constantly heard the rattle of machine guns from there.

As time went on, the procedures changed somewhat. In the first days, they made arrests right on the street, in broad daylight. Somebody said you were bourgeois, and that was enough. Later, however, they made arrests at night, at ten or eleven o'clock. When you heard the steps approaching your door, you knew that they were coming.

My father said that many tried to hide in the wineries. There were some big wineries in Rostov, the Romanovskie wineries, with thousands of barrels in them, in big places underground. Some of those barrels held maybe a hundred gallons. When the soldiers came in and wanted the wine or were looking for fugitives, and started shooting, the wine poured out. Those who were hiding there were afraid to come out because they knew they would be shot, and it flooded so far that they were drowned. Many corpses were found floating in the wine underground.

I could tell you many things that happened in those two or three days. The factory was made up of many buildings, and there was a big gate near our house. One window of our house overlooked the street, always full of soldiers. Once a Red Army cavalryman rode by, completely drunk, reeling in the saddle. He had slung behind him, over his saddle, many women's boots. Suddenly we saw another Red Army man come out from around a corner. He quickly cut the boots, put them over his shoulder, and walked away. A moment later the horse stopped, the rider looked around. Where were the boots? He took out his gun and started shooting, spraying windows in all directions.

Pierce: How long did this go on? When was some kind of order restored?

Kratins: On the fifth day, three Latvian regiments arrived, and they restored order. They were being sent down to the south, to the front. Denikin was out, and Wrangel had taken over command of the army. These Latvians were part of the Red Army.

They were followed by what I will call execution units, sent to establish order. They even arrested many of the Budenny men, because they had simply acted like bandits during those three days, grabbing everything they could, and loading their horses with boots, cotton, silk, and anything else that had value. We didn't know what they were called, but they wore different uniforms than the army, and when you saw them coming you went around the corner and along another street, because you didn't want to meet them.

Order was restored, but it was too late, the city was ruined. The famous Don coal mines had been flooded, the factories were not operating, the stores and the big warehouses were empty. The slogan "Everything belongs to the people" was the rule. Workers committees had been formed in the factories, only they consisted of the laziest bums, and the noisiest, with big mouths. Everything was at a standstill. Besides all the destruction, typhus began spreading, and there was famine. People dropped in the streets like flies, there was no milk for the children, no coal for heating, and no food.

Soon there was actual starvation. The station was full of wounded soldiers, or ones ill with typhus, and there were lice all over the floors. You coated your boots with oil, and as you walked it was crunch, crunch, crunch! The whole floor was covered with lice.

People were starving because they could not get anything, or they lacked the card that would show that you were working, and that you were entitled to buy a certain amount of food. And then the big lines started forming, for blocks and blocks, after bread, after meat, and everything.

Once I went to the stanitsa with my mother, for food. We went to the Novocherkassk area, where we had many friends among the cossack families. We rode on the buffers between the railway wagons. Everybody had a sack with flour or some meat or whatever he could get, because at that time they still had pretty big supplies, because they had fields. The city was really very bad, especially by the station, so the trains did not stop. They were especially for going to the stanitsa and bringing food to the town, and they did not stop in the stations at all, because there were Red Army units in the stations and they were shooting at the trains, so when the train came to a station it went very fast, about 40 or 50 miles per hour. Of course, there was shooting, and some who were sitting on the roof may have been killed. It was not a big train, it was only four or five wagons maybe, and of course the mashinist, or engine driver, had a pretty big supply of food too, and he wanted to escape all this too, so he did not take the train into Rostov station, but stopped about 2 or 3 kilometers from there. From there you took all your supplies on your shoulder and walked the rest of the way.

Pierce: What was your own position? You were about 13 then. Did your age make you fairly immune to arrest or molestation, so that you were able to observe events without immediate danger?

Kratins: My family never went out of the factory because it was guarded, and they were secure there, but I and the other boys went out and saw everything. For instance, I was going to the bank accompanied by two workers with rifles, to get the money from the bank to pay the factory workers. In our factory there were close to two hundred boys, and we were eager to see what was going on. We formed groups, and one group would go out today, and the other group tomorrow, and so on, and then we brought all the news back to the factory.

A Red Army unit was stationed in the factory to guard it, and to make sure that no one sabotaged the machines, so it was a kind of barracks. A soldier was always on guard by the gates, and sometimes there were two soldiers, with machine guns. Why they needed machine guns no one knew, but they sere placed on both sides of the factory gates. No one could enter the factory without a pass [propusk]. There were fences all around, but the boys knew where there were openings, and because we were close to the border of the town, when we went through we were completely on the outside, and no one could see us. Then we dispersed and went around and saw what was going on, and brought the news back to the factory.

Pierce: Did any of the boys ever try to get into the Balabanov grove?

Kratins: No, no, no! We knew what was going on there, and no one tried going there; that was absolutely forbidden, it was taboo. Some went pretty close and the guards said "Stoi! or we will shoot!" So we went around the town, and to the railroad station. Seeing how many trains were coming in with wounded soldiers, and how conditions were, we were thinking already that it was time to get out of Rostov. You could see people falling suddenly in the street, stricken by typhus or lack of food.

Back to Latvia

In 1920, word arrived somehow that the Latvian republic had been established.

> [On 18 November 1918 the Latvian declaration of independence was issued, but a prolonged period of invasion and conflict followed, until 1 February 1920, when an armistice was signed with the Soviet government. On May 1, 1920 a constituent assembly began formation of a government in Riga, and on 11 August 1920, in the Treaty of Riga, the Soviet government recognized the independence of Latvia.]

Then some representative from Latvia came to Rostov-na-Donu urging people to leave.

At that time in our factory there were pretty close to 300 Latvians, as well as some Lithuanians and Estonians, so we formed the major part of the factory. In the Don, Kuban and Terek cossack regions there were close to 4,000 families of Latvians. In Rostov we had a Latvian house or club. It was a pretty big building, which could hold close to a thousand people. When we had celebrations in the club, Latvians came from as far as Terek, which was about 500 kilometers away.

When we heard that the peace had been signed, we began thinking how we might bribe the Cheka people and leave. Some you could bribe with gold, silver or jewelry, but the best bribing materials were salt, tobacco, and flour. Salt and tobacco, those two were necessities. It was like cigarettes in Germany at the end of the second World War, when the Americans came in. If you had a carton of cigarettes you were a millionaire, you could get anything, and it was the same then. With these we started trying to bribe some of the officials and the Cheka, and gathering a supply to take with us. In this way we gathered about 300 pounds of salt, and because of united activity, bribing important party people and influential Cheka leaders, and some direction from Moscow, finally we were allowed to leave Rostov.

Our wagons were about three kilometers outside of Rostov, and it was agreed that some of the Cheka people would take us there in cars. In one way, it was a risk, but also we thought that if the others got wind of what they were taking from us they would perish too.

So we were transported at night time to the wagons with our few belongings and got aboard. The first echelon was about 250 people, including families, in three wagons, so we were really like sardines in a b ox. We could not take anything with us except necessities, but even then some were standing and some were lying in the car, and we had to change, like a guard, every two or three horus, so that those who were standing could lie down and the rest could stand. There were about 60 to 80 people in every wagon.

Pierce: This was like a special train, wasn't it? Did you see any other trains of this sort along the way?

Kratins: No, we were attached to an army train that was going to Moscow. It carried army units, and also civilians who worked for the railroad. We were not in the middle, but were in the last three wagons attached to this train. Once we were attached to the front wagons which were going to fight the Ukrainian freedom fighter Petliura, but at the last moment, about half an hour before starting, they found out that we were attached to the front wagons. My father took out ten pounds of salt, went over there, and in fifteen minutes we were detached and attached to the wagons which were going to Moscow.

Pierce: You had to depend on many people keeping their word.

Kratins: Yes, as I say that was a risk, but they were risking their lives too, supplying us with everything. So they were on a bridge too, to be or not to be.

Pierce: But many people along the way must have discovered that this group was passing through, and you must have had to get food as you went along.

Kratins: As soon as we crossed the Don border into inner Russia you could buy everything from the peasants for salt. You could get anything they had, because they didn't have salt at all. That was a necessity for them. Salt and tobacco.

Pierce: What was done at the stations? What arrangement was made, for instance, for people to go to the toilet?

Kratins: We never stopped in the stations. They were blocked with the dead, and wounded soldiers, and full of lice. Instead the train usually stopped at least three miles outside of the towns, or in the middle of a forest or a steppe. Then everyone jumped out of the car, because they were cattle wagons, for the army; there were no second or third class wagons at all. The women stayed behind, and the men went ahead, and remained until all business was finished. We had to be pretty sure about the engine driver - we had to bribe him too - because suddenly whisst! and the train started, and you had to run to get back on. We had five or six strong men by the wagon opening to help stragglers, so when the train started, and you were running to get on, they would grab you and pull you in. It was humiliating, and dangerous, but sometimes hilarious.

Pierce: Was anyone ever left behind?

Kratins: As far as I remember, only two or three. But when we were pretty close to the Latvian border they rejoined us somehow. I don't know how they managed; it was pretty close. I would say that of the 240 who started from Rostov, pretty close to 240 arrived, and we were under way for two and a half months. We lost only one member of our group, a young man, and our dog. We never knew how.

It took many weeks, but we finally approached the border, after giving bribes of salt, flour and tobacco all along the way. In some places, where Latvian units were stationed, they helped us to overcome difficulties, such as inspections, and in some dangerous places they gave us some Red guards, who accompanied us until we reached safer places.

On the Latvian border we stayed for three days, who, who knows. It was a frightening situation. We didn't know whether we would be allowed to cross the border or would be returned for prosecution as counter revolutionaries. Then came the order to get out of the wagons, take only what we could carry, leaving the rest, and to cross the border. As we did so, we heard some screams, "Stop, stop, they are counter revolutionaries!" and running soldiers, but we were already over the border. So ended our 3,000 mile flight out of the grip of communism.

After us, other trains followed, about three cars every week. Approximately 90% of those people reached Latvia.

Pierce: Has anything ever been published about this?

Kratins: Oh yes, it is mentioned in some Latvian books, published in 1922 or 1923, or in the papers of that time, how people escaped from Russia.

I don't think anyone from our train wrote about it, but people on other trains who came after us did, on how they travelled. You see, some, maybe because they didn't have so much bribing material, were delayed, particularly in the Ukraine. For instance my aunt, who left two weeks later, arrived only after four or five months. They could not transport everyone at once, because such big masses would have been too conspicuous. Yes, there were some books published at the time on how they escaped, for instance from Crimea, because there, where some of the biggest fighting between the White and Red forces took place, there were many Latvians, thousands of them. Odessa, the Crimea, and the Caucasus were full of Latvians.

During the first World war about 700,000 Latvians were evacuated from Latvia by Russia, and sent far away to the Caucasus, Siberia and so on. When the peace treaty was signed with Russia in 1920 we had difficulty in getting the people back, especially from Siberia. We had two armed units, about 4,000 men, who had to go through Manchuria to Japan, and around the world to get back to Latvia. That was the only group from there, but from inner Russia, and from the Caucasus, we got close to about 80%. So in the first World war we lost from the evacuation of Latvians, between 250,000 and 300,000 people who could not get out afterward and had to stay in Russia.

Before the first war we had big factories in Riga and other parts of the country, but after the war started the Russians took all the factories out, to Russia. After the peace with Russia in 1920, we got back only a small percentage, maybe 10%, of the rolling materials and machinery which the Russians had taken out of our country.

Soviet military bases in Latvia, Sept. 1939

Pierce: Now we pass over a period of nearly twenty years, to your next experience with the Russians. The fate of Latvia and the other Baltic nations was already decided in a secret protocol to the German-Soviet non-aggression treaty of August 23, 1939. Did life in the country remain relatively normal at first, with no expectation that something was about to occur?

Kratins: No one expected anything. When the second world war started [1 September 1939], and Germany attacked and conquered Poland, and partitioned the country with Russia, some of the Polish armored forces entered Latvia, either from Lithuania or across the small border - about 40 miles - between Poland and Latvia. They surrendered, and were interned.

Pierce: That was to avoid being taken by the Russians?

Kratins: Yes. At that time Latvia and the other Baltic states were neutral. There were rumors then that something was going on, that Molotov and Ribbentrop had talked, but no one knew what they had been talking about. The English and Americans, and I think the French were also talking with Russia, against Hitler, but no one knew what it was about.

And then, suddenly, in September 1939, the Russians declared that we should give them some military bases. The Baltic states were small countries, they said, and there were friendly relations between them and Russia, and if Germany should attack Latvia, the Latvians would be supported by the Russian forces.

There was a big session in the cabinet of ministers. Did we have to let the Russians in or not? But a mistake had been made. Our president, Ulmanis, had devoted his work to agriculture. We were an agricultural country, exporting butter and cheese to Holland and Denmark, our timber to England, and flax and wheat. So he did not pay much attention to the army. We had many commanding and staff officers in our fraternities, and from them we found out that the army could resist the Russians only about a week, or at most ten or fifteen days. Altogether we could mobilize about 100,000 men, taking everyone from 18 years until 62, and of course the reserve. Estonia could supply about 40,000 men, and Lithuania about 50,000 more, so altogether the three countries could mobilize about 200,000 men. But we were poorly supplied. We had only about three squadrons of war planes, Estonia had only about ten planes, and Lithuania had none. Moreover, Latvia is a flat country. Only on the Russian border, in Latgale, is there an area of about five hundred lakes, and marshes. We thought that could prevent the Russians from quickly overrunning our country, but there was the question of Lithuania and Estonia. After the first World war Poland had taken Vilnius, and now the Lithuanians said "Allright, you did not come to our aid when the Poles took our Vilnius, so why should we get together and unite against the Russians?" And from Estonia the border was completely open, they didn't have anything. Altogether we could put out only a small and poorly armed force.

Pierce: The Finns managed quite well.

Kratins: Yes, but with Finland it was of course a completely different thing. Finland fought for three months, and the Russians lost hundreds of thousands of men, but we could not have done so. We asked France and England if they could supply us, but they refused. Then some of us thought that Germany might help us, but there lingered some kind of old hatret against the Germans because the knightly orders had conquered Latvia, so that was out.

Finally, our cabinet decided, in accord with Estonia, that we could not do anything, and we would let the Russians in. Of course the army high staff, the generals, were against that. At least, they said, we could start to fight, and maybe somebody would come to our aid, but finally it was decided that we could not do anything. Also we had a little grudge against Lithuania because they had said no, they were against going against Russia, so it was decided that we would have to let the Russians have the bases.

> [The USSR concluded pacts of mutual assistance with Estonia on 28 September, Latvia on 5 October, and with Lithuania on 10 October 1939.]

So, they came in, but of course, instead of only about 20,000 Russians, as stated in the treaty, as soon as these were in, another 20,000 came in, so altogether there were about 50,000. After that, of course, there could be no question of resistance.

The Russian soldiers did not know what was going on. And about half of the Russian armed forces were Mongolians, because they were more stupid; they could not be influenced by what they saw. When the Russians first came in, our market was like an exhibition for them. The different halls were in zeppelin hangars, and in the meat market there was meat hanging from hooks all over. "What kind of exhibition is it?" they asked, "Are you putting it on for us?" Meat, butter, cheese, everything, it was a thrill for them; they had never seen such a thing. So, they would ask "Can we buy a pound?" "You can buy anything, but you have to pay!" "Oh yes!" So they bought ten pounds of butter and cheese, and everything else in large quantities. The country was small and well-supplied, but that was hard.

Annexation to USSR, 16 June 1940

> [Latvia in 1939-1942, issued by the Latvian Legation, Washington, D.C., 1942, p. 20, states: "During the first months, the conduct of the Soviet Russian troops was correct, especially during the Finnish-Soviet Russian war. But this ended immediately or very shortly after the signing of peace between Soviet Russia and Finland (March 12, 1940)]

Then the Russians said, "Allright, in case there is war with Germany we have to protect you completely." Of course, once the Russian army was in they came in such force [16 June 1940] that the country was completely flooded with Russian troops.

Then they said that our government was somehow hostile against the Russians, so we had to change the government, and that started.

At first they asked us to put it to a vote that we should unite with Russia. The voting [14-15 July 1940] was in such a way that the result was already declared two days before all the votes were counted. They declared that 99.8 percent of all the nation had voted to unite with Russia. And they voted like this. In the Federal State Bank, for instance, where I worked, it was ordered that everyone should go and vote. In the voting offices were already GPU men. In most countries when you vote it is in secret, but that was open, and a GPU man was standing by, looking over your shoulder to see how you voted. There were only two votes to make, for the democratic bloc and for the communist bloc, and for goodness sake if you put the button on the democratic bloc you would come out, but you would not go to your home; you would be arrested right away. Even so, we found out later that about 30% voted against it somehow, but after that we were joined to Russia.

Soviet terror

Then the horror started. At first some disappeared, and some committed suicide. The border army commander committed suicide because he would be arrested right away, and many of the officers who had fought in our freedom war against the Russians in the first years after 1917 were all arrested, tortured, and then shot; they simply disappeared.

And then it started with the civilians. When I came to the bank in the morning, the next desk was empty. At first everything was closed for three days, nationalized, the factories and banks and everything. We had not the slightest idea that during that time listening devices were placed under the desks. So, when the bank was opened, people came to work. As usual in our banks, fraternity men were in the higher posts, and we came together and said "What happened to him? He has not come in, is he ill?" and so on. "No, he is arrested." The family said he was called to the GPU, and he never came back." And so on.

And finally it got so you did not trust anyone, not even the members of your fraternity. And why? It was because you came to work at 9:30, and in the half hour before the banks opened, you had to fill out a list of what you did the day before, whom you had met, what you had talked about when you had a party, and so on. At first glance the questions seemed innocent, but this was repeated every day. And if your wife was working somewhere, she had to fill out the same. In school, the children had to put down what the parents were talking about. For instance, if you had a party in your home, they were told to put down who came, and what the grownups had talked about. Of course, the children could not lie, and all those answers went to the GPU and they compared them, and if there was any sort of difference between what your wife and your children and you had put down, then you were called in for questioning as to what it was all about, who was lying, and so on, until finally when you met your friends on the street you passed them by.

The whole idea was to destroy the intelligentsia, and then destroy the family. You came home and you did not talk to your wife. Usually you had told what you did in your job, what the prospects for promotion were, and so forth, but now you were like enemies in your house. Finally you thought, "Wait a minute, my wife and I have been together so long, of course I can trust her!" And then you both went outside, where no one could listen, and talked about things. But sometimes you forgot the children, and when they went to school the next day they might be asked "What were your parents doing?" "Oh, they went out in the garden and were talking. I don't know what they were talking about." And there you were. Both were arrested. Such things made life a complete horror, it made the whole country like a jail. You could not meet anybody you could not trust anybody, and you could not go anywhere. You went to the theater and you were like a body, just sitting there and looking. And of course in the theaters only Russian dramas and sketches were playing, nothing about national Latvia.

After 9 o'clock, no one could go out of doors. And then you heard somehow about various friends - he was arrested, she was arrested, he disappeared - and you were thinking, what will happen to me? So when you heard steps at your door at 11 or 12 o'clock at night, you knew that they had come for you. All the arrests were at night, between 11 and 1 o'clock in the morning, and the people were taken away in cars. We didn't know what we could do. We were completely demoralized. All of the radios were taken out, all of the typewriters were registered, and you were a prisoner in your own home.

And here is another thing. When the Russians established the army bases, we thought "Oh, they will not be as bad as they were in 1917, when they killed and tortured all the bourgeoisie and all the prosperous peasants." But the army people - soldiers and officers - who fought against Russia in 1917 were on their lists. When they came in those people were the first to be arrested. For instance, a very good friend of ours was a freedom fighter. After the war he became a farmer. When the Russians came in 1940, he was the first to be caught and arrested, and he disappeared. So they knew the names of all the outstanding officers.

There was another thing which was very interesting. When the second war started, Riga had a population of approximately 360,000. Every big house had a supervisor, who looked after the house. At night he opened the gate, he swept the street, he looked after repairs, and so on. Now when the Russians came, these men became somehow very important. When the killing and terrorizing started, they gave the names, for instance, of doctors, officers, high government officials, and so on, and because of them, many were arrested. The Russians could not otherwise have known all of them. For instance, when the Russians came we were taken out of our house and put somewhere in the outskirts. That was a big house, with about 110 units. How did the Russians know who was living in those 110 units? So these people were probably giving the names. Maybe they simply did not know what it was all about, but they gave the names. "Oh, he is serving in the Federal State Bank; he is an officer in the army; he is a professor of history, or of politica, and so on, and the Russians took those people right away. And by doing that they eliminated many of the intellectuals and deprived the units of their officers, so they could not fight. That was the main purpose. And destroying the family.

Pierce: Who were their allies? Was there a communist party in the country?

Kratins: Yes, but it was very small. When the Russians came they released them from the jails. There was a big demonstration, and fifty men appeared, dressed in prison uniforms. Our prison inmates wore striped clothing, and their heads were shaved, so that people would know they were in jail. These fifty were at the station to greet the Red Army, and with them were people brought from Riga's one suburb where mostly Russians were living. They came dressed in such ragged clothing that the rest of us were looking and wondering, "Where have these people been all of this time? Where were they hiding?" But it was all arranged, of course. Our workers were workers, but they were neatly dressed, and they were not starving; no one was starving in our country; but these people came out in ragged clothes and made you wonder, were they sent in from Russia?

And wagons came from Russia with inscriptions painted on the sides: "To the starving people of Latvia." They were empty, however; only the painted inscriptions were there. And they took everything out of Latvia. Our market, which had been in the zeppelin hangars, was emptied.

Pierce: Were there any communists in the national parliament?

Kratins: Only one, so you can imagine how many of them there were. We were so split and so democratic that we had 27 parties in our parliament, and they would change the government several times in one year. That was maybe our failure; we were too democratic.

And then they began putting the farmers into kolkhozes and sovkhozes. The kolkhoz was the smallest unit, and the sovkhoz was the biggest, consisting of several small kolkhozes. None of the farmers believed that such things could happen. "Why?" they asked. "We are producing according to the rules, giving the state so much, and the population so much, and keeping so much for ourselves, and now they start this!" Of course the farmers resisted, and arrests were made, of what were called kulaks. And these were deported and their farms were combined, but in such a stupid way. They destroyed the old buildings and tried to build new ones where the offices would be. For instance, if ten farms were to be combined in a kolkhoz, they destroyed about nine buildings in the kolkhoz area, and left only one, for an office, from which the farm was supervised. Now where would the people live? They had been living in separate houses, because in Latvia we did not have villages, derevnia, as they do in Russia. Only in Latgale, close to the Russian border, there were villages. Our farmers were complete individualists.

Pierce: This was like in Western Europe, or in North America, with separate farmsteads?

Kratins: Yes, every farmer was his own boss. They were not united in anything. Only the office in the community, which gave orders to repair the roads, and public buildings, and to support the school and so on, was giving orders to the farmer. Otherwise every farmer was his own boss; we did not have any villages at all.

When the Russians came, they settled people in villages, and we hated these, because, we thought, we are free men. For instance, you and I are neighbors, but I do not agree with you, why should we be united? To hell with you! This is my land, I am working on my land, I am fulfilling all the duties that you asked of me, but I should not have to unite with my neighbor. But now there is not a single independent farmer in Latvia. It is all sovkhozes and kolkhozes, and whereas before Latvia exported all that the farmers produced - meat, butter, cheese, flour, flax - now there is such a big shortage that meat is rationed. Sometimes, according to their letters which come out, they have not seen butter for weeks. And everything which they produce goes to Russia.

Deportations

And then, one day [in June 1941] I came to the bank and I noticed that there were many heavy trucks on the street, and across the river Daugava from Riga, in our suburb, there was a big area approximately a mile and a half around, where we were starting to build a stadium, and that was full of trucks. At that time we were living in that suburb, and we had some kind of suspicion - what could it be, why were the trucks over there?

And then, on the night of 13/14 June 1941, the deportations started. At that time I qas not in Riga. I had been sent from the bank to check the branches of the State Bank, so I was in the provinces. When I came back into town I had first to report in the GPU. I had credentials to check all of the banks in that town and in the surrounding area.

And then somehow I had an idea. When I returned I went first to the bank, and said "I will be here tomorrow at 9 o'clock in the morning, before the bank opens." Then I went to the GPU to present my credentials and get an OK. When I went into the GPU there were a lot of personnel running back and forth, back and forth, and phone calls all over. And somehow some kind of instinct took over. On the desk I saw a stamp with the initials which were put on your document to show that you were safe, that you were loyal. I looked around quickly, saw that no one was there, and put the stamp on my document. Then one came in and said "Now you go to your hotel and stay there. You know that after 9 o'clock you cannot go out."

The hotel was very close to the railroad station. So I went down to the dining room, got dinner, and went upstairs. Suddenly I heard heavy steps approaching. I opened the door and saw a GPU man, with one soldier. "Don't worry," he said, "nothing will happen to you. You have your credentials. But do not leave your room. And don't open any windows. The windows and the drapes should be closed." I could not understand what was going on. I knew that they could not do anything to me because of the stamp on my document, but I was nervous.

Then about eleven o'clock, I opened the drapes a little bit so I could see the station, and there I saw it all. Truck after truck was arriving, loaded with men, women, and children, and the station was full of GPU men, and there were wagons, with small barred windows, and the train was full.

Now I understood, that there was some kind of transportation, deportation or something. Rumors had already been circulating that something was going to happen, but no one had known what it would be. That went on all night, the whole area around the railroad station was full of army units, and no one could go out after 9 o'clock. Anyone who would be out on the street after 9 o'clock, they had told me at the GPU, would be shot.

Of course there was some resistance. In the town what we called our home guards had arms, and they resisted. Afterward I heard that about fifty men had been killed, and that also some GPU men were shot.

The deportation that night, all over Latvia, affected approximately fourteen or fifteen thousand families. About four thousand families were deported from Riga, and it was done in this way. For instance your name was on the deportation list. If you were not at home, they would ask your wife where you were. If she would not tell, she would be arrested in your place, because they always thought that when the wife was arrested the man would come and join her. And the man would run to the station where the deportation w

The deportations that night, all over Latvia, affected approximately fourteen or fifteen thousand families. About four thousand families were deported from Riga, and it was done in this way. For instance your name was on the deportation list. If you were not at home, they would ask your wife where you were. If she would not tell, she would be arrested in your place, because they always thought that when the wife was arrested the man would come and join her. And the man would run to the station where the deportation wagons were standing, and say that he would like to join his wife, but it was a complete mistake because the men and women and children were separated; they never got together.

After that night was over I had to go to my duties, the door was opened and the GPU man said, "Now, have you seen anything?" I said "No, I rested." "Allright," he said, " you may go, but be very careful. Don't listen to any rumors." And when I went to the GPU office, they said "Everything that you hear outside, any rumors, do not believe it. Nothing happened. And don't talk with anyone, go to your duties, you can check all the branch banks and so on." They gave me an escort, like a guard, who went along with me to be sure that I was not doing anything else except my task of checking the accounts. So really I could not do anything.

I had known the managers of all of the branch banks. I knew them pretty well because every six months I had gone to the provincial towns and checked all of the branches. But now none of them were there, and there was a completely new staff in all of those banks, and in some of the smaller ones the tellers and so on were so terrified that you could see it on their faces. They were counting the money with shaking hands, so that you could see what had happened.

So, as my escort sat by me I thought, I will try to test him, to see whether he actually knows anything or not. So I started checking and listed something which was completely wrong, but he looked on without reaction. Then I knew that he was completely dumb, he was only there to be a guard for me, and that was all. From there we went to other branches, and it was the same.

I was checking all the factories which had received loans from the Federal State Bank, to see how they were working, and that there was no sabotage. But when I presented my figures, I was told "For goodness sake, what are you doing? This industry will be closed! You have to put in more zeros! They should be stakhanovites! Don't you understand how we do things in Russia? Everything that is small has to have some zeros added on to it! You have to be a stakhanovite, otherwise you will not survive!"

I was very concerned about this, because it meant that all the bank documents were falsified, and if someone who really knew about banking ever came from Moscow and checked he would have said "Wait a minute, what are you doing? You are a sabotazhnik!" And I would have been arrested. Later, when the Germans entered Riga in July, 1941, I was really nervous, thinking that if anybody ever checks I will be the first to be arrested, because I have falsified the documents.

German occupation, July 1941

[Germany invaded the USSR on June 21, 1941 and by 1 July entered Riga]. The battle for Riga was very short but very harsh. The outskirts of Riga were like in medieval times, with very narrow streets. The Russian tanks would go in and they could not get out. Sometimes 5, 6, or 8 tanks would be caught in one small, narrow street, and be completely destroyed tank by tank. by the German tanks. A tremendous number were destroyed in that way. Of course our churches were damaged, the St. Peters church was burned out. It was a real blitzkrieg.

When the Germans came in, at first we met them as liberators. We were particularly anxious for them to catch some of the wagons or trains with deportees, but they had already gone so deep into Russia, and so fast, that the Germans got only three or four wagons with children, and they had mostly suffocated because the doors were not opened. Later we found that they had been given only drinking water, no food. About forty or fifty people were in each wagon, and many died, especially the elderly.

[Alfred Bilmanis, A History of Latvia, Princeton, 1951, P. 402, states that in the first stages of the mass deportation program, 34,340 Latvians were sent into Siberia and central Russia, where they disappeared into slave labor camps. Between June 13 and 17, some 824 railway cars of deportees were dispatched.]

When the Germans came, we went to the jails. It was a horrifying sight. Some people had been shot in the neck, some were completely cut open, with all their organs exposed. Tongues were cut out, eyes were cut out. Some were so battered that their own relatives could not recognize them. They could be identified only by some marks on their bodies. In the cellar of the GPU building small chambers were built in which you could not sit, you had to stand. All night there was only a bare bulb burning, and you could be checked any time through a small opening. If you slid down the cell was opened and they were torturing in such a way that they made it cold with some kind of machinery, so that you were freezing, and then suddenly they raised the temperature to a very high point. And it was full of blood. It was dreadful. And then they started opening all the graves around Riga. There were 12 or 13 mass graves in which they had put those they shot.

Under the Germans, things got back to normal. I would say that in the first year everything was normal except that the Germans did not give back to the owners the things that the Russians had nationalized - the banks, industries, and farms. They took them as war booty, so many things remained the same. Our farms had to give the German army about 50% of their produce, keeping about 25% on the farms, and sending 25% to our population in Latvia. At the end of 1942, there was rationing, because we had to supply the front and our own population with produce - eggs, butter, cheese, meat, and poultry, and of course barley and flour. We had to give the army 70% then, leaving 10% to the farmers, and 20% for the population. It was very slim. Of course, the farmers did not give everything they produced. Then in 1944, when the Germans had retreated from Russia and came to the Latvian border, every community had the fazans ["golden pheasants" - Nazi officials wearing light-brown gold-trimmed tunics], comparable to the SS, who supervised farm production and checked what each farmer was doing.

Pierce: What of yourself? Did you continue in the bank during the German occupation?

Kratins: No. In the bank I thought, allright, I have a high salary as an inspector, but according to all the evidence the war will last not one or two years but many years, and everything is going out of our farms. We will have a much harder life in the city and also on the farms. So, I thought, I will join some factory. So I went to a perfume and soap factory. Everything was getting scarcer, I thought, so that when the Germans came we were producing in the factories soap which was filled with air. A little bit of soap, and a little fat, and lime, so that it floated. Everyone got about ten small bars - single units - of this soap, but you could not wash your clothing with these, and it disappeared if you even washed one time with your hands. I had good friends in the soap factory, so I asked them "Can I come to your factory and so something?" "Sure," I was told, "you can manage it!" So I became a factory manager.

We produced real soap for the high officers in the army headquarters, because we had a good fat supply, and real soap for ourselves. With soap you could get anything in trade which you wanted - clothing, food, everything. That will be better, I thought, than if I stay in the bank, there you get your salary and that is nothing, and you get a ration card, but what can you get with it? But with my soap, and my perfume I could feed my family, and I could supply my friends with it as well.

Of course, we were backed by the army headquarters, because we were supplying the army headquarters officers with good soap, and good perfume, which they were sending back to Germany. So on Saturday night until Sunday morning everyone in the factory worked on the special products. We knew that no one would tell what we were doing. The workers were supplied with the good soap as well, so they were silent. No word went out, nor did the Gestapo come in. Once the Gestapo came to our factory to check, and I called army headquarters. In ten minutes a general came in, covered with iron crosses and so on. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. "This is an army soap factory! You don't need to set foot in this factory! Out!"

Pierce: Were you still putting out the poor quality soap the rest of the week?

Kratins; Oh yes. Ours was a little bit better, but we were putting it out because we had to submit a list every month showing how much fat, oil and other material we had used, so that we could get such and such an amount in return. Of course, we did not put down all that we had used. We were guarded by the army, and we were sure that none of the men who were getting soap and perfume from us would talk. They would keep their mouths shut, and no Gestapo would set foot in our factory.

Pierce: So you continued to operate on this soap economy as long as the Germans were there, until 1944? When did you feel that it was time to leave?

Kratins: In 1944, when there was already fighting in Latvia, on our soil, it was put to me, "Allright, are you going to the front line, or are you going to work in the factories in Germany?" Two choices! So why join the army? The front line in those days would have been suicide; there was no hope. The Germans had thought they could bring Russia to her knees by November, 1941. But America supplied them with tanks, and everything else. Sometimes when I was sent from our factory to the provinces to check other factories which were not yet in Russian hands, to check their fat supply, I saw American tanks, with white stars on them, not Russian tanks.

So I went to Germany. First I went and then my mother, my wife and the children came.

In Germany I was put into a labor camp, and we worked in the factories. I also worked a couple of months on farms, although I didn't know anything about farm work.

And then, when the Russians came closer and closer, we were transferred farther and farther from the Russian zone, until we were stranded in Halle-an-der-Zahl, in Sazony, and then came the Americans.

When the Americans came I thought maybe I can try to get into their headquarters as an interpreter - I had a pretty good knowledge of German at that time. They said OK, and so I served about three months before we gave Saxony to the Russians.

Then we were put in Mannheim, and from Mannheim we went to Islingen. There was a big Latvian camp there, with about five or six thousand Latvians; we called it "Little Latvia." They were supplied by UNRRA and IRO, and then they started calling us up as to where we could go. We found we could go to the Australian consul or the American consul. It took a little longer to get permission to go to the United States because they questioned you more as to what you had done, what you had been, and so on, and you could go to Australia right away. But at that time we met Lisl [Elisabeth Zierer, a friend], and she said "We are going to the United States, and we will call you." So, we went to the United States. Otherwise, most of our friends went to Australia. They said there were places for three or four more families, but in the meantime an affidavit came from the United States, so we came here.

Pierce: Did you come to California right away?

Kratins: Right away. To a farm, in Hyampom.

Pierce: Where?

Kratins: Hyampom. It is between Eureka and Redding, a very isolated region, surrounded by mountains. About forty or fifty farmers lived there, and were about fifty years behind the times. Some of them had never been out of Hyampom, or maybe farther than Hayfork, the closest town, about 20 miles away.

Pierce: What did they raise?

Kratins: Mostly cattle. There was one big cattleman, who raised three or four thousand cattle; the others were smaller.

Pierce: How long were you there?

Kratins: We came in 1949, and stayed about a year. I worked as a clerk at the lumber company.

It was, I would say, the dumbest community. When we came we were invited to a Saturday gethering in the community hall. The first question was "Do you have houses in your country?"

"Oh yes," I said, "but we have caves too, not only houses!"

"Ohhh," they said. They somehow associated Latvia with Iceland, and thought we lived in caves as protection against the cold. And they could not pronounce our names. They called [our son Oyas] Oyah, and [our daughter Aria] Yah-yah.

In the community hall, conversation was first about the cattle, and then about the lumber mill. That was all. What could I say about cattle? I had lived in a big city, in the capital of Latvia; I had worked in a bank; I had been in fraternities; I had a university education - what did I know about cattle? And what did I know about the lumber mill? I audited their accounts, but that was all.

I ordered some books, and when they came to the post office - it was a very small one - they said, "Why are you reading so many books? What for? Are you not satisfied with our neighborhood, with our community?

What could I say? "No, I am very satisfied, but I need a little bit to read!"

Another topic was marriage. For the first time we met people who had been married 3, 4, 5, or 6 times. It was a surprise for us.

Their minds were working only on those things. When I subscribed to a newspaper - it was during the Korean War - they asked "Why are you interested in the Korean War? To hell with it, it is a hundred thousand miles from us! To hell with it, let them fight! So what? They will not come to Hyampom!"

The only ones to whom I could talk were the lumber mill owner. His wife was well educated, and he was too, but they were already elderly people. But the youngsters, they married usually inside the community, so they were dummies like everyone else. So the only people we could really talk to were the lumber mill owner and his wife. When we had free time and the salesmen were out to sell our product, then I came to his office, and I explained about our country, and about the communists, and they were interested in such things. But you could not talk in the community hall about such things, absolutely not! As for the workers, all the loggers were Okies and Arkies, and they were the dumbest of all!

Pierce: How much education could your children get?

Kratins: There was only one grammar school, of three or four grades, and all the classes were in one room. The teacher was a young girl. I don't know how she happened to come to Hyampom, perhaps after a disappointment in love, so she came into the jungles. Maybe that. And she was teaching all four grades.

So, there was absolutely nothing in the nature of an intelligentsia. There were some people you would be talking with, and you would wonder from which cave he came out of.

You could talk to the ranger about the timber, and about the forest. He was an interesting man, who had put his whole life into the forest. Sometimes we had conversations with him, and he would tell about the forest life, the animals, and so on, but that was his only topic. The only thing that interested him was his forest; he had no outside interest.

They did not want me to leave. They offered to build a house for me, and to pay me $500 a month, which was very good money at that time, in 1950, and that was on the farm! I could get all the supplies I needed, and would not have to pay any rent. All this if we would stay, because no one would like to come to such an outdated community, and I knew about accounting and so on.

And the ranger told me, "I can give you a hundred acres of the best forest, on a hundred year lease. In five years you will have to build a house, that is the only condition. And you would pay $100 every year. You can use the lumber on your property, anything that you want, with no restrictions, and after a hundred years the house will be completely registered in your name and it will be your property forever, no one can take it."

Everything seemed allright, but then I thought, " My wife and daughter have gone to Monterey, my son is going to high school in Weaverville, my mother is with me. My family is split already, what will we do? We have to think about our children, and we are far from - I will not say civilization - but far from everything. In the wintertime we are completely snowed in, when the real storms come the roads are closed and we cannot get out for a week or two. No, we have to get out, no matter what they pay me. If I stay my family and I will be completely isolated from everything!"
And so we came to Monterey.

Pierce: That was in 1950; when did you get on with Holman's?

Kratins: In 1952, and then I was with them for 24 years.

Pierce: I would like to ask a couple of other questions about Latvia. You said there was good feeling against the Germans when they liberated the country from the Russians. How long did this good feeling last?

Kratins: When the Germans came in, we found that there were to have been other deportations like that of the 13th and 14th of June, and that our family and many friends would have been on the next one. So of course feeling was very good and we were very grateful to the Germans, for they were our liberators. But after a year when they started mobilizing our forces, to put our men in the front units, then the attitude became completely different.

Pierce: What of the native Germans who were there, the descendants of the German landowners?

Kratins: Hitler called them to Germany before the war started. He asked that every German from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should go to Germany, so the Baltic Germans left. They took everything belonging to them that they could take on the ships, and we were to pay for the rest, for their houses and so on.

Pierce: Was there any minority problem?

Kratins: Our population consisted of over 80% Latvians, 12% Germans, about 4% Jews, 2% Russians, 1% Poles, and about 1% Lithuanians. And the minorities were treated very good. In Riga we had Jewish schools, Polish schools, and Russian schools. In one town, near the border, there was a Lithuanian gymnasium.

Pierce: There was no feeling againat the Jews?

Kratins: At that time absolutely none. In the country districts there was some kind of humor. The Jews went there wearing big coats, with sacks, selling needles and other small things to the farmers. They usually stayed overnight on the farms. And sometimes they ridiculed them: "Oh yes! Isaac is coming!" but they were friendly. And sometimes on some farms they teased them, putting pork before them. It was against their religion, of course, to eat pork, so he would say "Oy, oy, oy! Why this pork? Why this pork? Don't you have any other meat for me?"

In our parliament, the Seiam, they had four or five Jewish deputies, six or seven Germans, one Pole, two Russians, and one Lithuanian. So everybody was represented. Of course when the Germans came they started gathering up all the Jews, but that was different.

Pierce: You have mentioned the fraternities several times. They must have been a special feature of life in Latvia.

Kratins: They were a closed society, completely closed. There were 21 in our university, including some sororities, for women.

Pierce: We have them here too, but evidently yours were somewhat different.

Kratins: You see, we took an oath that we were loyal to the government. If the government should call us, everyone in the fraternities would go to the armed forces, right away, without waiting for mobilization. We had 18 months of compulsory military service, and every year a month in the army, with training, so we were prepared for military duties at any time. You could go through the cadet corps, repeat your military education, and upon graduation you would be a second lieutenant. Most members of the commanding staff were fraternity men.

Pierce: So these were quite different from what we have over here, which are more in the nature of living groups.

Kratins: Oh yes. You could not get in a fraternity, for instance, without them checking your family. Every fraternity had its own colors, and name. This (showing a copy) is a magazine, *Universitas*, devoted to all the fraternities. This is the insignia, *Pro patria*, *Iustitsiia*, *Honoris*. That was issued for the hundredth semester in the fraternities, from the time I joined. And every fraternity has different colors. Ours were black, white and gold. All three Baltic countries had them. This book is devoted solely to the fraternities of Latvia.

In the case of disaster and so on, the Estonian groups with whom we had treaties would help us and we would help them. And it was carried out. This is a picture of our group in Toronto.

Pierce: There are some younger people here also. So the groups continue?

Kratins: Oh yes, it continues, the tradition is the same, completely the same. You are taken into a fraternity only when you are checked. You cannot be a communist nor a left liberal.

Pierce: You have to be a conservative or a right liberal then? To what extent is there interrelation with the Estonians and Lithuanians? Do they ever all get together, or do they send delegates to each other's meetings?

Kratins: Once a year we have gatherings, each national group in turn, with delegates from the others. Relations between them are cordial.

Pierce: Do the Latvians in particular keep up the idea of nationalism more than perhaps the other two?

Kratins: No, the Estonians are very nationalistic too. The Lithuanians follow a slightly different pattern, perhaps because they are mostly Catholics. We are all Protestants or Lutherans, the same in Estonia. They don't have any Lutheran fraternities in Lithuania at all. In that way it is a little bit different, but I will say that among the fraternities the friendship is the same, differing only in the religion.

Pierce: How many students were there in the University of Riga.

Kratins: When I went to the university, 10,350 had matriculated. Up to the end of free Latvia it was 22,800.

Pierce: How many would be on the campus at any time?

Kratins: Approximately 11,000, all faculties together.

Pierce: What percentage of those would be in the fraternities?

Kratins: A little over 40%.

Pierce: Would there be any feeling between the non-fraternity members and those who were?

Kratins: No, because the others who were not fraternity members also had clubs, although they did not have the kind of traditions which we had.

Pierce: Were these fraternities in the same tradition, then, as those in the German universities? Did they stress dueling also?

Kratins: Yes. And we had dueling too. Most of the dueling was done with the German fraternities. Especially when we had gatherings they invited us to the German fraternities. You were always picking out somebody to start a fight with. Because in the German fraternities in our country they were mostly nobles, German barons, so they were saying "How is it with the peasants?" But we were showing that the peasants could beat the Germans. We were specially trained to beat them in the duels.

INDEX - KRATINS

Americans, 27

Balabanovsky Grove, Nakhichevan-na-Donu, Southern Russia, killing ground, 10, 13
Baltic Germans, called to Germany by Hitler, 30-31
Budennyi, General, Red Army, 9

Cheka, 10
cossacks, 2, 3

Denikin, makes Rostov his base, 4
Deportations from Latvia, June 1941, 22-24

Epidemics, typhus, 11
Executions, 10

Famine, 11
Family life, 3, 4
Finland, 17
Fraternities, 31-33

Germany, occupation, July 1941, 25
Germany, emigration to, 27
Gestapo, 26, 27
GPU, 19; atrocities of, 25

Hayfork, Calif., 28
Hyampom, Calif., 28-30

Jews, 31

Kaledin, Ataman of Don Cossack voisko, 7
Krasnov, General, 7
Kratins, Oswald, birth, 1904, 1; trip to southern Russia, 1; education, 4

Latvia, minorities, 30
Latvian Republic proclaimed, 1920, 13
Latvian regiment in Red Army, 11
Latvians return home, 13
Latvia, annexation to USSR, June 1940, 18
Latvia, wartime losses, 15-16

Mannheim, 27
Military bases, demanded by Soviets, September 1939, 17
Monterey, California, 30

Nakhichevan-na-Donu, 1

Poland, 16, 17

Rennenkampf, General, 5
Russia, Revolution, March, 1917, 5, 6
Rostov-na-Donu, 7, 8, 9

Samsonov, General, 5

Samsonov, General, 5
soap factory, 26
Starocherkassk, cossack meeting, February 1918, dispersed by
    Red Army, 7

Terror, Latvia, 1940, 19-22

United States, emigration to, 27-28

Vilnius, 17

White Army, reasons for defeat, 8

World War I, 5

Zierer, Elisabeth, 27

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California-Russian Emigré Series

Valentina Alekseevna Vernon

Recollections of Life in Russia and in Emigration

An Interview Condcuted by
Richard A. Pierce
July 23, 24, 25, 1980
at Monterey, California

With Written Recollections by
Valentina Alekseevna Vernon

Copyright (c) 1986 by the Regents of the University of California

VALENTINA ALEKSEEVNA VERNON

I met Mrs. Valentina Vernon about 1978, in "A Bit of Old Russia," the tea room and sandwich shop she and her cousin operated in the village of Carmel Valley, a few miles east of Carmel. Light and airy, with a view of the surrounding hills, the little shop did a good business in tea and light lunches. A few Russian dolls in glass cases gave an appropriate Russian touch, as did the proprietress herself, tall and elderly, in a colorful Russian peasant costume, with a long skirt. She took orders, served, and in slack moments chatted with the customers. Lively, with a keen sense of humor, she enjoyed meeting the public and reminiscing about the Russia she had known, or the United States as it had been in the 1920's when she and her family arrived, or during the depression days of the 1930's. She was less favorable about the changes in society and pace which began during World War II, and deplored hippies and what she considered the increase in communist influence. Her cousin and business associate, Oleg Petrovich Plemianikoff, a tall man in his late 70's, was usually in the sweltering kitchen preparing food.

I asked Mrs. Vernon if I could tape her story, but she was too busy with the tearoom by day, and tired in the evening, and I was there for only a few days anyhow. It was the same in the following year, 1979, but in July 1980, circumstances had changed. Oleg had died; the tearoom was up for sale, and after a few days at the home of a friend, Vera Elischer, in Monterey, Mrs. Vernon would go to live with her son and his family, in Milbrae. On three successive days, July 23, 24, and 25, she gave me some of the highlights of her eventful life.

We began at the end, with her arrival in the United States, carried her story to the present day, and then reverted to her birth and childhood, the Revolution, and emigration. In transcribing her account I have placed events in more or less proper chronological order.

When we began, Mrs. Vernon was still fuming about a telephone conversation she had just had with an employee of Medicare. Her cousin had died leaving one or more Medicare checks unsigned. She needed the money for his burial expenses and had asked for it, only to be told that the money could be paid only to the person to whom the check was made out, who had to sign the check.

Vernon: I have just sent his checks to the doctor. They can do whatever they want with them regarding his account. This is for Medicare. I talked to one of the people there, not just a clerk, but a supervisor, and when I told him my cousin had died, he told me: "He has to sign the checks."

"Yes," I said, "but he is dead; he died!"

"He has to sign the checks; the law requires that he sign the checks."

I asked, "What did you drink today?"

He repeated, "The law requires..."

I said, "I am sorry, I do not talk to idiots!" That is all I can do, for if they are crazy... I have never heard of such a thing that a dead person has to sign his checks! It is unbelievable! I don't know what has happened in America. People used to be so sensible, and now that they do everything with machines they have ceased to think...

The interviews were held in a rather busy household, so there were occasional interruptions by the telephone aad doorbell.

I hoped to have another interview, in order to fill certain gaps and to make sure of the spelling of names. However, a few weeks after leaving Monterey, Mrs. Vernon died. I heard of her demise only several months later.

In 1985, Mrs. Vernon's son, George Vernon, kindly provided copies of a series of sketches she had written for her grandchildren. Her writing style in these is more belletristic or "literary" than her spoken account, but the sketches display the same good humor and other personality traits of the narrator. The two accounts overlap in some ways, but in general compliment each other.

The sketches, appended as a supplement, close with a few lines which might equally declare "finis" for her entire generation:

> "The sun has set, the fog is coming over the hills. Is it me and years gone by?.......but this fog is gray, gloomy and sad. The tree is only a silhouette against the misty backdrop--the leaves are still falling, but I don't see them anymore--just a soft rustle--it is getting cold.
>
> Time to go in and shut the door."

Richard A. Pierce
22 July 1985

Interview, Richard Pierce,
with Mrs. Valentina A. Vernon,
at Monterey, California,
July 23, 24, 25, 1980.

Early years

RP: Can we begin with some of your earlier recollections, where you were born, about your family, and what you recall about life before the Revolution.

Vernon: Do you want it in Russian or in English?

RP: Whichever is easiest.

Vernon Well, English is as easy as Russian. It doesn't make any difference.

I was born during the Boxer War [1900]. Wars and I were never far apart. I was born, I think, in Blagoveshchensk or Khabarovsk [in Eastern Siberia]. My mother always wanted to be near my father--at this time they were newlywed --and my father was at the front. I don't know who my god-parents were. You know, in Russia they christened the children; we didn't have any legal papers, we had only church papers. My mother was very, very sick; she had four children, and every time it was very hard. So I was taken to the church and only my aunt was with me from the family. They picked up some people in the street, I presume, and asked them if they could be my godfather and godmother. I have their names, but I don't have the slightest idea who these people are!

So they baptised me there, and then my brother [Paul] was born, then came the Japanese War, when I was five. At this time my mother wanted to be close to my father, so she went through Siberia, to Harbin, and I was deposited with my aunt, who was in the Ural Mountains. But I have this written down; I can send it to you. I wrote it as little short stories, for my granddaughters.

So I was with my aunt and my uncle, in the Ural Mountains, during the first revolution. They had an estate, near Ufa, on the Rezanka, one of the affluents of the Belaia, and my uncle had a steel mill. That new [shopping complex] here, "The Barnyard" [at the entrance to the Carmel Valley] is exactly like my uncle's factory. When I saw it the first time I thought: 'My goodness, it reminds me of something!" but I could not place where it was. At that time, you know, the factories were not built with stones and so on; now some look like palaces they are so beautiful, but this was the beginning of the century, so it was wood, except that there were chimneys sticking up there. Ours was prettier because the river Rezanka was running in front of it. I was never in the factory; they never allowed children to go in factories, but really the whole thing is exactly the same, so it dawned on me, "My goodness, this is what I have seen 75 years ago!" So I always laugh, I think here they are trying to be modern, to progress; but its kind of backward, you know!

And that's where we were at this time, and when the first revolution broke out, they destroyed the whole factory. At this time they didn't call them Communists, they called them Nihilists. And they threw the chief engineer into the domna, the big blast furnace. As for my uncle, they said, "Well, he has always been a good man, so we won't throw him in, we will throw him out!" and they threw him off the domna, which broke his leg, he was always lame; they had probably broken his hip; anyway they didn't burn him, but the place was completely destroyed.

A domna would be a smelter, probably, where they made rails for the railroad. Everything was steel, because it was a very rich country there for steel. In the evening we saw the big fires from the mill, but there was no electricity yet, at least not there.

These are kind of vague memories, very early. The only thing that I remember from there is the workmen from the factory. They were all very well dressed, they didn't look very beggarly. The peasants didn't like them /and the disturbances they created/. My cousins went always to play with the children in a nearby village, so they knew what the peasants were saying.

The factory workers came down and they stood in front of our house with a big placard. They wanted to write Svoboda (Freedom), but instead they wrote Sloboda (village). I remember that we children--in Russia we knew how to read at five--my cousins and I , we were laughing so much, at the funny factory people, who didn't even know how to write properly! This is all I remember of 1905.

After the war was over, my mother came, and picked us up. At this time my father was working and building the fortifications of Vladivostok. They were so well built that the Japs attacked Port Arthur and Dairen /but not Vladivostok/. I even have a picture of it. My father sent it as a postcard to my mother, who was then back in Petersburg, and he wrote: "Here I am reading a letter from France, addressed to the commander of the Japanese navy, Admiral Togo, Vladivostok! They made a mistake; they thought /the Japanese/ would attack Vladivostok!"

My father stayed in the Orient for quite awhile, because he always thought that the main attack would come from that side. He was in the General Staff, and he was fighting with Petersburg all the time, trying to explain to them... You see, our Tsar was so timid; that was the trouble with him, he was terribly, horribly timid! His father, Alexander III, was just the opposite, and I think that Alexander III treated his children so that they grew up without any guts, as we say in America. My father always said that the first shock that he had in his life was when he finished the General Staff Academy. He was Number 1; at studying he was always super-duper.

The officers--there were usually only 32 in the General Staff--were presented to the Emperor, and when he approached my father he shook hands with him and congratulated him on finishing the Academy, and he said--at this time my father was captain--"Naturally you want to stay in Petersburg, in the Main Administration?"

But my father already had his misgivings, because he had been in the Boxer War, about the Japanese, so he said, "No, Your Imperial Majesty, if possible I would like to go to the Far East!" Then, instead of saying yes or no, as Alexander III would have, Nicholas turned to the Minister of War who was standing back of him, and asked, "Can I decide? /Mozhno-li razreshit'?/ " He couldn't even decide himself! Naturally the Minister of War said "Konechno! /of course/" And that was it. My father said that he knew than that the Emperor did not know his own mind. When things had to be done he would be easily influenced, and this was actually what happened, and that is why we are here!

Then again for awhile we were in Vladivostok, where my father was finishing his projects, fortifying Vladivostok, and then Poset, which is now a very important Bolshevik center, and Khabarovsk. It used to be a small no-good-for-nothing town, but I think it is now an enormous Bolshevik center. My father always wanted to do something in this Maritime Province /Primorskii krai/ so it would be safe from the Japanese and the Chinese.

After that I was in Moscow most of the time, in the Institute. You could enter the Institute at the age of nine, so I was spending all the winters in Moscow, and then going for vacations to Vladivostok.

RP: What do you remember of Vladivostok?

Vernon: It was a beautiful city. Very much like San Francisco in the setting--the same bay, and the mountains, and even Egorscheldt. The bay reminded me very much of San Francisco Bay, and then we had the Russkii Ostrov, which was the same distance away as the Farallones, only it was flat. And Askol'd, another island, farther down. So I understand why Togo and the Japanese thought twice about attacking it, because they would have had to go through those fortifications on Askol'd and Russkii Ostrov before they would get into the bay, and Russkii Ostrov was very well fortified. And so they would have been caught between Egorscheldt, which is one of the promontories, and the two batteries on the other side.

The climate was rather mild, and the view was beautiful too. As a child, and as a young girl I enjoyed it very much. Later, San Francisco really reminded me of it . And we were driving around; my father had one of the first automobiles in use there, with the open, funny carriage; it was a Mercedes, they didn't call it Benz at this time, but just Mercedes, and you had to put on a hat and a veil, and the dust was flying, and for some reason there would always be two drivers, two soldiers, usually. I think one must have been a mechanic, in case something broke, for there were no service stations where you could go. The wheels were made kind of funny, like a velocipede, and they had to be very, very careful on the turns, because sometimes they slipped off, and then you went bang down the hill! I am not a mechanic, so I can't tell you why, but they were always watching those chains, because the daughter of General Mishchenko, who was a very good friend of my father, was killed in one accident like that. They were going up the mountain and they said that the chain slipped, the car went falling down the hill, and she was thrown out and killed.

So that is my first remembrance of /automobiles/. We frightened the cows and the horses very much! The stupid cow would be running in front of us, and the more the chauffeur would honk the horn the crazier she would be.

RP: What kind of social life did they lead in Vladivostok?

Vernon: Well, they were mostly military. The last year my father was always saying that there was something that he felt in the air, that he felt that something was going wrong, so he didn't want me to leave the Far East. So, instead of finishing the Institute, I got one year of public school. I found out what the Russian public schools were like, and they were much more democratic than American schools, which surprised me when I came to America. We had uniforms, and we were all equal in the class, and our social origins didn't make any difference, as I found out.

I was a brat; I was a terrible child. Many years have passed, but I still can't forget it; it was one of the very shameful moments of my life. We had brown uniforms, all the same material, no furs or fancy hats allowed. If the teacher met you on the street /with anything different on/ she could send you home.

RP: This was a school for girls only?

Vernon: Yes, we never had a mixed school, so that is why, when we came to America we sent all our children to Catholic schools. They went to Our Lady of Victory, like my son, and then when they graduated from grammar school the girls went to Notre Dame, which was closed last week, and then the boys went to St. Ignatius, so we kept on the separate thing.

We had only a little white collar, turned up around, but being a brat I didn't like that white collar, so I put on a smaller one with frills or something like that. And naturally the dame de classe, who was like a governess, said: "Would you kindly take it off?" So I took it off, but next day I put it on again, so she told me to report to the directoress.

So I went to see the directoress, and she looked me and said:"What, actually, are you trying to do? You know that many of those girls here, their parents have no money. We have daughters of izvozshchiki (teamsters), and you know, any kind of people, and so you are trying to show that you are in a better financial position. This is the most disgraceful thing that I have ever seen! We are all equal here, and you just kindly remember it!"

I tell you, so many years have passed, but I have never forgotten it! In the class we always said ty (thou) to each other. Titles or any kind of things were never mentioned; we were all absolutely of one grade, whether we were the daughter of a garbage man or a general or a nobleman there was no difference whatsoever, and so when I came to America and found that pupils were dressed according to papa and mama's financial status I couldn't get over it. I looked and I said "How come? They say its a democracy and yet we had it the other way in Russia!"

RP: So that was during your one year in public school?

Vernon: Yes, just one year! Luckily I graduated. I was very thankful to the Lord that I graduated, because my behavior there was impossible, but at learning I was pretty good. I had an excellent memory, so I memorized everything, and so when I finished the class I got a gold medal, real gold, about that size. My best friend got the silver one, the next one. And you know, if I had finished the institute I would have gotten a chiffre, they are ribbons, with the initials of the school, that you put on your shoulder. My institute was Ekaterinovskii, named after Catherine the Great. There was an E and an M, after the Empress Dowager, who was the head of everything, and this was something which admitted you to Imperial balls and things like that. It didn't cost a penny. As for my gold medal, when things were awfully bad in Petersburg we ate a whole week on it! It was a very pleasant experience, one year of grammar school and I got food for a whole week!

That was in 1915; my father was already in the fighting, and my younger brothers had already gone back to Petersburg and to the military school there. I had to finish, that was my last year.

RP: So he had foreseen...

Vernon: I don't know, it must have been my father's intuition. Because you know, in Russia men didn't talk to women as a rule about politics or their work, nor to children especially. I said "No" to my father only twice in all his life, once when I was 16, one time, and the second time when I was 42! That was the old style!

RP: What were the occasions, if I may ask?

Vernon: The first occasion was very strange. Actually up to now I cannot explain why I did it. It was during the war, the beginning of the second year. By this time I had finished, and was back in Petersburg, with the family. The war started in July and I think this was in January, because I finished in the middle of the year, because of the war's conditions. And everybody put all their money into the first war bonds, so my father came back from the front and he told my mother, take all the bonds and stocks and whatever was there. My mother had quite a few gold nuggets--her uncle had a gold mine, and whenever the children went there when she was young they gave them as a souvenir a chunk of gold, big chunks. So my father said: "Take it all, take everything, including your jewels, and put it all in the first war bonds!"

Everybody was doing that, even the Imperial family. That is why, with Anastasia, when they thought there was gold in the London bank there wasn't anything but a big heap of World War I first war bonds! About all they were good for was wall paper. They had made a whole story for nothing. So my mother went to dispose of the gold and brought that box with her jewels in it. She had very good sapphires, but the green ones, emeralds, were her favorites. And he said "Now I want you to sell those and put them in the bonds too."

And then, I don't know what pushed me there; I couldn't tell you up to this moment; it was one of those strange things that happened in human life, it was the first time I said "No!" I was sixteen at the time and I walked up to my father and I said "No, you are not going to sell them. This will belong to me and to my brothers' wives later on," and I gook the box in my room and locked it in a drawer. Why did I do it? My father gave me a stunned look, he was so surprised. He didn't say a word but just turned around, and you know, he never insisted on doing it anymore; I don't know why. And those jewels saved our lives later on.

RP: So you finished school in 1915, in Vladivostok, and then you went back to Petersburg?

Vernon: My mother was [in Petersburg] by then; my father wanted me to finish school, so I was left there with my governess. That was my only experience in public school; the rest was the Institute.

RP: And how was it in Petrograd?

Vernon: Actually I can't tell you anything special because I didn't pay any attentio I was a teenager, and a very flighty one too. Well, I went to the university, to the *Bestuzhevskie kursy* (Bestuzhev courses), but I took it only one year, and then there were the Bolsheviks. I was more interested in boys and things, and most of those boys came back in coffins, dead. So that is why even now I cannot go to a funeral service in Russian, and I can hardly bear to hear a funeral march, such as Beethoven's funeral march.

Toward Revolution

(Interruption; end of Reel 2, side 2; beginning of reel 3, side 1)

RP: Certainly it is all past history, but still we study it, and try to find out what happened, and to learn from it.

Vernon: Yes, we try, but one wonders, *why* did we do all this? Why did the people... Well, it was a long time ago; we were traveling on the Amur River, on a pleasure trip. I was about 14. We were on a boat, one of those beautiful boats with the wheels going around.

RP: A paddle wheel steamer?

Vernon: Yes. And most of the people were elderly--at least for us--and we were just a group of youngsters, 14, 15, and 16 years old. And a German student, and I think kind of lonesome, joined us. This is a very good short story for children. There are some mountains down there, of turf. In the day time they are just gray, but at night time they burn. The peasants called them the chortovye gora (devil's mountains) because they thought the devil was running around. In Russia we have quite a few torfianye bolota (peat bogs) and these were the torfianye gora (mountains). This was below Khabarovsk, farther down inland, because I think we had passed the affluent of the Ussuri, or maybe it was higher up. And that young student was listening to a bunch of old people in the big sitting room with windows around so you could look at the view. There was a bunch of Russian generals, professors, and people from the government, too, and they were looking at those beautiful mountains, and our little German student heard them talking. And the Russians were always talking against the government, and nobody trying to do anything; it was all talk.

So he came over and joined us, and he said, "You know, you are a kind of funny people. I will tell you a little story. If there would be a broken chair in somebody's house, if it would be in the house of an Englishman, he would not mend it; there could not possibly be a broken chair in a gentleman's house. If it were in a German's house he would quietly take it out, mend it, and put it back. But if the broken chair happened to be in a Russian's house they would sit there for a long time, talking and talking and talking, and blaming the government for not making good chairs, but not doing a thing to mend it!

And this is my opinion now when I hear Russian people doing it; I think he was very right. This is very characteristic, we always have a lot of opinions (mnogo osuzhdali) and never do anything, and as a result--we are here in America. In general we had a strange psychology. The nobility considered it not nice to talk of monay, to do anything practical was absolutely inadmissable. We had no idea that all those estates had been mortgaged one time, two times, and a third time until at last they went.

The peasants were the same. The peasants and the higher classes in Russia were very close in their psychology. I think you must have read of it in the books, actually many of the children /of the landowning class/ were raised by nurses and nursed by peasant women, and I think we and the peasants were very close in some ways; we got some ideas from them /and they got some from us/.

That's why when we had the pogroms they always said they were organized by the government. Well, our government was stupid, but not stupid to that extent, because they /the Jews/ were the ones who were paying the taxes. But what happened, our peasants were always head over heels in debt, and so, when after selling their crop they drank too much vodka, who was to blame? Not they, it was the Jewish fellow who gave them credit. So it was the poor Jewish fellow who was beaten up. They always slept on the parina (?), the federbett, and /the mob/ always cut these up and the feathers would be flying around. Usually this would happen in a village where there was only one gorodovoi (policeman), or sometimes not even that, it would be a starosta (village elder). So that was why they had to send the cossacks, because there would be rioting, and the local police could do nothing. And then they said that it was the cossacks who were at fault. But what could the local police do? One man couldn't /deal with/ a drunken mob that was destroying everything around. But they would never blame it on themselves, and I think our higher classes were the same. We were always blaming somebody else, but never trying to do anything to straighten things out.

RP: This isn't uniquely Russian, of course.

Vernon: But in Russia it was to an enormous extent. That is why some of them joined all those revolutionary groups. I blame Tolstoi to a great extent. My aunt was a follower of Tolstoi. She cut her hair--a terrible scandal at the end of the last century; she wore glasses, another scandal; she went to the medical school, another scandal; and she was a *tolstovka*. So this killed my grandfather, because it was a terrible disgrace for the family. She had two brothers, my father and my uncle Vasilii, but she was the only daughter, and the apple of my grandfather's eye.

And then they would join all the nihiliststs and so on at this time, most of them were of good families. And so, naturally, they did the same thing, instead of doing something they were talking. Talking and talking and distributing leaflets.

Well, I cannot talk about those things; you must have read a great deal about it.

RP: True, but it is valuable to hear about it from someone who was there.

Vernon: Well, the only class that did anything was the *kuptsy*, the merchants. Have you read the book, *Russkoe kupechestvo* /Russian merchant class/? Maria Vladimirovna has it, among the books I gave her. All those men were usually out of the peasant class, but instead of drinking down their crops they started doing something practical, and gradually Moscow became the center of all the extremely rich merchants, and they started as peasants, some of them serfs even. The grandfather, the son and the grandson each did better /than the one before/.

That is why the people of Petersburg always despised Moscow--"Oh, *kuptsy*," they said. But those kuptsy were the ones who had something in their head, practical, instead of just blabbing and talking. And all the Tret'iakovs, Morozovs and Eliseevs, they started from very low grade, and some of them became multi-millionaires. Whereas the Russian nobility, when it became a question of what to do, just remortgage.

Fortunately, my uncle had some sense. My aunt was very much a follower of Tolstoi, and even joined a Tolstoi commune, like the communes here now. Luckily she met and married him. She remained very liberal, but living in a comfortable way was much more convenient than in a commune. And my uncle, her husband, instead of taking a third mortgage on his estate, started a steel mill, on the Ural River. After the Bolsheviks destroyed it he started a sawmill , and naturally the Bolsheviks killed him. The last letter we received from my aunt was in 1933, when she wrote that Vasilii--her brother--and Nikolai--her husband--had both met with an accident. It was an open postcard, but when she wrote "they met with an accident and things are very sad"--you know, for the essentials of life--we understood. And the last line was "Mea culpa--mea maxima culpa!" The censor wouldn't understand it, but we understood what she meant, that she was sorry.

Have you read Basargin? He was one of our best writers. He was a revolutionary too; I don't know what party he belonged to. He exiled himself from Russia and lived for a time in Italy. When the Revolution came he went back, and what he saw terrified him, when he saw what they had done. One of his books is *Mea culpa*, and the other, in Russian, is *Sevrazhek* (?), the name of a street in Moscow, or in English, *Quiet Street*. It is terrifying, because he saw the results of their work, what it led to. I have it in English. If you don't find it in the library I can send it to you. It was quite popular in America about 30 years ago. It gave him enough money to be able to escape again, this time from the USSR. I think he died in Paris.

Just like my aunt, they all smote their brows and cried "Our fault, our fault!" at the end, but it was too late to correct it. And naturally Tolstoi had a great influence. I think--and I'm not that smart--I think that at the end he was just plain senile. Because his writing was so beautiful he was like a god, and everything he would say, people admired it, but toward the end all his preachings and so on--well, it was just talk. But on account of his enormous genius as a novelist, he had a terrific influence on the people, especially the young people. Everything that Tolstoi said was like a Gospel; they believed every word of it. So I blame him a great deal. Well, again, that is my opinion.

RP: You said yesterday that as a teenager you didn't notice the events leading to the Revolution, but later it must have become more apparent.

Vernon: Yes, when it did become noticeable, it was a shock. The abdication of the Tsar, and then the Provisional Government, and the way Kerensky was running things. And meanwhile the army was falling apart. Because by that time--this I know from my father--the army was already composed of *borodachi*, bearded ones.

For me, the first shock was when so many of my boy friends were killed. They didn't even have time for a *panikhida* (service for the dead, requiem) for each one, so they always used to have six or seven bodies at a time.

You see, what happened, the best soldiers and the best officers were sent in the first attack. Again, I am not a tactician, so I cannot judge, but they were sent in the first attack, you know, when they were very nearly in Prussia, with flags flying, and trumpets, on horseback, in parade uniforms--it was like a parade. And then the Germans just turned those Big Berthas loose on them, and the whole thing just went *pfft*. And my first horrible impression was that I had some friends in the *konnogvardii* (horse guards), one of our best regiments in Russia, and I remember a friend of ours, Vadim Kushelev, out of 32 officers of the regiment, he brought back 18 coffins. I remember Vadim saying to me: "I wish I could be in one of the coffins, because it is too heartbreaking." But 18 officers--and one of them was Konstantin, one of the grand dukes, the nephew of the Emperor.

So that was it. And naturally the soldiers were the best. Then they mobilized all the young people first, and then after they were all slaughtered, there would be a second mobilization, of the middle-aged men. By that time the war was going worse and worse, because of mistakes which I cannot tell you about--my father could have explained it.

By then it was already the borodachi, the middle aged men, who had families and children, who were taken. And what happened? The first day, there was no bread, because there was nobody at home to work. The men on whom they depended for raising food were at the front, so naturally those men were very susceptible to any kind of propaganda. And then there were the food shortages. And this is what happened. And so that was the end. My father said he was still trying to do something at the front. He said that when you talked to individual soldiers they were normal and acted normally, but as soon as there would be one of the agents--by that time Lenin and Trotsky were back--they would turn into a mob, that would kill their officers and go home. And they promised them land, which they never got. And this was how the army fell apart. And this is why I became kind of... I always say there is nothing, when they say there is something that is supernatural...

(interruption)

RP: This was all in the time of Kerensky?

Vernon: Kerensky, yes. And Mr. Kerensky, if he had been a man and not what he was--no decent Russian shook his hand when he was at Stanford. He was actually to blame for... Well, he was actually a nothing, but a very good talker. He could talk, my goodness how he could talk, but as to action he was absolutely... Well, naturally he ran away. He let our Imperial family die, but he saved himself. He dressed as a woman and he crossed the frontier to Finland, and later he lived very comfortably in Stanford. I hope the good Lord will make him pay for it--well, he is up there now...

If Kerensky could have stopped them in the beginning, just simply, plainly shot them, we wouldn't have had the... This was one of the characteristic...

I think there were only about eighty men who were his (Lenin's) bodyguards, or whatever you want to call them, and he was talking from the mansion of Ksheshinskaia, that is, crossing over the Nikolaevskii Most (bridge). There was a big open... and Kshenskaia's big house was right there, and here was the Petropavlovskaia fortress, and farther down a beautiful Moslem mosque. I asked one of the boys who escaped from there whether the mosque was still there, and he said " No, it is a skating rink." But this is the way...

We were still supposed to vote--it was still the time of the Vremennoe pravitel'stvo (Provisional Government), and here came my maid, Marusiia. And she said: "Look, look, I have 25 rubles!"

"Where did you get it?" I said.

She said, "Trotsky and Lenin are talking to the people and their agents are going around giving the people 25 rubles to vote for proposition No. 4." That was the communistic item on the ballot. So here was that stupid little girl--she was about 20 years old--saying "Here I have 25 rubles and I am going to vote for No. 4!"

I said, "Marusia, don't do it!"

"Well," she said, "I might get some more!" That was her psychology!

And I looked at the 25 rubles, and they were false. Naturally the Germans must have sent Lenin and Trotsky lots of money, but they didn't have very much themselves, so they printed this counterfeit money. And those people stupidly accepted it and voted for Number 4, giving the most communistic party the lead over the others.

I could not vote--I was too young, but one man who was in the voting place told me it was a most amusing thing--here came an old Russian peasant woman and there was an icon there--there were still icons--and she crossed herself and said, in a loud voice, "Well, I hope we are going to elect a good Tsar!" And she voted for proposition No. 4!

Life under the Bolsheviks

Then /after the Bolshevik seizure of power on 25 October/7 November, n.s., 1917/ it started to get worse and worse. But the Communists were not too well organized yet. The Cheka was only beginning after they took over. Actually they were shooting at random. If they saw somebody in uniform they would shoot. The counter-espionage was not organized as it is now, everything was just at the beginning. Most of it was just simply killing. Naturally my husband or my brother could not get out of the house in uniform. They would finish you off, for no reason whatsoever.

RP: When did you marry?

Vernon: Why did I marry? Because I was an idiot!

RP: No, no! I didn't ask why! I asked when!

Vernon: I was in love with my future husband. And I told you how my parents obtained permission to leave, and I could have left with them. My mother implored me to come, but I said, "No, I can't live one single day without Igor! My heart would be broken, I would die!" You know, at eighteen! Later I was divorced from my husband, and lived here in America, and my heart didn't break once! We were good friends. There was no quarrel, and we were on good terms for the rest of our lives, till he died. But at this time I thought one more day without him would be the end.

So I was married the 12th of January 1918, and my parents left on the 13th. I am going to get the papers concerning my marriage from my husband's third wife. I always say that, and the Americans always laugh. I say she is the wife of my husband, and she is a very wonderful woman; she lives in Canada, in Vancouver. She just wrote to say she is sending the marriage certificate that my husband had. She is mailing it to me because I want to give it to the Hoover Library, because we were married in the chapel of the Winter Palace. You know, people just did not think it was the end of everything. How we got there I don't remember; I was all excited, my parents were leaving, and my darling and I were getting married. You know, at 18 you have no brains anyway, so by some dark corridor, by some kind of stairway we walked into the chapel. How it happened, I don't know, but my husband's father was in the Imperial government (Imperatorskoe pravitel'stvo). He wasn't military, he was an Imperial councillor (tsarskii sovetnik) or something like that.

RP: But this was already 1918. Was a church wedding still allowed?

Vernon: No, it wasn't allowed; we were kids, but our parents were grown up, and we were all risking our necks to be married... As I have said, the Bolsheviks were not organized yet, but they were there in force, their soldiers were all around the Winter Palace. So how we got into that chapel I don't know, but why it happened was because my husband's family was very religious, and Ian Kronshtadtskii, you know, the famous priest, when he came from Kronshtadt he was always the guest of my husband's family. They were very religious and the priest who had baptised all the children met my fiance and me on the Nevskii, and he said--he was the chaplain of the Imperial chapel--and he said "I have baptised you, and I am going to marry you." So that's why we were married in the chapel of the Imperial Palace (Zimnii dvorets). And my father and my brother were in uniform--it was of khaki, but still it was the uniform.

RP: That was a great risk.

Vernon: Well, as I said, the grownups should have known. And the members of the family of my husband's brother, and Mr. Garton (?) who was a stahlmeister. That uniform, can you imagine putting it on during the Revolution? Its unbelievable! Can you imagine that?

RP: Well, he couldn't have gone through the streets wearing it. He must have carried it in a package.

Vernon: I don't know, because as I say I was in a daze.

RP: That was really bizarre, because the old regime was finished.

Vernon: Yes, and they were grown up! and it was finished; everything was finished, but he still had to put his uniform on. Naturally it was khaki, during the war. And so did one of the witnesses, Stenbock-Fermor--not the one that lives in Palo Alto, but one who is still living in London.

So somehow we managed that. That is why you would find the marriage certificate interesting, because it is stamped by the Zimnii dvorets. So besides the priest there was some kind of secretary, who put on one of the last stamps of the Zimnii dvorets. But as I say, it was ridiculous. Foolhardy. The street was full of revolutionary soldiers, and how we sneaked in there I don't remember. But I do remember some kind of dark halls and a stairway. But it wasn't through the front.

And that was how optimistic we were. We didn't believe that it would last. I was very fond of furs; I didn't like diamonds; and my mother had very, very good furs. Girls weren't allowed to wear them, only belyi pesets (white fox) and Persian lamb, but not too much of that.

RP: Allowed by whom?

Vernon: By custom. Look at our grand duchesses, the way they were dressed was pitiful, because all they were allowed to wear was just one string of pearls, and only a little bit of ermine, even for big occasions. The ladies in waiting were dressed very well, while the daughters of the Emperor were still young ladies, and not married, they were not allowed... And we were not to go to restaurants, or to light /opera?/...

RP: So this was by social custom, then, your being allowed or not allowed to do certain things?

Vernon: Those were the things that were not allowed. For instance, we were not allowed to wear any black. So we were dreaming about it. Black was supposed to be for older women. We were allowed pink, pale blue, and white, but no black. Nor gloves. We even had a song in the boarding schools, about having gloves. We were embarrassed about our bony, skinny, horrible looking hands, and short sleeves. Only the graduating class was permitted to wear gloves, with 16 buttons. In French there was a song "O les gants avec seize boutons"--gloves and sixteen buttons, this was our dream at that time.

My mother had quite a large collection of sables, and gornostai (ermine)--quite a large collection--and so they wouldn't get spoiled during the summer there was a big fur store which took things which had to be preserved from moths, by putting them in special rooms, I suppose, so we turned all our furs to the fur store--Mertons?--I still have the receipt. These were stored so the moths would not eat them. Then on top of that we always had rugs to be stored. But by 1918, Mertons was closed, and the banks and everything else.

Hadn't the Bolsheviks started confiscating those things?

Vernon: That came a little later. You see, the Bolsheviks were not yet taking too much--they were too busy killing. My father-in-law and his family and his wife had an apartment on the Liteinyi náberezhnyi, that is, on the bank of the Neva, at this time the whole floor. And then somehow my husband and I found an apartment on the next corner--we didn't want to live with the family. I think it was on the Voznesenskii náberezhnyi. We were not far, so we could go and visit them.

And then things got steadily worse. At this time when the Bolsheviks searched--they never searched our apartment--they did not have enough men, so when they came in it was just to pick up a person and take him across the Neva on the Vasil'evskii ostrov, to be shot. We were living directly opposite, and at night, at 1 o'clock, they would always start shooting. They took all those people across there, and so naturally there would be screaming which you would hear across the Neva, when it was cold, because at night everything was quiet--there wasn't much movement anyway, even in the daytime. So to shut up the sound of the machine guns, they used trucks; they lifted them up in some way and started them, and then they put people against the wall and machinegunned until everybody was killed. At 1 o'clock it always started, the noise of the engines, and through it you could hear the sound of the machine guns, and so we knew people were being shot. So we woke up at 1 o'clock, and stood near the window and listened; it still makes me cold when I think about it. And my mother-in-law and her sister were always praying for those who were being killed.

But as far as furniture and things were concerned they didn't seem to be much interested. The soldiers running away from the front were interested mainly in going back to their own villages. But there were quite a few peasants coming from the north, and this was really--I was young, so we still laughed. They would come on the Neva on big barges, land on the *pristan'* (pier) and come ashore. They were bringing flour which they would exchange for furniture, dishes and so on. Big, strong, and very blond, they spoke with a he-he-he-he, a funny kind of Russian, through their teeth. They took furniture and things, and actually we were glad to get flour and something edible, because there was nothing you could buy. I remember a bunch of them came in; they were workmen, and the communist soldiers didn't pay any attention. They were scared of them, I think, because those people wouldn't talk two minutes, they would just pick you up and throw you in the river.

(pier-glass)
So once they came /and they noticed/a *trumeau* / --we use the French term--a piece which has a little table, and then a big mirror up to the ceiling.

RP: A sort of dressing table?

Vernon: No, it wasn't a dressing table; it was usually in the living room, a decorative piece. And this peasant woman, she said "Well, I want *that* thing there."

"What do you need it for?" I said.

"Sell; I want it."

"Well," I said, "how much will you give me for it?" I don't remember how many pounds of flour you got for something like that.

We bargained a little, and then I said, "Well, actually, what are you going to do with it?" because I knew that the peasant houses were low. "Your ceilings will be too low," I said.

"Oh," she said, "I'll put it lengthwise."

And another one, she looked in the house of my in-laws. They had a grand piano, and one of them wanted it.

Again I asked, "What do you need it for?" I was genuinely interested.

And she said, "Well, you see, my son likes this sound, and you know, it gets pretty damp in our villages in winter, so it would be a very good place for the chickens to hatch!"

That was the kind of exchange we made. Different antique pieces of furniture were exchanged for food. And when they departed it was amusing to look through the windows. Here was a barge, carrying a grand piano, with a broomstick sticking out, and a bunch of pots lying inside, and the peasants happily sailing away with that stuff. But they were very welcome.

And then the "bagmen" (*meshechniki*) organized. They carried a lot--they were risking their lives, actually, because the Bolsheviks were searching their clothes. They took valuables from the town into the country and brought back food. We had one, the sister of our doorman (*shveitsar*). She was a very skinny little woman, and she would bring us a leg of lamb, for instance. And suddenly this little skinny woman would develop the figure of a Marion Monroe, having it attached around her neck. So that is how we were supplied with food, but naturally, if they were found out, they were shot, so it was a serious thing.

And then the ones in the barges stopped coming--I think they must have put some kind of restriction on the river. So the meshechniki provided our only exceptional things. Otherwise the food was well, bread, about so much /indicates a very small amount/ for two days.

RP: They were more like little cakes?

Vernon: Yes, and full of straw, and dried fish. You see in Russia we had lots of dried vegetables. In the winter time they used them to make soup. So this we could get. We ground that horrible stuff, and then used the skins from the potatoes--you could get a few of potatoes, they were a sort of luxury. The skins were put in the oven and dried out and made into a powder, and the cakes made out of the dried vegetables were rolled in the black stuff and fried in coco-butter. Awful! There was no butter, but you still could find some coconut. And then the dried fish (seledki), that was the main supply of food. So naturally we lost some weight. And this was our existence until we left.

RP: When did you leave?

Vernon: In September, 1918, just 18 days before the birth of my son. I had the Spanish flu, but I didn't die, and my son didn't either. Like the doctor here, who says Russian women are awfully tough! But my sister-in-law refused to leave, and they shot her husband.

So this is another amusing fact in the life of human beings. My sister-in-law's first husband before the war was Prince Bobrinskii. I must try to find out from Vera Aleksandrovna /Eliścher/ if he is still alive, because one Bobrinskii is a priest and a relative of Vera Aleksandrovna. They had a little boy by the name of Aliosha, and they thought the Russian nurses were no good, so they had English nurses. The room was heated by Russian stoves (pech') with a pyramid on top so there wouldn't be any dust, it would fall off. All the shelves in that poor child's room were out of glass, so the nurses could wash them every day. The poor kid was taken every time he ate and put on a scale, so it was a very scientific way of bringing up a child. And Aliosha, a little blond fellow, was not strong.

What Bobrinskii had done was a family secret, I don't know, because divorces in Russia were very, very difficult. But Lolot--the girl's name--and he were divorced; it was very hush-hush. Perhaps it was explained and I didn't understand--we were very naive in some ways. Then she married a Count Vronskoi. There were ten days between us. I was expecting my son, and she was expecting a child too, but because her sister Vera, who was married to the brother of my husband her mother, Mrs. Garton, were there she wanted to stay.

We were trying to escape, and we told Lolot and her mother to come, but she said, "No, no, the child is coming soon, and I cannot travel in that condition!"

"Well I am," I said, "and you can do it too!"

But she said "No, I won't leave."

In the last letter I got from my mother-in-law, she said that about ten days after we left the Bolsheviks searched her house--they had a beautiful house, not far from the Frantsuzskaia náberezhnaia (French quay), They took Vronskoi, her husband, and they shot him on the street corner. And naturally the baby was born ahead of time from the shock, and Lolot had no milk, and as my mother-in-law told us, they raised the new born baby on potatoes. That's all they had, so they took potatoes and boiled them to the consistency of milk and like my mother-in-law wrote, Aleksei, the one who was raised scientifically, was still a weak little boy, but Olga, the new born baby, was a husky little thing. Can you imagine? The way human things work out. As far as Bobrinskoi the priest could find out, Lolot Vronskaia died later in a labor camp. That is all I know of the family; but it shows that a child can survive in strange conditions. I know nothing further of what happened to her or the rest of them, whether or not she survived to be a teen-ager.

RP: How did the rest of you escape?

Vernon: The jewels /that I had insisted were not to be turned in for first war bonds, in spite of my father's wishes, back in 1915/ saved our lives, because we paid them to the Jews who got us out of Petersburg. There was no money, and these were the things that I had to sell because my husband and my brother couldn't get out of the house. They had no civilian clothes, and they would have been shot on sight, so I sold /the jewels/ and paid enough to three very nice Jewish fellows, Sherman, German and Berman. I think one got us the false documents, the other got the tickets for the train, and the third one escorted us to the frontier, to the Ukraine, which was by this time occupied by the Germans. And not only us but the brother of my husband, his wife, my mother-in-law, and one of the maids who didn't want to leave (them).

My husband /had papers showing that he/ was a worker at the Putilov factory--I don't remember the name--and Gleb his brother was also a worker in some other factory, sent to the Ukraine by the government as a progragandist. My brother always had a slight German accent--he spoke German perfectly--and so he was supposed to be Finnish; they gave him some name and he was supposed to be in the military. And the women were just women--their wives and so on. And so we got the documents, the tickets and so on, and then Mr. Berman went to the frontier and got us over the line.

RP: So you made it out, and were able to have your child...

Vernon: At Novorossiisk. There the White Army was in control. I don't remember any of the trip, my fever was very high. He (my son) didn't suffer from it in any way whatsoever. He was in the Air Force here, and they gave him 99% perfect with only one point off because he had a broken tooth; he broke it diving. He is 61 right now--he was born on October 12--and thank God he has never been sick. So human children are very much sturdier than pedigreed dogs.

So that's how things worked out. But by then the White Army--the Volunteer Army (Dobrovol'cheskaia armiia) was in very sad condition.

RP: Was there still hope of victory?

Vernon: Yes, we were only 60 miles from Moscow, and if the English would have... Well, don't let me talk about the English, I don't like them. They sent us ammunition of one kind, and guns of another. They were so afraid that

Russia might--well, they were always afraid of Russia, I don't know why. Russia was big enough without trying to get colonies, but for some reason they thought that Russia wanted India. Good heavens, who wanted India when we couldn't take care of what we had. Well, that's another part of the history, but when it comes to the English I have no sympathy whatsoever. The way they treated us on the ship and so on, I will never forget. The Japanese and the English are two peoples that I don't--well, there are individuals, of course; I have some English friends that I think are wonderful, but... Well, they always called it treacherous Albion /kovarnyi Albion/.

RP: Perfidious Albion, Napoleon's term?

Vernon: And they keep on, but they are punished for it; I believe in higher justice, and the higher justice is punishing, you can see it by England. Out of a big empire, what are they, a miserable little island, and only existing because America helps them--the America they despise so much.

RP: At what stage did people begin to think that there was no possibility of beating the Bolsheviks? Did the optimism last until the middle of 1919?

Vernon: You see, we advanced pretty well, but there were lots of mistakes.

RP: What kind?

Vernon: Well, of every kind. It would take very long, and I cannot tell you. Mistakes in tactics, mistakes in commanders; Denikin was--blah. My brother always said he didn't have anything of the leader about him. My brother was 17 and he was commanding because most of the officers were sick from the black typhus or Spanish flu. So the doctor and my brother, Paul, aged 17, were commanding what they called a guard artillery division /gvardeiskii artilleriiskii divizion/.

RP: The doctor was commanding?

Vernon: He was the only one who was healthy, he and my brother--the two of them. One of our poets described it very well in Evgenii Onegin nashego dnei, one of our humorists. The reasons for the White collapse have been set forth very well. Mamaevskii and Shkuro--you know how it is in a civil war, men sometimes came in from outside and raised the peasants, and they were plundering and so forth, so there was no support from the peasantry.

As for Denikin, my brother said, it was like a parade. If it had been Wrangel he would have saved the situation, but here came Denikin, he was a fat, elderly man, and he had a swollen tooth, and his face was tied with a handkerchief. He came in, and he was mumbling something. My brother said we had the whole regiment at this time, and everyone was so eager to go in and fight, kind of enthusiastic, but when they saw that pitiful figure of their commander their spirits sank. You see, if you have a good leader he can lead the troops to any attack, but when you have a kind of plump, good-for-nothing... Wrangel was another person, a good leader, but he didn't get the command until it was too late. When he took over it was already hopeless, only the Crimea was left, and that was the end of everything. I have pictures of Wrangel's funeral which I will send you. They were made in Serbia, where he died. This was the end of everything, the end of Russia. So when they speak of Russia to me now, this for me is the USSR. If I had a chance to poison one of them, one of the leaders, I would die happy.

Have you read "The Man who Walked Away," in the Reader's Digest? You see that class now in the USSR; they take bright boys and raise them under luxurious conditions to become members of the KGB, its about how they... I have that book; I must get it for you. That young man was raised in luxurious conditions, and then, what changed all his outlook, they took them to the country, where he saw how the peasants were living, and under what horrible conditions, because they were the bosses and those people were the rabble. So when he was sent to Egypt, he got in touch with a man from the American CIA. It was while Nasser was the head, and Nasser's closest advisor was a communist. But Nasser was not, and this was when there wzs that big break, when they sent all the Soviets home. And this young man helped a great deal in it, and when Nasser found out about this he put his close friend in prison. First he sentenced him to death; I don't think you last long in an Egyptian prison.

But anyway, the whole politics of Egypt was changed; they became pro-American and this young man was the connection between the KGB and the CIA. They had an arrangement with him that if by some chance he would be discovered, the Americans had a Volkswagen in his street, and in that VW were different things--children's toys, rags, etc., like somebody who was a tourist travelling, and if you see a bunch of vlowers on top of that mess that is inside of the car, keep on walking. So one day he saw it, and he kept on walking into the desert, and a helicopter picked him up. I suppose now he must be living somewhere in America, under a false name. It is very interesting; they give the names, and photographs. I'll send it to you.

4. Voyage to America

RP: Would you now tell how you left Russia and came to the United States?

Vernon: After the White Army collapsed, they shipped the women and children, and the wounded from Novorossiisk. My husband and my brothers were still fighting under Wrangel in the Crimea, but we were shipped out.

Nobody wanted to accept us, first, because we were not tourists, and had no money whatsoever, and second, because we had black typhus. Do you know what that is? It is a terrible kind of disease. It starts with red blotches on your body, and then the temperature goes--in Russia the highest is 98, which in America would be 105. On the tenth day it drops down to normal, and the only way to save you then is to inject adrenalin into the heart, but we didn't even have aspirin, so it was a sure way to die. We had some cases on the ship, so in general it was a very sad journey.

RP: Which ship was it?

Vernon: The Karlsberg; it had been taken from the Germans. It was run by a crew of fellahs, recruited in Egypt, the captains were Italian, for some reason, and the main crew was English. That is why I still have an unpleasant memory of the English; I will never forget that, because the soldiers and the captain took all the cabins, and we were in the holds, the first, second and third. In the first were 400 wounded men, most of them dying slowly. In the second were the women and children, including the Grand Duchess Olga, and in the third were the healthy men.

Our White Army had paid the English in oil, from Baku, but just the same they didn't feed us, the water was... And the children started to die; that is why I will never forget that. There was nothing to eat except crackers and canned meat. The babies just couldn't take it in. Our doctors complained to the English colonel, and he said "Well, why don't you soak the crackers in water? The children can have that." So we were burying them at sea. But my son survived, somehow, thank God for that.

But naturally nobody wanted that kind of crowd, a bunch of women with kids, and dying men. The only ones who would take us were the Serbs. Their king, Alexander, said: "Well, we have nearly nothing left, but what we have we will share with the Russians with pleasure, because you saved us one time, and we will try to do what we can for you."

And so we spent two years in Yugoslavia, and they were a wonderful people. I don't know how they are now, but then they were absolutely marvellous.

For a long time I thought that my father had been shot, together with Kolchak. He was on the staff of the Kolchak army, and when the French surrendered Kolchak to the Bolsheviks they shot the whole staff too. However, it happened that my father had been gassed during War Number 2--I am sorry, War Number 1! Excuse me, I have seen so many wars that I get mixed up!--and this day he had a blood pressure in the head from the gas, and he had to leave the front, so he escaped the slaughter. Then, for two years, we didn't know if he was alive, and they didn't know if we were alive. But then somehow, somebody at this time--after the war there was no telephone, and no telegrams, and as for letters, you could send one, but if it didn't arrive it was normal--we found out that my father was alive and he sent us a visa. By that time he had decided to go to America, and from Siberia had gone by way of Japan and then to San Francisco. So he sent us a visa and instructions to come to San Francisco.

But the only way we could go was to Italy first, and we got there just at the time of the Mussolini revolution. There was some shooting, but by that time we were used to it--trucks, shooting, and so on. They kept us there six weeks, and we were getting very nervous, because the visa was for only a certain amount of

[illegible] présent que [illegible] graphie con[illegible] celles de
Valentine Varipaev
Belgrade, le 18 octobre 1920
Gérant Le Consulat
Le Secrétaire de Légation Nic. Pursati

97/8

о уполномочію Временнаго Россійскаго Правительства

Россійское Вице Консульство
въ Бѣлградѣ.

2246. Показательница сего Россійская Гражданка Валентина Алексѣевна Варыпаева, вдова, ур. Владимирова. съ сыном Юрием 1 года ~~отправляется~~ продолжает свое пребывание заграницей.

Во свидѣтельство чего и для свободнаго проѣзда данъ отъ меня сей Паспортъ съ приложеніемъ печати Россійскаго Вице Консульства.

Бѣлградъ Октября 18 числа 1920

Выданъ на ос
ваніи Англійска
Проходного Свидѣ

1180

Form. No. 228. Revised

DECLARATION OF ALIEN ABOUT TO DEPART FOR THE UNITED STATES.

AMERICAN CONSULATE, at Zagreb, Jugoslavia 28. IV. 1921 192

I, Varipaev Valentine a subject of Russia
Ja *podanik*

bearer of passport No. 2246 dated Oct.18th 1920
vlasnik putnice broj *od*

issued by Vice-Consulate of Russia inBelgrade ,in the name of the Provisorial Rusian government. am about to go to the United States of America, accompanied by husband /has own passport/
izdane po *imadem nakanu putovati u Sjedinjene Države, u pratnji*

ViaTrieste

I was born 1899 at Vladivostok Primorski gubernija Russia
Ja sam rodjen(u) *u*

my occupation is homework, I last resided at Ljubljana Jelkova 12 Slovenia
po zanimanju *stanovah u poslijednje doba*

~~for 4 years, and I intend to go to Porto Alto California~~
kroz *godina, te sam naumio(la) putovati u*

in U. S. A. to remain for not know for the purpose
a Sjev. amer. Sjed. Države *radi*

of joining my parents as shown by letters or affidavits attached hereto and filed at the Consulate. I have previously resided in the United States at the following places for the following periods: Never in US.
kako potvrdjuju moja pisma ili priložena izjuva ubilježena u konzularnom zapisniku. Ja stanovah prije u Sjedinjenim Državama i to slijedećim mjestima i kroz niže navedeno vrijeme:

My references in United States are Baron Alexis Boudberg, sent wire inviting me to him.
Upute o meni može dati u Sjed. Državama

Business Address Porto Alto 305 Cowper Street.
Naslov

My references in this district are Madame Terezina Jenko
Upute o meni u ovom okružju

Address Ljubljana Jurčičev trg 3
Naslov

I have rendered military service during the world war in the armies of
Za vrieme svjetskog rata služio sam kao vojnik u vojsci

as follows
i to kako slijedi

M.A.

I have informed myself of the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act of February 5. 1917.
Podpuno sam upućen(a) u naredbama članka zakona za useljivanje od 5. veljače 1917. te sam
and am convinced that. I am eligible for admission to the Unitet States thereunder
uvjeren(a) da će mi biti dozvoljen pristup u Sjedinjene Države.

I realize that if I am one of a class prohibited by law from admission into the United States
Poznato mi je da ako pripadam medju onove asobe koje su izključene iz Sjedinjenih država,
I will be deported or detained in the United States by Immigration authorities and I am prepared to
da će mi biti pristup uskraćen i da ću biti po iseljeničkim oblastima deportiran(a), te preuzimam na sebe.
assume the risk of deportation and of compulsory return in case of my rejection at an American port.
svaku odgovornost u slučaju deportacije iz bilo koje amerikanske luke.

I solemnly swear that the foregoing statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
Ja se svečano zaklinjem da su gornje izjave istinite i po mojem najsavjestnijem znanju učinjene, te
and that I fully intend while in the United States to obey the laws and constituted authorities thereof.
se obvezujem da ću kroz vrijeme boravka u Sjedinjenim Državama poštivati i podupirati zakone i oblasti istih.

For Varpaev Valentine signed her husband

☛ POTPIS Ygor Warypew

Subscribed and sworn to before me this ______ day of 28. IV. 1921 192

Wilbur Keblinger
~~Vice~~ Consul

Consul's Recommendations:

Fee No. 11075-11076
Application . . . . $ 1.00
Visa . . . . $ 9.00

Visa granted 28. IV. 1921 192
Visa refused 192

TRIESTE

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE $5 FEE STAMP

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE $5 FEE STAMP

11075

AMERICAN CONSULATE No. 11076
at Zagreb Jugoslavia
(City) (Country)
SEEN for Varipaev Valentine
For the journey to the United States
via Trieste
Wilbur Keblinger
Consul
Date April 28th 1921
Seal and Fee Stamp (The validity of this visa expires ~~twelve~~ 60 days ~~months~~ from this date, ~~provided the passport itself continues to be valid for that period.~~

and it is good for only one visit to the United States.

Issued under instructions of Department of State of Nov. 11, 1920, to Consul General, Yokohama.

time, but at last we got in some ship, and the ship took 21 days to reach New York--one of those old galoshes, you know.

RP: Do you remember the name?

Vernon: It was of the Kazulich line, but I don't remember the name of the ship.

So we arrived in New York. Another interesting thing was our way of disembarking,
So we arrived in New York. In front of us I saw the Statue of Liberty, and I said to my son, Iurii, "This is one country where my son will never go to war." We thought that the Americans would never go into another war, but in World War II my son spent five years in the Air Force.

Another interesting thing was our way of disembarking, but I won't tell it to you because they would get mad at me!

RP: Who?

Vernon: The people that used to be... Oh well, it was so many years ago... There we were, in the middle of the bay, but they wouldn't let us land. When we asked the Italian stewards they were very amusing, they said "We land when the commission is ready!"

I said "What do you mean by ready?"

And he went like that /taps throat/. You know, like the Italians do when you are drunk. "They are in the captain's cabin being entertained."

You see, it was during Prohibition, and they were being entertained until by the time they let us go they didn't know if it was a man or a woman. There were so many comical and amusing cases. Some dark haired young woman would come out and they would say that some man was her father, and the father would be about 20 years younger than she was, and blond, or something like that. But by that time they didn't care.

We landed in New York on the 10th of June, and oh, it was hot, beastly hot. And we weren't dressed for it. I was wearing a raincoat.

From New York we went by train to San Francisco. In Chicago it was impossibly hot. In geography we had learned that California and Florida were the warmest states, and I said "I'll die; I'll die in California, no question!" But we crossed the Sierras at night time, and when I woke up in the morning it was so nice and fresh that I was sure we had taken the wrong train. I said to the conductor: "Are we going to Canada, or to Alaska? Where are we going?"

He said: "But we are in California, lady!"

And I said: "California? But it is not hot!"

He said: "It's never hot in California."

Later on we found that it was true; it was always warm and pleasant; it must have been around the 15th or 16th of June. It was nice weather. It was foggy in San Francisco.

5. Getting established in San Francisco

About this time there were only about 1,000 Russians living in and around San Francisco. Most of them were officers, who had been in the army in Russia; there were professors, doctors, generals, anybody you wanted. Most of them didn't know English; some knew French and German, but that didn'telp very much, and they didn't know how to do anything. So they took whatever jobs they could get, but the Americans were very nice at this time; they were so friendly and helpful. The women took jobs as chambermaids in the hotels, and as seamstresses, even if they never had seen a sewing machine, anything they could get.

We settled/at first/in Palo Alto, but it was not far from San Francisco. Most of us didn't know English. I could read English, so I was very proud of myself. I thought I could get along very well, but when people spoke I could not understand anything. I could understand women /better than men/ so I had always to go to a lady and ask "Would you kindly tell me what this gentleman told me?"

So, as I understood some English, and could talk a little, though not too well, I became a waitress. At this time there were lots of tearooms in San Francisco, where they served lunch and then tea and things in the afternoon.

RP: Had these been started by Russians?

Vernon: No, those were American places. The Russians couldn't start anything; nobody had any money.

RP: What kind of a community did they have--was there any feeling of solidarity?

Vernon: Oh yes, it centered around the church. At first people assembled under the quarters of Father Sarkovich (?), the priest, and then gradually, when things got better, they got other quarters. Now there is quite a large institute, in a large building there. There is a journal they put out, from the time of World War II, when Russians already had jobs, Den' russkago rebenka (Day of the Russian child). You'll find there some very useful data about who the members were, and how they organized, and so on. I gave my copies to Maria Vladimirovna; you can get them from her.

RP: Of the thousand who were there then, were there any who stood out as leaders?

Vernon: No; everybody was too busy trying to find a job. All except a few of the merchants /kuptsý/, especially Kulaev, and Dr. Maksim ___, who was married to one of the Kulaevs.

RP: And how soon did a cultural life begin?

Vernon: If you get Den' russkago rebenka, it will tell you, and I gave something on it to Professor Pronin, of Fresno State.

So I was already a waitress. I understood English but I didn't understand idioms. I'll never forget one of the customers in the little tearoom where I was working. She was a maiden lady, very rich and very unpleasant, one of the few unpleasant Americans I met, but I had her as a customer for 15 years, because when I had the Russian tearoom she followed me. Heaven's sakes, it was mean of me, but I was glad when she died! At that time I didn't understand idioms, so when I was getting her a cup of coffee, and didn't fill it to the top--in order to leave her room for sugar and cream--she said: "Would you kindly fill my cup? I want my money's worth!"

Money's worth? I just couldn't figure what that thing was; I thought it was a dessert of some kind. So I went back in the kitchen and there was a nice Negro cook, very, very nice, always with a big smile, and nice eyes.

And I said, "Mary, this lady wants something, and I don't know what it is! I think it might be some kind of dessert."

"What does she call it?" she asked.

"'My money's worth,'" I said.

And Mary just about died laughing, and she said "Honey, she wants her money's worth!"

"But what is it?"I said, "Is it a dessert?"

"No," she said, and she explained to me. After that every time I made an order she said to me, "And you want your money's worth, darling, don't you?"

Other ladies took jobs mostly as chambermaids in the Fairmont Hotel. Like one lady whose husband used to be one of the biggest bankersin Petersburg, and when they were trabelling on their honeymoon they had one of the top floors in the St. Francis Hotel, but now she was working in the basement, sorting the dirty linen. "My goodness," she said, "San Francisco looks different from the top and the bottom!"

Most of the men, the professors and so on, were running elevators. Somehow they figured out how to run an elevator. And most of the middle aged men took jobs as janitors. Oleg, my cousin, who died, had a job for Southern Pacific mopping the floors, and he had never touched a mop in his life. Those horrible cuspidors were the worst to clean, and up to his last year he always said it gave him the shivers just to think of them.

So most of them did janitor work, or tried to be painters, but the Americans were mostly very nice, and when a lady didn't know how to make beds they would say "Honey, that isn't the way to make a bed." They didn't make any fuss or discharge her, but would show how to do things. And when a fellow was working for a painter and he would wash an oil brush in water, he would be told: "You don't use water to wash a brush. You'd better take this oil..." They were really trying to help, there was no question about it.

But naturally, there must have been lots of really amusing cases. One woman, a friend of mine, got a job with Marindell, a big dairy company near San Francisco. They put her in the room where she had to watch the machine that brought the butter and then wrapped it. It wasn't computers at this time but some kind of arrangement where the butter would go through the line, and down to the place where it was cut and wrapped, but she got so scared of the whole thing that she didn't know what to do. After awhile the foreman who was working in the main room was surprised that that department was so very quiet, and when he walked in there was Lydia lying there on the floor in a dead faint, covered with butter, with the machine still going, throwing out those cubes of butter.

Some tried to sew. I remember another lady who was supposed to sew a sweater together, and the forelady told her what to do. Well, she had never run a sewing machine in her life, but anyway she decided to try to do her best. Well, she pushed the wrong buttons, and instead of sewing the sweater together, it got smaller and smaller, diminishing until there was only a little patch left!

The younger men, the ones who were strong and healthy, got jobs as oongshoremen. At this time the longshoremen were paid very well. It was Mr. Bridges who destroyed the whole thing; he destroyed the San Francisco port. And for this he got the Order of Lenin. Did you know that? I have a clipping about it which I cut out out of a newspaper. He was given it when he retired for his big achievement for the cause of communism, and the Order of Lenin is very difficult to get; it is one of the highest decorations. So when people don't believe me, I show them the clipping.

But this was before Bridges, and the longshoremen were paid very well. here were not very many machines, so it was not easy work, but they were paid about as much as a teller in a bank, or more. The salary of a teller was $80 a month at that time, while I know some boys, among them the brother of the chef I had in the Russian Tearoom. He was a big, husky boy; he was only 19, but he said he was 21--you had to be 21 to work there--and that boy was making a hundred a week, working at night time.

RP: That was a big wage then.

Vernon: Oh, at this time it was very nearly the wage of the president of a bank. I know, I used to cash his checks for him. He worked long hours, it is true, and night shifts, and with dangerous things, so he made $100 a week. I was surprised, for $100 then was like a thousand now. And it really actually ruined the boy for life because he made so much money that he went to drinking, with women, friends and what not, and the longshoremen were gambling a great deal. After work they would go to speakeasies, and gamble. And one time my chef said, "Oh, my soandso brother; last night he lost 800 dollars!" It was unbelievable, that amount of money.

Other men got work in the mines, some gold and some silver. It was a hard job, but it was paid well. For instance, one of my husband's friends made enough money in a gold mine, for a year, so he could buy all the equipment for a beauty parlor for his wife, and they went back to Shanghai and started a beauty parlor there.

So those were the jobs. And then for our younger boys there was a very good arrangement, that anybody who had graduated from a military school, what they call a cadet corps (kadetskii korpus) or a gymnasium, before 1917, got 2 years credit in the university. So my two oldest brothers /were able to continue their education/. Paul went to Stanford; he didn't have to pay the money then. We signed a note, which he paid when he got out. It was one of the most expensive universities, but very good. He took electrical engineering, and got two years credit.

My other brother, Peter, in Berkeley, got two years too. However, my youngest brother did not have time to graduate from anything in Russia, he was a teenager. These two years helped a great deal. Many became engineers, and very quickly. Meanwhile, naturally, they had to work in the evening.

Paul, my oldest brother, graduated from Stanford in German. Paul spoke a perfect German, and was especially good at it, but his English was still poor. We landed in June and he went /to university/ in September. We had a very nice neighbor who taught him as much as she could, but although he was good in languages, his English was still very broken. So when he went to Stanford the professor of mathematics in the engineering department was a German Jew by the name of Karl Marx. And he was a wonderful man. He died not so long ago, because a lady who stopped in my place in Carmel Valley told me that she had studied under him, and that he died when he was 93 or 94 years old. She said that everyone remembered Professor Karl Marx, because he was so helpful to the students. So he told Paul, my brother, that in mathematics everything is the same, so he said "You don't have to worry about it, everything will be alright. You understand enough; there will be no trouble. As to everything that you have to write--write it in German; I'll accept it!"

That was my brother's first year; in the second and final year he knew enough English to write in English. This lady who had been one of Professor Marx's pupils said that he had done so much for different students to help them through the university. But naturally his having that name was always a little bit surprising for us. My youngest brother Alexander, on the other hand, had to take two years of high school before he could /enter university/.

/Doorbell rings; pause/

/Few became alcoholics/. ...There are so many now who say someone is drinking because "he has problems." Or women are drinking because "they have problems." I don't believe that. At this time I suppose the wole of us were close to a thousand, half men and half women. Of course we had problems, nothing but problems, but out of all that group 500 men, there was only one. To my great regret he was a good friend of ours; I mean of my father, really. I don't know if he is still alive, so I don't know if I should mention him really; he was the only one who did wrong, and he had a better position than anybody else.

RP: If he is still alive, it couldn't have hurt him too much.

Vernon: I don't want to say anymore, because the last I heard he was still in the same situation; he still drinks. He spoke English very well, while most of us did not. In Russia his aunt was the Princess Lobanov-Rostovskii, a lady-in-waiting of the Empress, and his uncle was an attache of the American Embassy. They fell in love and got married and she came to America with him. Naturally she was very happy to find her nephew, and her husband was working in the Crocker National Bank, and Mr. Crocker was a good friend of hers, so right away he arranged for this Dmitrii--that was his first name--to be given a job in the bank as a teller, so he had a white collar job from the beginning, a good job, and a very good boss, because Mr. Crocker was fond of his aunt.

Well, he didn't keep that job and he sank lower and lower. When my father heard about it, he did not know what the situation was, and he invited him to our house. I saw that something was peculiar, but I had never met any alcoholics in Russia--it was not very frequent--so I didn't know what was the matter, but his behavior was very strange. He never lifted a finger to do anything except smoke a cigarette, and did nothing to help my mother. She killed herself working; she died when she was only 54, from work and worry. So finally I asked him to leave. Then he was a janitor somewhere; well, everybody was a janitor, but everybody else tried to better themselves, but he didn't; he finished picking up cigarettes off the street. Somebody told me he is still alive, but he doesn't pick up cigarettes anymore. Some Russian who has an apartment house took him as a janitor. I don't know if he still drinks.

But this was the only one of those five hundred men. All the others did their best, and everybody improved their living conditions. They got better and better. Some managed to bring some money with them, but those were mostly Siberian millionaires, kuptsy (merchants). Some of the women sewed their money in their dresses, and so on, but those helped the rest of the Russians as much as they could. One of those who managed to get some of his fortune out was Kuvaev, who had been one of the very rich merchants of Siberia, with gold mines and all that. He had a nursery for the women who went to work, and so on.

And so the few Russians who had money did help the others. The boys went to universities, and worked at night; they didn'thave time to make demonstrations or anything; they worked. My brother Paul was working part time in the Delmonte factory watching the wrapping machines--for a long time he couldn't look at a Delmonte sign--and part time in a nursery. Since he didn't know anything about plants I imagine he did a terrible job. And Peter was washing dishes in a restaurant in Berkeley, and probably not too well either. Alex, my youngest brother, had the best paying job. He was a gifted mechanic; he could drive, repair or do anything; he was driving a truck for an undertaker. He said fishing the dead bodies out of the Bay was very unpleasant, but for that time it was comparatively well paid.

RP: So your whole family was there.

Vernon: Yes, my three brothers and I, and my father and mother. We were lucky because my two younger brothers, Peter and Alexander, had been sent away from Petersburg ahead of time. Both were in the cadet corps, This was still under the Provisional Government, before the Bolsheviks took over, but already they had started to throw the boys in the Fontanka. Besides, there was nothing to eat, so my mother shipped them with my aunt to Harbin, where my uncle, Nazorov, was chief attorney. He had no children, and so my two brothers were dumped in his house, to his great discomfort, because at that age they were terrible. He was married, but very strict, like most attorneys, and I don't think they made him too happy. However, I didn't know about their existence at this time. My brother Paul, and my husband were in the army until finally we escaped. We had a little harder time. As I say, for two years we did not know if the others were still alive. When we finally found that they were, to our great pleasure, we managed to communicate, by a very complicated way, and they sent us some money for the tickets so we could leave.

RP: How did you learn that they had survived? The Red Cross was not available then; was it just hearing from people that you met?

Vernon: Yes. Well, at this time the Russians were very close to each other. Most of them lived near the Fillmore district, but at this time Fillmore was a very nice street, whereas now they say its a dump, and even the policemen are afraid to go there. From the old times there were kind of arches and big lamps, with electric globes. It was really very pretty, and all the stores were Jewish stores, and those Jews were very, very nice. They were mostly Russian Jews, and spoke Russian and helped the Russians to settle in the Fillmore district. They had come before the Revolution; they had stores, different kinds of groceries and so on--at this time they didn't have those big markets--but they had stores of groceries, and meat, and what not. Even pharmacies. The pharmacist, Mr. Bachman, knowing the position of the Russians, arranged with the Russian doctors to make a special mark on the prescriptions, and he charged only half price. You know, things like that.

There was just one church then, the one on the corner of Green and Van Ness; it is more like a chapel. It is still there. With Father Shakovich, a Russian priest, who was here before, and then there was the parish house. There have been many offers to buy it, because now they have the big cathedral on Geary Street, but it is still there.

Later, when things became a little better, we had balls every year, to help the Russian veterans across the waters, because especially the wounded ones were in a terrible situation. Often the Scottish Rite auditorium, quite a large place, gave the place for free, so that we could use it for balls. In many ways, as I said, I have to give credit to the Americans who were very, very helpful and kind. The Jewish people who said that in Russia they had been so terribly persecuted didn't seem to resent it, because all of them helped a great deal. However, the Russians started to move away to the avenues, near Clement Street, etc., and now they say that Fillmore has changed.

And now, naturally, all of my generation are dying. Oleg was the last one of his class at the Litsei (Lyceum). Now there is only one left, Mr. Klibanov (?) in San Francisco. Oh yes, in the south, in Santa Barbara, there is the Archbishop, Prince Shakovskoi. He is of one of the younger classes. As to the school of my cousin, the Pravovedy (?), there is only the Prince Ukhtomskii (?), in San Francisco, who is 92 or 93; all the rest are dead.

As for our children, they are all married, to American girls. Some kept the Russian language, butnot many. My son speaks Russian with an American accent. He understands Russian perfectly but he says it is too complicated /to speak it/.

RP: Is he still in the service?

Vernon: No, no. He left after the war. He is in the automobile business. He lives in Milbrae; that is where I am going to live now, when I finish all of this Medicare business, and all of the bills of Oleg's death, and close out the accounts. I am going to leave in about two weeks. But my granddaughters don't speak any Russian. My brother Peter and his wife tried to keep their daughter, my niece, from speaking English, only French and Russian, until she would go to school, so as not to spoil her accent, because the English accent spoils all the other languages, but it didn't help. So right now Xenia tries very hard to bring the Russian back, but her son is already 23 years old, so she is not a young girl, and her accent is very amusing, partly English, partly French. I always have fun talking to her. I talk Russian to her just as I talk to my son; he understands. But with Xenia I always laugh a little bit, because it is a very amusing Russian.

RP: Does her son speak any Russian?

Vernon: Oh no, and it is the same with my grand daughters. A few families, the ones that were younger, and could, kept their children home, but most of them are like my son, they speak half and half. This is what they call the second emigration. Most of them escaped from the Bolsheviks through Siberia, and later, when in the 1940's the Bolsheviks came to Harbin and Shanghai, they came here. They were younger. We were the old emigration, the first one.

Some lived for quite awhile in Peking and came here after World War II, but some came a little later, when the communists started to take China. I know a lady, here in Carmel Valley, who speaks Chinese perfectly, because her parents lived in Peking, and there was a Russian doctor, who died a short time ago, at the very ripe age of 96, who practiced in Peking.

Many escaped from Shanghai; they knew that the communists were taking ove but those were in a little better position; they had already had some training, in the different arts and trades,in China. When they came here they already could get jobs that were decent, of a better class than digging ditches and what not. We were the first emigres, and then the second emigration had it a little better. For awhile they couldn't come directly to America, there was the visa and so on, so quite a large group lived in the Philippine Islands, on Tubabao, and there they learned English perfectly, whereas most of us didn't know it at all when we came. Others learned the same way I did, we never lost the accent. My two youngest brothers didn't have any accent at all, but they both were teenagers, in high school. Peter was actually 18, he had graduated already, but he still was in the young class. My brother Paul and I were 20, and after you are over 20 it is awfully hard to lose your accent. And Alexander, my youngest brother, you wouldn't know that he was not an American; he died very young.

6. The Russian Tearoom

RP: How were you able to start the tea room in San Francisco?

Vernon: For awhile, after we came in 1922, I was a waitress. My mother was a marvellous cook; I never did figure out how she learned; she never cooked in Russia, but somehow she developed that talent. She could sew, although she had never sewn in Russia, because since we had no ready to wear clothes in Russia you had to go to a tailor, and anyway the Russian men all wore uniforms. I never saw my father in civilian clothes until I came to America, nor my brothers either. But somehow my mother knew how to sew, though up to now I cannot understand where she learned. She used to go to the basement of the Emporium or the City of Paris, and buy leftovers for two dollars and fifty cents, and just from looking at the display at I. Magnin's, which at this time was one of the two best stores in San Francisco, she made a pattern, and from that she made me a dress. She made it so well that they asked me: "Where did you get that beautiful model?" And I would say: "In the basement at the Emporium, for $2.95!"

(Telephone rings; digression regarding forgetting languages. She says she has forgotten her German, but thinks it would soon come back.]

...with me, I could sit here with you and recite Russian poetry for two hours, without stopping for one minute. The same with French and German poetry too, but speaking it, that is another matter. Isn't that strange?

RP: If you or I tried to memorize something now, it would be more difficult than it used to be.

Vernon: No, I could; it would just take a little longer. My memory is still good for poetry, though sometimes zero in life. This morning I couldn't even remember the number of my postoffice box in Carmel Valley! It's a very strange machine, our mind, very strange. It works in unusual ways. So when people say "This kind of miracle happened to me!" I never say no, because its a possibility, and because I have seen too many examples in the War and the Revolution where things were absolutely unbelievable, but they did happen. Like in the movies.

For instance, I was telling Vera Aleksandrovna (Elischer) a short time ago about my father when he escaped from Siberia. As I told you, he was on the General Staff, and a soldier was elected to become the head of the General Staff. He was very drunk that day, so when they gave him the permit for my father to leave, he signed it, and on the 13th of January 1918 my mother and my father left Petersburg. My husband and my brother could not go because they didn't have a permit, and secondly they were just young boys, lieutenants, and they were keeping all the young people because they wanted to put them in the Red Army.

By the time my father reached Irkutsk in the middle of Siberia, by that time they must have been in communication with Petersburg, and heard that something was wrong, that the permit had not been given by comissar whatever-his-name-was, and that my father was traveling on false papers.

So they took him off the train, and had a court martial, and when they brought my father in he figured "Well, the next thing will be that they will shoot me."

But then one of the men, the head judge, if you want to call him that, of those three commissars, said to the other two: "Leave me alone, I want to talk to the General myself."

Why they obeyed him I don't know, perhaps he threatened them in some way. The Bolsheviks were not very well organized at that time; it was just the beginning. And so, when they had gone, suddenly the commissar in charge turned to my father and said: "General, do you not remember me?"

My father said "I haven't the slightest idea who you are; I have never seen you before."

But he said"I remember you very well."

"How did it happen?" said my father.

"When you were in Vladivostok," he said, "where we had our Institute of Oriental Languages." This institute was not for military people, but for general students. In the old times we were always organizing balls or spectacles for the benefit of the students, to help them out, to pay their tuition, and so on. And so it was a benefit evening, for the students of the Institute of Oriental Languages. And he said "I approached you, and I told you that I was in a very bad financial position and I wanted to go to Moscow and continue my studies in the university but I didn't have any money, and you gave me 200 rubles."

And my father said "Oh? Did I?"

And he said "Yes you did, and I haven't forgotten it, and so the back door is open. I have told the soldiers to put your luggage on the train that is going east, and your wife has been transferred too."

My father wanted to thank him, but he said "We have no time for thanks; just walk as fast as you can." And so he saved my father's life. So you see [the result of] a miserable 200 rubles--well it was money, yes, but my father had forgotten about it completely in over 20 years. In many cases people were saved like that; they did something good for some soldier, and when the soldier became a big commissar later on, he would shelter them, or tell them that they might be arrested, so not everybody was bad.

We cannot change things now, its too late; we made lots of mistakes, so that's why I am always a little afraid for America. The Bolsheviks are working hard here, very hard. Even in Carmel Valley, I know three, three agents of the communists, can you imagine that? And they are born Americans, they are not Russians.

But one, a woman, made me laugh very much. At that time I had a larger place. It was during lunch, which was very annoying because later on I would have remembered. But she came in while I was busy, the customers were coming and I had to seat them, the cook wanted this, and the waiters wanted that. And she brought me a letter and she said "Would you kindly translate this for me?" Can you imagine it? It was one time when I found the Bolsheviks being stupid; usually they are very clever. She didn't know Russian! She thought,"She's a waitress, she's alright."

And this letter was very interesting, it was from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR. I tried desperately to remember the name of the commissar, but when you are busy you just cannot. It must have been a code, because he said: "Dear Mrs. ...: We have to inform you in reply to your letter that the situation with the wolves in the USSR is very acute now, because they attack the sheep in Siberia, and we might lose some stock, so would you pay attention to the wolf situation in the United States?"

It was an idiotic kind of thing, but I understood what it was. I told her: "If you will leave it with me I will give you a good translation." But she said "Oh, no, no! I just wanted you to give me an idea of what it is!" I didn't remember the name exactly, but I wanted to write to that commissar and say "Comade, if you choose an agent to work in the underground in the USA you should be a little smarter than to choose that stupid woman!"

Pretty soon they disappeared. And one of those fellows used to be a lieutenant commander in the American Navy!

RP: But how do you know?

Vernon: The boys told me, the American boys. You see, there was a corner store, called The Encounter. And he was working there, and when I asked a lady who had a store farther on I said "Why is he, a middleaged man, working in that store?" And she said, "Oh, he is working there because he says he has to do something to earn his living!"

That's funny, I thought, they get a good pension, /he doesn't need/ to make sandwiches for a bunch of kids. And then after Viet Nam one of the boys told me, he said /this man/ had meetings in the evenings where he was lecturing the boys who came back from Viet Nam, who were especially bitter because of the war and everything, and he was telling them: "What could be better so that there would be no war?" and the blessings of the communist regime, and so on. I know the boy, I know that he's honest, and he wouldn't have invented it anyway. I saw him always in the store where this funny woman, who had the letter was, by this time she had a doughnut shop, and he was always hanging around there too, and then there were the other people by the big place, they were the big shots, they had money, and they were all working together.

And one time they were passing my shop in the middle of the day, that was when I /still/ had the big place, and I heard someone say in English: "We should burn that damned place!" And I wanted to jump out from behind the counter, but I didn't have time , and to say: "Listen comrades, just give me time to get good insurance, and go ahead!" Because they had already burned my place in San Francisco, so I knew from experience that I must have a good insurance before they did the job.

RP: Now back to the tea room. You began working as a waitress in 1922; how long did you hold that position?

Vernon: For two or three years, and then the lady who owned that little place sold it to me. By that time we had accumulated a little money; at that time you could buy a place for a hundred dollars.

RP: What was this place?

Vernon: It was a tea room, not far from Van Ness and from the Russian church, near Green Street. And then at this time Monsieur Verdier, who owned the City of Paris, he had a beautiful building on top of Russian Hill, 1001 Vallejo, a beautiful place. They called it "the Ghost House," so nobody wanted to take it. The story was that it was built in the style of a European castle. 1000 Vallejo was very steep, and actually it was poor for business because the cars would not go up that hill. It was built by some millionaire lumberman for his lady friend that he expected to marry, but she changed her mind and didn't want to marry him. So the building wasn't quite finished, and Mr. Verdier saw it and he wanted it for his wife, who was in France, so he finished it. It was built in the old fashioned way, there were steps and little couloirs (corridors) and then other steps, and balconies. And the main living room was double light, two storeys, and a gorgeous dining room and then the sunken garden. So he offered to let me take the dining room, and so we got together with the chef, and Russian girls who needed a job. Because when Madame Verdier came from France and saw the house she didn't want to live in it /either/.

At this time there was a club there, the Hillcrest Club, which occupied the whole building, with pictures, and lectures. It was an artistic club, and Mrs. Livingstone, the head of it, was very artistically inclined. So I took that sunken garden, and there we fixed up the dining room, and the kitchen of the Hillcrest Club, so we were feeding the members of the club, and then open to the public too, and gradually we got an orchestra, with two singers. And so it became The Russian Tea Room. It became very popular because the chef was very good. We made lots of mistakes, but I guess I'm used to customers coming in, to find out about such a strange place with strange speaking people.

We had lots of trouble there on account of Prohibition. We had actually to be like policewomen, and very nearly search our customers, which was very unpleasant. They brought their liquor in those flat bottles (flasks) and the ladies had them in their purses. It was something that I didn't like at all. And the girls had not only to watch their food, they had to watch the glasses, because there were /fountains/ in the sunken garden and they would pour the water out and pour in the liquor from their flasks. I always said that the glasses should be kept full of water, so the girls were filling them with water all the time. It was becoming very annoying, and I thought My goodness, there will be...

RP: Why did they call it "the Ghost House?"

Vernon: That was because it was deserted for awhile, and there were hoboes--at that time there were no hippies--and these hoboes, usually old men, lived in the basement, and they had candles, and the people saw the moving lights of the candles. And one of those hoboes hanged himself in the basement, so this gave a reputation to the place. And then a poet--he was part Japanese and part American, named Harashiri (?), took the opera house, when it was the Hillcrest Club, and would stand there on the balconies in a white robe and make long speeches, and declaim from Shakespeare. And a brother of Isadora Duncan, who was always walking in a long white dress, he was there too, and the two of them would be playing Shakespeare, reciting on the balcony in the moonlight. So there were those two men, and the lights in the basement.

And then Mr. Verdier put them out, and cleaned up the place, and the Hillcrest Club, and then we came. But I just couldn't deal with the problem of Prohibition; I was afraid that some scandal would break out, and there would be war, because how could we prove that we did not serve it? So that's why I went to Mr. Verdier and said "Either you cancel my ... or tell the Liquor Control why I am leaving." That was in 1926. But it was all the time constant fighting; it was tiresome.

7. Another Russian Tea Room

And then I borrowed money, all around--frankly, I don't remember how I did it, and then opened the Russian Tea Room down on Sutter Street, at Number 326, and we had a very good business. And again the Americans were very helpful. Dohrman (?) Hotel Supply was the company that supplied all the restaurants, and I did not have any money except the money that I borrowed here and there, which was very limited. I still remember his name, Mr. Sheray (?), he was the trade manager. I went to him and asked "Will you give me credit?" He looked at me for awhile, and then said "I will." So I got all the equipment on credit, and he didn't ask me where I was born or anything.

And the plumbing there was very difficult, because it was a /high?/ building and they had to bring those pipes. Oh, it was dirty, and for new equipment and so on we had to have those long pipes on the roof; it was the law. Mr. Hutchins did the plumbing, and the bill came to nearly a thousand dollars. "I can give you two hundred," I said, "will you give me credit?"

"I'll let you know tomorrow,"he said. And he went to Mr. Sheray, and Mr. Sheray said, "I know that she will pay you. She will work her fingers off and she will pay you, so I guarantee her bill." So next day Mr. Hutchins came down and said "I will give you credit." And when I paid him, he never told me why, but later he told me why he had done it. He said "Did you know that Sheray guaranteed your bill? Believe me, I am surprised that he did." That was the way the Americans did business, they kind of judged you. Then the business went very good, and I paid off my bills very quickly.

Depression days

And the Depression came, and everybody's business fell off. It started in 1929; 1930 was still allright; in '31 it began to show a little bit, and then in '32 things became really bad, because it came from the East, then spread across America, and then it came to the west. And then, well people were starving, but they weren't the Americans of nowadays; they were a different people; I respected them highly; I was very proud of the Americans. You could walk in the streets of San Francisco in the middle of night, and nobody would ever attack you. Nobody was stealing; there was no murder. People had reason to--when you see your child hungry you can kill--but nothing happened. I had girls at this time who worked as usherettes in the movie houses. There were no taxies then, and they would take a car after 1 o'clock at night to go to Hunters Point where their parents were living. Today the policemen are afraid to go there at one or two at night, but then they could walk 4 or 5 blocks to their houses and nobody was ever even touched. Of the hundreds of people who came in the restaurant, not one asked me /for food/; they would say "What can I do to get a meal?" And when we had food I served them, and there wasn't one who didn't get up /after eating/ and say "Now, lady, what can I do for you?"

We had one man who was coming in the evening who was dying of cancer--at that time there was no Medicare or anything--and that man, on his death bed, dying of cancer, knowing that I was a Russian, embroidered --cross stitched--a picture of a Russian troika. This was the Americans of that day.

And not only the poor but the rich. I always remember Tommy McGee (?). His family was one of the richest in San Francisco, and his mother, Mrs. Miller, owned half of Oakland. But one day he came in and said--he was one of my favorite customers, I liked him very much, he had been educated in Switzerland and Oxford and a year here, --and he said "Can I go to the kitchen and ask the chef how to make a beef stew?"

I said, "Tommy, what for?" You know they had a mansion on Pacific Heights, and so on, his father was dead. They had been thrown into such financial condition that they had to sell everything, and the boy was driving a truck for a construction firm. And he said: "When we stop I have to cook for my gang, so I want to find out how to make beef stew." He was a wonderful boy. During World War II he was the first one shot, Thomas McGee III was the first casualty. He was in the Navy.

That was the way people were then. There was the son of another family--they had been millionaires in real estate--and he came in and I said "What are you doing?"

He said "Oh, I am driving a truck for the milk company."

"Don't you find it a little difficult?" I said.

"Oh," he said, "I never knew the sunrises were so beautiful!" He had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning. Most of the people did a beautiful job, and if Mr. Roosevelt hadn't interfered, and introduced the WPA, most of America would still be as it used to be. My father at this time was alive, and he said "This is the first blow at the American [system], to get something for nothing. It has never been done before. This is the first step in the downgrade of everything." Which it was.

The night they burned the tea room

RP: You mentioned that your second tea room was burned; could you tell about that?

Vernon: That happened on December 6, 1932. It was in the middle of the depression; things were so bad that I didn't know how to pay the PG & E; I didn't know how to pay the rent. At this time I had no unions, and the only way we existed, my chefs were getting $64 a week. That was a very high salary at the time because they were excellent chefs, and the girls--I don't remember how much they were getting--but anyway, I called them all together and I said, "You see the situation. I don't want anybody in the breadline [breadlines then were two and three blocks long] so I don't want to let anybody go; you go home, and figure out what you can exist on, because..."

I had two chefs, and Konstantin, who was a bachelor, came back and said "I can live on $18 a week." And Vladimir, who was married and had a son, he said $21. And the girls, and the kitchen help--we had Filipinos--asked only a dollar, and so we didn't fire a single person out of 25 employees. We survived because there was no union to interfere. I presume every owner of restaurants and other businesses did the same thing, but the banks laid off many. My cousin, the one that died, he was in the Crocker Bank, and in one day they laid off 250. Actually we had more people in the kitchen than we had in the dining room.

They threw a Molotov cocktail.

RP: Why? Were they trying to organize your staff?

Vernon: No, no. They just wanted to burn the place. They didn't like my father, and me. My father was not very popular with the communists.

RP: Because of his activities in the Russian Civil War?

Vernon: Yes, because of that, but more because here in America he was an honorary member of the American Legion, and a member of the Un-American Activities. You see, in the American Legion there was an Un-American Activities /division?/ and my father was a member of that. Well, he hated the communists as much as anyone could, so naturally they didn't have much liking for him, or for me either.

At this time the Molotov cocktail was not called that; it's a bottle, but if you want to burn a place I can tell you how to do it! Marshal Kelly, our fire chief at that time, explained to me how it was /made/... Marshal Kelly told me exactly the place where it fell, and he made a package very similar. The kitchen wasn't burned, it went through the kitchen into the dining room, and the pantry in between. And he told the policeman to throw this bag and it landed where he told me. It was unbelievable, because the place was burned black, black all over, and he found the right place.

So he asked me what my insurance was--at this time many businesses and restaurants were burning /for the insurance/. I said it used to be $12,000, but when my friend (the agent) called me up, and asked if I wanted to raise my insurance, I said "Darling, I don't have the money to pay for it."

/End of interview for that day; resumes next day/

...the Bolsheviks don't talk like we do; they talk differently. One friend of mine, who died a short time ago, a Russian Jew, very highly educated, Mr. Truve (?), who lived in Carmel, made a trip to the USSR. He finished at Petrograd University, and before this he was in the Annenschule, one of the best schools in Russia. I don't know why it was called that. It wasn't Catholic, so it wasn't named for any saint. The other was the Peter and Paul school. Two German schools, and they were very, very good, the best ones in Petersburg.

Well, he finished there, and then he finished at the University of Petersburg. He lived here for close to 50 years--he had a marvellous collection of Russian records and books--and then he went to the USSR for a trip. And that made me laugh very much too, because he had been very radical in his principals, although just the same he didn't like the Bolsheviks. But after he had visited the USSR he came back the biggest monarchist you could expect; he changed his mind about everything. But he said that he was afraid he was beginning to forget Russian, having been over here so long, but he said the people there stopped him sometimes, saying: "Would you mind talking to us? You speak such a beautiful Russian; its classical Russian!" So Mr. Trubik laughed when he came back. "I thought I spoke Russian," he said, "but now I find that I speak classical Russian!"

RP: Could we return now to the tea room in San Francisco. You told how the depression came, and your establishment was burned by arsonists.

Vernon: Yes, business was dropping and dropping, but at this time we didn't have any unions; I think I told you that we just kind of compromised with the help and the chefs went to 18 and 21 dollars a week, and the girls to one dollar, but this way not one of our 25 employees went to the breadline. And on top of that, my father--he had the Russian Veterans Association (Obshchestvo russkikh veteranov), he organized it many years after we came, of former officers, and there they had some clothes and beds, and we sent what was left of the clothes down there. In we avoided more or less starvation for the people, and the same with the help; I did not fire one person, but there was no union. Now you would have to keep the salary even--it was what I told those idiots in the union. I said: "You cannot squeeze blood out of a turnip, why do you try? So many places have been ruined on account of this, putting up salaries that they could not possibly afford. The St. Francis and the littletea room are not in the same league, you know!"

RP: So the little ones would be forced out of business, leaving the people without jobs?

Vernon: That's exactly what happened. But after they burned my place, we knew who had done it, because my brother had seen him in the back alley at 1 o'clock that night. My brother and his wife had gone to a movie, and as they were coming back he went through the back alley, to go to the kitchen to get something, and that fellow was walking there. So my brother told Marshal Kelly, and Marshal Kelly said "Aha! That must be it! But the trouble is you cannot prove it as arson."

So he sent two detectives of the criminal detail or something like that to me. And this time I laughed my head off, because I was young and still could laugh. They were the funniest kind of characters, just like in the movies, very big, tall, and husky, with kind of round hats, and cigarettes, this way, and they said "Well lady, we talked to that fellow, and he said, yes, he was in the back alley; he was going to Chinatown, to get some cigarettes." It sounded very funny. He said, "There is no question that there is something there, but we have to have your permission."

I said "What do you mean, permission?"

He said "We'll take him to a private hotel, and have a nice private conversation, and after that conversation he will confess."

I said "Well, gentlemen, I have left my country because they used private conversations, and I am not going to go for the same here. Forget about it."

And he said, "So you don't give us any permission? Well, alright lady, that's up to you," and with their cigarettes hanging down, they left.

But everybody was just wonderful. Everyone of my suppliers said "We will extend credit until you reopen, and we will send you everything you want until you are again on your feet." All except Mr. Waxman. He was the breadman; he made excellent Russian bread, I have to admit; he was a little Jew, very small, he spoke Russian as well, and this was another amusing anecdote.

He came in, he looked around the place, and he said "Hm, burned?"
I said "Yes, burned."
"Pretty bad?"
"Pretty bad."
"Well, how is your insurance?"
"No good," I said.
"Hm, not covered, not at all?"
"Not at all."
He said, "Not declaring bankruptcy?"
I said, "No."
He said, "You mean you are overhead in debt, and you don't want to declare bankruptcy?"
I said "No, I am not going to do it, Mr. Waxman."
It was funny, he wore suspenders, and he put his thumbs into them, pulled them up and stepped back and he said "I'll tell you, I thought you were a smart woman, but I found that you are a *schlemiel*!"
But he still gave me credit, even though he lost his respect for me--I was a schlemiel!

But we all worked, everybody worked; the chefs painted the walls, the girls worked, and all my family, and in about two months we rebu the whole thing and we started all over again.

By that time, things were worse. It was 1933, the banks were closing, but we did the best we could. In 1934 things worked out fine, until the great strike, led by Mr. Bridges.

Really life is strange--before the depression my chef Konstantin wanted to take a vacation and go to Hawaii. Well, I didn't know where to get a replacement, so I called up the union, and I said "Do you have a Russian chef by some chance?"
"Yes, we do," he said.
"I said, "Well that's fine, could he work for about two weeks to replace Konstantin?"
"Oh sure," he said, "we'll send him in."

So that fellow came. Vasilii Zakharov was his name, and from the beginning I saw he did not belong. He had very communistic inclinations, and we were all White Russians. As a cook he was no good, and he was very annoying toward my waitresses, who were young and pretty. In every respect he was unsatisfactory.

We suffered with him for about a week, and then I talked to Vladimir the lunch chef and he said "Well, I'll fix it up; I'll work nights. We cannot stand that fellow."
So I told him "Vasilii, I'm sorry, but you don't fit in here. Here is your check."
He understood, and he said "I'm sorry I disturbed you."

That was before the depression. When the strike of 1934 began, Mr. Bridges ordered everything closed, everything except the gas and electricity. It was like in Russia, everything was dead.

But then the strangest thing happened. When I opened the newspaper, I found that Vasilii Zakharov had by that time become a big shot in the Communist Party. He was the chief of the Maritime Chefs Union, and a member of the party. And so when my head waitress came in, and she said "Vasilii wants to talk to you," I said "What can he talk to me about?" I went to the dining roomand there was Vasilii. "I came to talk to you," he said.
I said "All right, Vasilii, what's it about?"
He said, "Tomorrow everything has to be closed, and knowing you I am afraid you are not going to do it."

/Interruption/

/He warns her to close/.

... and then a Bolshevik, and after I had fired him, had the kindness to come and tell me. I was stunned for a minute, and naturally I shook his hand and said "Thank you, Vasilii." And I closed, like everybody else.

So this was another surprise in my life; the strangest things happen, like this. The strike lasted only three days, but it was like in Russsia, they were turning back the trucks that were bringing food to San Francisco, and near Brisbane they were turning them over, down the hills, inclines and so on, and then there was some trouble with the police and I think two of them were killed, and there was a big howl about that, that the police were doing the most horrible things--just like the media always do--but somehow the strike was settled, and then business was good,/in the rest of 1934, and 1935 and 1936/.

Southern California

I sold the place only when the war started, when my son had to go in the Air Force.

RP: That was in 1941? You had kept it for a long time.

Vernon: Yes, a long time, from 1924 to 1941. Iurii, my son, was stationed at Long Beach, Burbank Airport--he had to change the motors or something, and he was married by that time too, and my first grand daughter was born there. So I stayed there during the war, though I didn't like it.

But the tearoom, the man I sold it to, in 9 months he went broke. He was a Russian, but he changed the whole thing; he changed the whole atmosphere. The first thing was it never had a bar; I didn't like that, and he put in three bars; and he changed my orchestra from a balalaika orchestra into some kind of a violin trio, and the chef quit. He got a very good chef, and instead of having a family place where ladies could come in unescorted he changed it into a ... and so he went bankrupt and the place died out, and it was the end of the Russian tearoom.

In Southern California I had just a little place, because I had to do something. It was a small cafe, most of the men were military people. And then, naturally, I was with Shirley, my daughter-in-law a great deal, their first baby died, so there was enough trouble down there.

Return to San Francisco

After the war we came back, but by then San Francisco was completely different. It was another San Francisco, like somebody took it, moved it away and put in something else.

RP: In what way?

Vernon: Well, because in the old times, during the depression, when people were hungry, really hungry, and you understand--well, not being a mother you don't know it--but actually when your child is hungry you might kill; I wouldn't blame them, but you could walk anytime in the night or day anyplace in San Francisco. We had no murders, no rapes, no trouble whatsoever; I had some girls, still in high school, who /also/ worked as usherettes, to help their parents to survive. One, for instance, worked in the California Theater that was on the corner of Third and Market. They closed at 1 o'clock, and this young lady, very pretty too, only 16, she would go on Market Street at 1 o'clock in the morning and take a street car to Van Ness, and on Van Ness change to South Van Ness, stand there waiting for the other car, and go to the end of the line, to Hunters Point. Now when the policemen go on Hunters Point, they go three together, never one, yet from the end of the street car line, from the terminus, it was four blocks to where her parents lived, but she said "Nobody even talked to me." Now, even for an elderly woman to walk one block... this was the whole difference.

When we came back I got a house on Buena Vista Park. In the old times I used to walk in Golden Gate Park at night, alone, with my two little dogs--I had a sealyham and a scotty, each about ten inches high--but I liked it. After having been all day with cigarette smoke and people I was tired, and I always lived near the park so I would have a chance to go out. So I would go walking in Golden Gate Park with as little concern as right here now. The people you would meet would say "Nice evening," and you would say, "Yes it is," and they would say "Well, have a pleasant walk." And never, never, absolutely nobody ever was afraid, it was so beautiful there at nighttime.

When I moved back, naturally I thought that San Francisco was the same, so I got a house near Buena Vista Park, that is, on top of the Buena Vista Hill--Buena Vista Avenue goes around it and the park is in the center, so the street has only one side. By that time I did not want to go downtown, because I didn't like the outlook there--women walking with their hair in curlers, and in slippers or sandals--I was shocked. On Grand Avenue in the old time a woman would walk in a hat and with gloves and a purse, looking ladylike, and those people looked like tramps. So I had a place on Ocean Avenue, where there was a better class of people, anyway better than...

But one of the first nights, after fixing up the place, around ten o'clock or something like that, I took my two dogs and was crossing Buena Vista Avenue, and I saw a police car kind of slowing down, and then the officer kind of leaning out of the window, and he said "Where are you going, lady?"

I said, "I'm going to walk in the park."

He said, "You're going to do WHAAAT!" You know, as if I had said I was going to jump on the moon. He was a young man, and I said "Young man, when you were in your diapers I used to walk in that park at night."

Well, he started laughing, and he said "Have you been away?"

"Yes, five years," I said.

He said, "You know, we even advise a man not to walk there alone in the day time. So you'd better take my advice, don't go across the street, keep on that side."

So only then I took his advice, which later on proved to be the best thing I could do. It had changed completely, so this was the beginning of my understanding, because I used to walk in Sutro Forest, Sutro Park, any place, you know, and I liked always to have empty spaces where the dogs could run with no chance of getting hit by a car.

They have wonderful parks there. Golden Gate Park is beautiful, and the same with Sutro Heights. It was beautiful in the day time , because I didn't go there at night. My house was near the Golden Gate, very, very deserted. Or even the Getty (?) cemetery; it was a beautiful place too, and very safe for my two little dogs.

But then later on it got worse and worse, and then this Haight-Ashbury, it began to be full of hippies and Negroes and what not, and my two little dogs died, of old age, they were each about 15. And so I got a Doberman, and he never attacked anyone. I let him run in the park in the night time, and if anybody was in the park /then/ he shouldn't be. Well, he wouldn't attack, but naturally the sight of a Doberman frightened people. And one night I heard him barking; I knew from the sound that something was wrong. And there was a big Negro standing there, inside my gate, and I got on the porch and said "What are you doing there?"

And he said "That dog has attacked me."

And I said, "Funny, a dog has attacked you and you got into his yard to protect yourself? That sounds very funny. You had better keep on walking!"

So he kept on walking, and fast, I'll tell you, because King was following him, just growling, a little bit, once in awhile. And he would walk faster and faster.

Well, the next day, King was poisoned. So I sold that house, and we went to San Mateo first, and I still wanted more peace and quiet, so we came to Carmel Valley. I had a restaurant, the Russian Inn, on Ocean

Avenue. I just sold the equipment; part of it we took to San Mateo.

Carmel Valley

RP: When did you get started in Carmel Valley?

Vernon: Nineteen years ago, in 1961. I called it "A Bit of Old Russia," because I wanted it known there was no communist affiliation. There is no "Russia" anymore; "Russia" is dead; we call it "Bolshevizia" or "Sovetshchina". It isn't my country. Russia died, at least for me, in February 1920.

But I am sorry for the Russians, because the Russians are still MY people. Some of those who escaped they have come to me in my little place here. It is the same. One lady, who escaped only a year ago, told me that the KGB car stops and picks you up, and that is the last you hear from them. And one characteristic that is very interesting for me is that in Russia in the old times when we spoke about the government we said *pravitel'stvo*, but now they say *nachal'stvo*, the bosses--'the bosses are telling us,' not the government.

So, for us it was the end of our country. So I made an American out of my son. Oh yes, why should he feel like an emigre, an outcast; its his country, he was fighting for it; and my granddaughters are thoroughly American, both their husbands were fighting in Viet Nam, and they don't speak any Russian at all; my son does, but not my grand daughters.

RP: What do you think of U.S. politics?

Vernon: I vote Republican. What frightens me is that I hope it isn't going the same way as *my* country. In some ways its like an old movie re-run, with different subtitles. In many ways. It is heart breaking, because it is a beautiful country, and I love Americans. But the program is the same, and the Bolsheviks work the same.

I cannot find the paper, it is with the papers of my father, in the Veterans Society in San Francisco, on Lyons Street. And there are none of the old people there /now/, only one old gentleman, who is 84, and /he is a bit ga-ga/. As for the others, it is more of a Russian meeting club now. Most of my father's papers, his decorations even--I asked if I could get his sword, you know, it is Georgievskaia /Note: bestowed with Order of St. George/, but they said "No, it is going to the Hoover Library when the old people are all gone."

But this was an extremely interesting paper. It was 1933, and my father was an honorary member of the American Legion and a member of the Un-American Activities section, and still had some communication with the USSR underground, and the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich was the head of that organization.

And so my father sometimes got information from the underground, how I couldn't tell you. And in 1933, he got that paper, /a plan for/ the destruction of the United States. The speaker was Mr. Kamenev, whose real name was Tsederbaum. He was giving a lecture to the students of the Lenin Institute, the ones for underground work. He was /addressing/ the ones being sent to the United States. This was in Russian shorthand, evidently written by somebody who was in that meeting. My father received it in 1933--my mother died in February of that year, and the meeting was in March, and, as I say, devoted to the destruction of the United ates. My father transcribed it into Russian first, and then translated it to English, and he mimeographed close to a thousand copies. He sent it to everyone from Mr. Roosevelt down to the last assemblyman at Sacramento, but nobody paid any attention.

This is what I can still remember of it. He started by saying: "Comrades, you are going to the United States. You must remember that the Americans are much different from the Europeans and from us Russians. They are very interested in and devoted to their so-called liberties. (Laughter in the audience). So remember that you are not fishing for a small fish, but for a very big one. So be extremely careful. Act like a smart fisherman does with a very large fish; let them take the hook and then let them play for awhile, then pull, and let them play again. We are not in a hurry, eventually we'll get them in the bag, but it will take some time.

"What we are interested in, in the United States, is the middle class. As for Wall Street, when the time comes, we will just liquidate them. As for the unions we have them pretty well organized already. But what America is built on is the middle class, the small business people, and the farmers. We have to destroy that, overtax them, somehow cause trouble in this class by excessive taxation; work in the universities through the young people--old people don't interest us; they are going to die anyway. Try to teach the Americans that there might be strikes; they are not used to that; make strikes, and at times when they are extremely appropriate. And a little bloodshed here and there would not be bad, but always be very careful, remember the Boston Tea Party. If you pull too hard they might do the same thing nowadays.

"Another thing, we don't want any war; what we want is to destroy the United States financially, and when it is in bad shape, then we can work. These are a few points you must work on. The Americans are very much against passports. We want to have them, to have them numbered; we want to know where we can trace a person by the number. [Mrs. V.: We got that with Social Security].

"Another thing, we want to engage them in some kind of competition; and you know, Americans are very fond of being always at the head, Number One, which I admit is a very good quality, even in a hog-calling contest (Laughter in the hall). They want to be Number One, but we will use that quality of the Americans to help them spend money, and we have to try to engage them in some competition which will be very, very expensive (Mrs. V.: later the first sputnik came). And with that problem, let them spend more than they should. Then, when the dollar is low enough, then we'll see. But meanwhile just take your time, do it carefully and gently, and right now don't pull, don't pull! And engage the Americans in wars, not big wars, but small ones, which will cost them money, and exhaust their treasury..."

That was the program, and now I have seen it year by year, this program. The [space program], this stupid thing going round and round, and going to the moon, and the small wars--Korea and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and then Africa, and the last will be South America.

So it was a very interesting paper, but nobody paid any attention to it. As my father was a member of the Legion, he asked if they would read it at the Miami meeting. They read it in 1948 in San Francisco, 13 years later. Later a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, about 20 years after my father had sent it in, said it was a very revealing document. And then there was a columnist, for a long time he was the most famous in America, but I have forgotten his name. I think it began with an S--names are terrible with me. But he said he had had a meeting with Senator Nye, and that "he showed me a letter sent by a Russian general who had escaped the communists, and it was a very revealing document."

They work so hard with the young people. As a very simple example I will tell you of a case here in Carmel Valley, which is mostly a decent, quiet place of middle class people, well-bred, well-educated, nice people. It was just last year, the 4th of July. In former times the 4th of July was something that was so beautiful. There was always a big parade. A man who used to be in the American cavalry--he had a gorgeous horse--would always lead the procession, and always there were lots of girls who are very good horseback riders in Carmel Valley, all of them following with all those American flags; then very often they would send the Presidio band to play, and soldiers--they came to the restaurant to eat--and then girl scouts and boy scouts--it was really very impressive, you know, beautiful. And so Oleg and I decided "We'll open the 4th of July this time; it will revive our spirits to see a good American parade!" And, I'll tell you, we had one!

Next to our little place was a place we called 'the hippy joint'--its a place where they get marijuana and beer. Beer is the important part, they say, but I know there is something more, stronger than that.

At 2:30 it began, and it was absolutely unbelievable. The whole street, you could not pass; traffic stopped. There were around 200 cars and trucks, with all these long-haired, bearded, unkempt characters and women, and we had the same thing as we had during the revolution in Russia; they must have brought something stronger than beer. And for two hours it went on. I was so shocked, I said: "Here is a revolution again," except that in Russia the women did not take part. There was always a bunch of drunken soldiers and men, but not women, and here were those women with hardly any clothes on. And so they were shouting, screaming, drinking, and rolling there in the dirt in the street. No cars were passing by; everybody was scared to death. And we couldn't get a deputy sheriff because they were on strike, there were 16 for all of Monterey County.

At last a neighbor came, a nice lady, the wife of a former lieutenant commander in the navy. She is a big woman, and very decided. She came down through all this, through the back alley and the yards. The noise that these people made was such that it could be heard in her house, two blocks away. And she came in and she said "I came to salvage you; I believe you are in the middle of a riot!"

"We certainly are," I said. And we couldn't get out. The car was parked, and we couldn't get a car through.

By that time, luckily, they got one deputy sheriff, and when she passed by, they quieted a little bit and so we could get to the car and go home. And then, they say, they started all over again, and they finished by knifing each other there and they had the ambulance going there three times. I don't think anybody was killed, but they were pretty well cut up. So this was the difference between the former and the present 4th of July. And I could only say "Well, well, well!" I really got very, very upset. I said this is just the same story with different pictures. Again this was something predicted in that paper I told you about.

RP: Your father's memoirs of the Civil War were published in an emigre journal; did he leave any other accounts?

Vernon: He had many other ones. My father was always writing and writing, and making speeches; it is all there in the Veterans Club. And many books that he donated. So I didn't get anything, and my brothers didn't either; I have only a pair of his epaulettes.

So if you can get in you might find lots of interesting things. And that book about the Russians who were organizing balls and so on to aid the ones who were in Serbia and Bulgaria. Many of them were invalids. Because the Serbs were helping a great deal, we even had a military school there, and a gymnasium, and when Wrangel died there was a state funeral for him, with all the Serbian soldiers standing there with what was left of the Russian army, the White Guard. It was very impressive. I have a picture, which I can send to you. Its in a little book. Wrangel was the last of our generals who was commanding the Volunteer Army.

RP: How did your father get along? Did he get any kind of employment?

Vernon: No, he did not, but somehow he managed; he lived with me and my mother.

RP: Being mainly a military man, I suppose he would have had trouble adapting?

Vernon: He never did; he never took American citizenship, because he said I cannot sign that I renounce Russia, because Russia is now the USSR. I renounce the USSR every moment. But just the same he was a member of the American Legion, and when he died-it broke his heart that he was dying as a civilian--the American Legion sent men to stand as an honor guard at his coffin. The Russian officers were there, and so was the American Legion, and when they buried him there was a platoon of the 1st Marines, and they played taps and fired their rifles. So I think he was satisfied--he was buried like a soldier!

RP: In what cemetery was he buried? And what was the date?

Vernon: Serbskii. It was in December; I don't remember the year; it was after 1945. He died of a heart attack. He always loved American soldiers. He took part in the National Guard exercises at Fort Ord, and had a wonderful time crawling through the mud with the soldiers

--at his age!--he enjoyed it very much.

Mr. DeGraaf, in Carmel Valley--he passed away a short time ago--said he always remembered how much my father enjoyed marching with the soldiers. When they had the parade at the Armistice /end of World War II?/ my father was standing by the Lincoln statue in San Francisco, and when he saw the soldiers marching he jumped off, 4 or 5 feet--physically he had still the old training; it was his heart that killed him--so when they saw that he had the Legion cap they said "Oh Grandpa, that's wonderful!" so they grabbed him and he had a wonderful time marching with the American soldiers, as happy as could be. But then he had a terrible time, because he never drank, not a drop, and when the parade ended the boys all went to the bars, and they wanted to drag him along too, and he had a time extricating himself.

He was 78 when he died.

RP: So he must have been born about 1870. He saw a great deal--the Boxer Rebellion, you said, the Japanese War, World War I, and then the Russian Civil War. What of your brothers--did they have an easy time adapting?

Vernon: Well, I told you about Paul, who graduated at Stanford, and Peter graduated in Berkeley; he became one of the very famous professors of Oriental languages, and he was the Dean of Oriental Languages in Berkeley. He was already professor emeritus, but he killed himself, actually, overdoing. He didn't have to lecture anymore, but my sister-in-law, she fell down and knocked her head against some rocks there in Berkeley--they were living on Santa Barbara Road; it was a hemorrhage. And it was actually a Jewish doctor, who was very good, who saved her life. He asked my brother, "Professor, do you want me to operate?" Because the other doctors in Kaiser Hospital refused to operate, it was too serious. Naturally my brother said yes, and that doctor operated from 9 o'clock in the evening until 2 o'clock at night. He saved her life, but not her brain. Six years after my brother's death, Elena is still alive. She is physically OK, even at her age, but mentally she doesn't know her daughter, or her grandchildren, whom she adored, and she doesn't know that Peter is dead.

I have never seen her since that time, but my niece does, the one that I am going to see in Berkeley. She is married to Richard Lee. Every generation has someone named Richard, after Richard Lee who signed the Declaration of Independence. He is Richard Lee the 12th and his son is Richard Lee the 13th. Well, this is a very long and funny story. The old man was very much opposed to the marriage, because I guess he wanted his son to marry an American, and I guess he had it figured out who he was to marry. But Richard--Dicky-- is not the kind to be told who to marry. So it is to Dicky that I gave many details about our family, our genealogy. Naturally he has his.

They are very happy, except that Xenia goes to see her mother every two or three days; she is in one of those very good retirement homes. Peter was getting a good pension for all his years in the University. He told me that as an emeritus he did not have to go on, but he told me on the telephone that "If I take a few seminars it will raise my psnsion so much that it will take care of Helen for good." I think it was around a thousand dollars a month in the retirement home, and he didn't want it to be a load on Xenia's shoulders. That was a Tuesday, and Thursday he died, of a heart attack. Those extra seminars were something he had to take.

I have a bunch of books about Peter, but I don't understand anything about it. It was by his co-workers, and students and so on, but it is all about Confucius, and Mao-tse-Tung. Well, as for me I don't understand any of it. He never bought a suit; it was always done by his wife, so that when she got sick, he was lost. All he ate was beets.

RP: Beets?

Vernon: Beets. I don't know why. In some ways he was like a child, left without its mother. He did not know anything. Except that Xenia could help him; she is of a very sound mind; I am going to stay with them for awhile. And Dicky is a very good boy--he is a boy to me, though actually he is 23. He is very nice. And Julie is their girl.

But this is modern history, what happens to them and to me. For me it is not important, but what will happen to them I don't know. Every generation has its problems. That's why I never interfered with the life of my son, who is thoroughly American. That's why I had an argument with my father, who said "You are making an American out of him!" And I said "Yes, this is his country. And why should he feel an emigre, and mourn for a country that doesn't exist. I said "I am not going to hurt my son. I want him to be the American that he is, and like baseball, football, basketball and golf!"

INDEX - VERNON

Alexander III, Emperor, 3
Amur River, 6, 7

Barnyard, The (Carmel Valley), 12
Basargin, writer, 8, 9
Bobrinskii, Prince, 15
Bolsheviks, purchase of votes, 10, atrocities, 11, 12
Budberg, Aleksandr, brother, 24, 25, 26, 28
Budberg (Boodberg), Aleksei, 1, 3, to U.S., 19, 29-30, 41, 44-45
Budberg, Paul, 1; service under Gen. Denikin, 1, 7; 45
Budberg, Peter, at Stanford University, 24; 26, 27, 28, 45, 46

Carmel Valley, Fourth of July celebration, 1979, 43-44
Christmas customs, Supplement, 22
Communist activity, purported, 30, 41-43

Depression, 33
Dress of girls, restriction, 12, 13

Elischer, Vera A., 29
English, perfidy of, 16; "Portrait of a gentleman, Mr.
    Reginald King and the bandit queen, Supp., 103 ff.

Fillmore district, San Francisco, in 1920's, 27
Food shortage, 13, 14, 15

Hillcrest Club, San Francisco, 32

Kamenev, speech on tactics, 41-43
Kerensky, Aleksandr, 10
Ksheshinskaia palace, 10

Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich, 10
Livingston, Mrs., head of Hillcrest Club, S.F., 1920's, 32
McGee, Thomas III, 33, 34
Mishchenko, P.I., General, 4

Nazorov, uncle, chief attorney, Harbin, 26
Nicholas II, Emperor, 2; abdication, 9
Nikolai, uncle, steelmill of, 1, 2; sawmill, 8

Russians, characteristics of, 11, 21 ff.
Russian emigres, old and new waves, 27
Russians in San Francisco, 21 ff
Russian tea room, 22ff., 31, 32, burned, 34 ff; restored, 37.
Russo-Japanese War, 1, 2

San Francisco,in 1920's, 21 ff.; in post-war period, 39
Shakovich (Shakovskoi?), Father, Russian priest, San Francisco, 26
Shakovskoi, Archbishop, 27
Southern California, 1941-1945, move to, 38
Superstitions, Supp., 7-8 to 15; witchcraft, Supp. 27; pagan
    rituals, supp., 77-79, 83

Tolstoi, 8, 9

Ukhtomskii, Prince, San Francisco, 27

Verdier, owner of "City of Paris" store, 31, 32
Vernon, George, son, 27
Vernon, Valentina Alekseevna, nee Budberg, birth, 1,
    marriage to Varipaev (Vernon) in Winter Palace, 10, 11, 12;
    escape, September 1918, 15, 16; emigration to U.S.,
    documents, 18, 19 a, b, c; education, 4, 5, 6
Vladivostok, 2, 3, 4
Vronskoi, Count, shot, 15, 16

ERRATA SHEET

Russian Emigré Recollections: Life in Russia and California

Page Number	Line	Correction
21	15th from bottom	"Sarkovich (?), the Priest" should be "Father Vladimir Sakovich, Dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral,"
26	12th from bottom	"Shakovich" should be "Sakovich Dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral,"

Corrections provided by Maria Sakovich, granddaughter of Father Vladimir Sakovich. For more information, Maria Sakovich may be reached at (415) 849-0508.

Valentina Alekseevna Vernon

Written Recollections

Supplement

SKETCHES OF A FORMER LIFE

By: Mrs. Valentina A. Vernon

Chapter I THE WITCH. Witchcraft among the Pennsylvania Germans; River Belaia, 1904; malignant spirits, 7; a witch, 10

Chapter II THE HOUSE. Life on an estate; Christmas customs 17

Chap. III LITTLE GEORGE WASHINGTON, RUSSIAN STYLE. Uncle Peter, a cossack; Auntie Shura; their son, Oleg 32

Chap. IV SARAH BERNHARDT; School at Institute, in Moscow; A visit from the celebrated French actress 50

Chap. V KATIA. School (cont'd)

Chap. VI THE LAST VACATION. Estate of Uncle Nikolai, at Muromsk; pagan rituals 71

Chap. VII THE VULTURES. Life in St. Petersburg in 1918; trading for food; the "bagmen" 83

Chap. VIII THE ESCAPE 96

Chap. IX PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN; excution of a female bandit; Mr. Reginald King 103

Chap. X FORGET IT; departure from Russia, February, 1920; resettlement in Yugoslavia 111

Chap. XI THE STATUE OF LIBERTY: arrival in New York; journey to California 129

Chap. XII THE RUSSIAN TEA ROOM 135-147

The leaves are falling slowly, slowly they drift from the maple tree: purple, orange, golden leaves in the light of the setting sun. They drift down to be lost in the shadow of the damp earth. Autumn for the garden and for my life.

Before the golden leaves of memories, events and people disappear in the dark, I would like to pick some at random to preserve between the pages of a scrapbook, like our grandmothers used to do in the long bygone days in my long lost country Russia.

The Witch

Six A. M. We are driving back from Washington, D. C. to Hazelton in the Pennsylvania coal region. A dismal greenish light filtering through winter clouds does not look like sunrise at all. Unless--the thought comes to you, weary and tired of the long journey--unless we lost our way and are somewhere on another planet, one of those weird surrealistic landscapes.

Sharp turnes all the time. The road is climbing, but the hills are so desolate. Even the snow, the beautiful white snow is not white at all but grey from the coal dust. Each chilly river we cross looks like another Styx. The miners coming from the graveyard shift are like some damned souls emerging from underground; specters shuffling in the grey snow; ghost faces with a greenish make-up and coal dust mascara around hollow eyes. And no sound but the rustle of the tires on the icy road.

It's too much like a nightmare.,,.We have to break it up. We start to talk all at once. Remembering yesterday's pleasant drive through Lancaster country in that crisp crystal clear afternoon, we marvel about the beautiful farms, the shaded lanes; at the cleanliness, neatness of every inch of ground--groomed, combed, brushed--perfect!

"I know now where Borden's contended cows come from", laughs my son. "How possibly could they be otherwise in those beautiful red barns with electric lights, electric milking machines, ventilation and so on. I bet they have aircooling for the lucky critters! One thing I forgot to ask; why on most of the barns do they have pictures of a cow, a horse and a ship, and above them a funny sign like a whirly Swastika in a circle. Do you know, Joanna?"

Joanna is my sister-in-law and Pennsylvania Dutch. "Oh yes, it is a hex sign."

"Hex--"witch" in German. We don't understand. People don't believe in witches. We are in America. It is the year 1939."

"You would be astounded at how tenacious the belief in witches is among our people here in Pennsylvania," explains my brother Paul, and he starts a long dissertation. The origins of the belief in witchcraft, opinion of Professor "so-and-so," burning of witches, citations from Historian "so-and-so," evil eye, hexing the cattle; "if you want to shoot a witch, you have to use a sawed-off shot gun."

I wonder why it should be sawed off? I must have dozed off. I am awakened by the voice of my son.

"A French proverb says: "Speak of the devil, you will see his tail; here we speak of witches and there is one in person!"

She certainly was a perfect specimen. The car was going very slowly on the icy pavement and we all could see her silhouetted against a rickety hillside cabin. A lantern in her crotchety hand cast a flickering light over a hawk-like nose, toothless mouth; beady eyes peering from under wisps of grey, untidy hair.

"See, she is leaning on a staff. I bet it's a broom; the snow is hiding it," my son was squealing with delight. "Gee, I wish I could take her "as is" to California to a Halloween party! Just imagine, it would floor them all--a real, authentic Pennsylvania witch!"

"Shame on you, George! It's just a poor old worried woman. No doubt she came out to watch for the return of a miner, son or, more probably, a grandson " Joanna was admonishing him, but there was an edge of added anxiety in her voice when she begged Paul to drive more carefully.... Did she cross her fingers surreptitiously inside of her muff?... As to my brother and me , we exchanged one fleeting glance and our simultaneously spoken question clashed in mid-air: "Do you remember?"

I certainly do remember, but it is another country--the mountains of the Ural, our own great divide between Russia proper and the vast Siberia--another river, the fast running Belaya--the year, 1904.

I

The house stood on a hill overlooking the river. On the other bank was the factory, the mysterious place where our uncle spent his days. Everybody on our side, at the house and in the village that lay in a pleasant valley back of our sprawling park, spoke about the factory, the ore, the production, the steel plates.

We saw at day time the tall chimneys sprouting endless columns of smoke; at night flickering fires in what looked from our side to be huge barrels--ovens, the kids in the village told us. Their fathers all worked there too; they seemed well informed at what was going on in that interesting place, but we children of the "house" were not allowed to cross the bridge.

"The factory is no place for children" was the grownups verdict. There were so many places not "for children"--the fascinating world of the kitchen, for instance. It was in a semi-basement of the house. Some mysterious action was going on there, too; appetizing smells, clatter of dishes, chopping sounds, the cook's voice, the kitchen maid's laughter, bits of songs escaped from the windows. Once in a while unseen hands would deposit smoking loaves of bread on the wide windowsills--steaming pies, exciting smelling pots all cooling off in full sight, but like forbidden grapes, out of reach. Any climbing devices; overturned crates, boxes or garden benches were always spotted by one of the governesses and the offender pulled down and told once more to stay out of places that are „not for children." Only once we two, Cousin Lussia and I, were successful in our quest; we carried away an enormous round loaf of bread intended for the help and the girls from the village that were, as usual, called for extra help needed for making strawberry jam....For some unknown reason, it had to be cooked outdoors in large copper pans over an open fire, and what was very important, "under a linden tree." The cooks were carefully spooning off the white scum from the boiling, sweet smelling berries into separate pots. „The jam was to be as clear as crystal," they explained to us. They were nice girls; when the housekeeper was not around, they filled large saucers for us. The forbidden fruit, the stolen loaf of bread, was devoured by us--you would have thought we were starved kids--and the result was a gigantic stomach ache, the doctor and castor oil. Once more it was the same; stay out of places that are „not for children." That meant the animal yard, too; the fascinating place where lived cows, pigs, chickens and turkeys. We were especially interested in the turkeys after the poultry department woman requested some vodka from Claudia the housekeeper-to rub the young turkeys legs. "They are not doing too well; the weather has been so cold. I gave them chopped green onion and red pepper with their mash, but something is wrong with their legs. I think I should rub them with vodka."

"Oh please, please let us see Akaelina massage the turkeys", we implored. But the governesses were adamant. "You remember what happened with the geese?" The grownups always had a point...It was true the encounter with the flock of geese had been rather painful.

We met the flock on the narrow path leading to the pond. We were not going to give the right of way to a bunch of dumb geese, and tried to shoo them away... Then the incredible happened--they attacked. The long snake like necks went down; hissing and slapping their wings, they chased us all the way down to the house. Our calves and higher ups were black and blue for days after.

There was no use arguing that not all the domestic birds were as mean as the geese; ducks for instance. "I don't like ducks", wailed my brother. "They ate Daniel". Daniel was his pet garter snake. He had his bowl of milk on the back porch, and every morning he would emerge from the bushes, so black, so shiny, and drink his milk in a gentle and refined way. He could be taken for a walk, too, a leash around his neck, and seemed to enjoy it. But one fatal day, Brother decided to take him for a swim in the pond with his leash on, so he would not drown." The big ducks, the big white ones, pounced on poor Daniel, killed him and ate him, piece by piece.

For quite a while Paul had nightmares about the terrible fate of poor Daniel, and would wake shaking and sobbing until his old Niania would put her arms around him, sooth him, and sprinkle some Holy Water over his head "to chase the evil spirits away." The Holy Water, kept in a jar behind the icons, was an important item in the household....There were so many malignant spirits that had to be taken care of.

There was the Domovoy (dome-house in Russian). He was not too bad; mostly at some mischief like rattling windows, dropping things, playing tricks to frighten people. In winter he would sit in a corner of the attic and howl with the wind. We were sorry for him--so cold and lonely there.

"Niania,could we have a blanket to take to the poor Domovay, to keep him warm?"Niania would cross herself. "You stupied kids, to talk about the evil ones, and at night time, too". She would spit, say "Choor, choor" (away, away), and cross her fingers. All of this was supposed to take care of the bad ones.

In summer the Domovoy had lots of fun; he liked to spend the nights in the stable and braid the horses tails. "Niania, do the horses like it?"

"No, no, stupid ones, it frightens them and they get so nervous you cannot handle them in the morning. It is why the grooms keep a he-goat in the stable to protect their horses."

This we understood. What spirit, good or evil could withstand the goat's B.O. ?

Then there was the Leshey (less forest in Russian). This one was real mean. He lived in the forest and would waylay people who would get lost and were never heard of again... "So keep close to the grownups when picnicking, never dare go by yourself, and keep away from ponds and rivers so the Roossalky (mermaids) could not reach out and pull you in. Never climb on the well in the park; the Vodianoy (voda-water--the water-girls Papa) might grab you." All this was quite fascinating, if frightening, too.

"But, Niania, what about witches? Are they like the old woman that fixed Nikolai's hand?"

"Well, there are witches and witches; it depends."

We could not get very much information, but remembered the old woman that took care of Nikolai, our coachman, whom we all adored. He was so big and strong and could drive a troika so easily, and look so handsome in his loose black coat, red shirt, and a small hat with peacock feathers all around it. He never sent us away when we wanted to look at a new horse or colt. He let us ride the two small ponies, and promised to teach us to ride the big ones "when you grow up".

One day there was a terrible commotion. Nikolai was injured; the horses of the troika had become frightened, and while he had managed to stop them, the reins had cut off his thumb, and he was going to bleed to death. To send for a doctor to the nearest town would have taken hours. "Oh my, oh my", everyone wailed. In the confusion, the grownups forgot to send us away and we stood, a small group of frightened sheep, crying over our dear Nikolai who was going to die.

Then they brought her in; "The Old Lady" they called her, but we children were sure she was a witch. Her nose and chin were like two hooks meeting together; she was bent and leaning on a stick, a black kerchief over stringy white hair, bushy eyebrows, beady eyes..and all wrinkled up like an old, old apple. Everybody stepped aside. She took Nikolai's hand, held it in her own birdlike claw, mumbling something under her breath. The blood slowed, slowed and stopped. She went in a corner of the garden and dug out some molded leaves, mildewed soil, cobwebs, mixed all this and applied it to Nikolai's wound, bandaged it, mumbled some more, and departed.

I remember my young French governess exclaiming, "God help us, he is going to die of blood poisoning. Those savages!"... He did not die, and a while later drove the carriage as usual with a great flourish and jingling of bells on the lead horses' harness.

While the witch was ministering to Nikolai, we children noticed a shy young boy who came with her, but stood apart hiding in the bushes. Nicki, our cousin, who was old enough to be allowed to go to the village to play with the peasant boys, and knew everyone of them, was puzzled and went to speak to the newcomer.

"Who are you?"

"I am her grandson, Vania"

"Why don't you come to the village and play with the other kids?"

"They don"t like me"

"But I like you. Next week there is a fair on the pasture grounds; come down, wait near the church, after the Mass is over I will take you around and introduce you to everybody. We will have lots of fun."

Vania liked the idea. He and Nicki parted good friends......

The summer was over, the crops were in, the wheat had been harvested and the fields looked like the unshaven face of the earth. It was time to celebrate.

The Fair was usually on the big pasture, between our village and the neighboring larger one. Early in the morning we were loaded on a long carriage, sitting back to back with our Nikolai driving, not a troika, but two horses with two extras tied to the back "in case of an emergency."

The road was crowded with vehicles, carts of the merchants and groups of peasants dressed in their best. The fairground~~s~~ was teaming with people; the farmers selling their produce, the merchants displaying their wares, the horses and cattle raising clouds of dust, while chickens, geese and ducks in cages were having a concert of their own.

We spotted at last our new friend Vania and introduced him to all the wonders of the fairgrounds. Pretty soon he was loaded with packages of nuts, dried fruit, honey cookies covered by some pink frosting--the works. For awhile we were distracted by a marionette side show....

and that was when the catastrophe happened. We saw our poor Vania standing against the church wall, clutching his bags while a mob of peasant boys was attacking him.

"Give us all this or we will beat you up, and how", shouted the young hoodlums. Vania tried to stand his ground.

"The children from the house gave it to me, it is mine, leave me alone or I shall complain to Grandma, and she will hex you all".

The next moment we saw the pathetic little figure running for his life, all the sweets scattered in the dust while the mob followed him, belting him with stones, shouting: "You Witches brat, we will teach you a lesson, you and your devil's relatives."

Crying bitterly we told all to our mother who was visiting for a short while, before returning to the war zone. Our aunt was not very sympathetic: "He should not have called a hex on them, our peasants are so superstitious". But Mother, who was not used to country ways, was feeling differently. "Poor kid, tomorrow we are going to his grandmother's house, see if he is hurt, and bring some other goodies. You meant well, but somehow we all are responsible for what happened."

The next day, one of the maids was induced, rather reluctantly, to show us the "old woman's" house. She took us as far as the jetty. "Now, my Lady, you go on by yourself, I am not stepping inside of this place." She crossed herself, folded her hands and sat down on a tree trunk to await what was going to happen to us, doubting if she would ever see us again in human shape, but transformed into frogs or what not.

We followed the trail and reached the little house on the knoll. The inside of the hut was rather disappointing, rather dark and gloomy, but no black cat, owl or broom in sight. The only unusual thing was the absence of icons always displayed by our peasants--instead bunches of dry herbs, dry roots and strings of mushrooms hung on the walls.

The old woman was cooking something on the large stove; her greeting was far from cordial. "Why are you here, and what do you want?"

Mother explained that we came to see if Vania was badly hurt, if he needed a doctor, and if she needed some help.

"He was hurt all right, but your doctors, they don't know anything. I can doctor him better than any of them. If you want to see him, there he is on the bench."

Vania's face was badly bruised, his hand bandaged, but he assured us that he was all right, "as Grandma could fix anything." His face lit up when he saw the sweets and presents. We were still his friends and he promised to come to see us at "the house" as soon as he was able to.

Meanwhile his grandmother was watching us with her birdlike, unblinking eyes and seemed to come to the conclusion we meant well. After Mother deposited some money on the table, "to help to buy some cloth for the child", her attitude changed to an almost friendly one.

"I see, my Lady, you are as kind as you are beautiful. I will do something for you, too. Give me your hand. I will tell your fortune."

She bent down over Mother's hand and her voice took the same strange sing song mumbling tone she used with Nikolai.

"Worry,..worry not about your husband, Lady, he will come home safe. But the two others, your brothers you fret about; one you will never find the same as he was when he left, the other never more. Sorrow, lots of sorrow I see for you, gracious Lady. You travel a long, long way across some big water, and never will see your country again. You and your children will be buried in foreign soil. And, oh my, while the earth over one's grave at home is as light as feather, it is as hard as rocks in a foreign land. Dark clouds ahead is all I see for all of us."

And so truly it came--the storm that carried away home, family and Russia.

II

The House

The house was divided into four parts. A winding stairway led to Grandmother's apartment on the left, and Uncles and Aunt Mila's on the right. Downstairs were the children's headquarters, our cousins and their Fraulein Elsa. On the other side were ours and Mademoiselle Constance, our governess, and the quarters of the old Niania (nounou) who had raised my father, and was now in charge of our infant brother Peter. Under her command were two young subaltern nurses assigned to help her in that important task.

And help she needed, poor soul! Peter was the apple of the eye of Grandma, and spoiled accordingly. He would condescend to eat his mush of oatmeal in the nursery, downstairs, but then: "No, no, I eat the eggs only with Grandma!" Screams and riot, and the procession goes upstairs; first nurse carrying the highchair, the second "The Brat" (as we called him in private), and closing up the old lady with the dish of eggs.... After the eggs are consumed in the presence of Grandma, a new order from the little tyrant: milk only downstairs, and everybody proceeds in reverse.

As to us, the rules were strict and obeyed, though sometimes there was some confusion on the neutral grounds downstairs. They consisted of the main reception room, called somewhat pompously, "ballroom", with a grand piano, old fashioned stiff , uncomfortable chairs, and sofas lined along the walls, and portraits of the ancestors in heavy gold frames.„ We did not like to cross this room in the dark. It was kind of ghostly with the moonlight designing silvery squares on the parquet floor, the crystal chandelier tinkling slightly, „tink, tink," with the tall grandfather clock accompaniment, „tock, tock, tock"---and the eyes of all those stern gentlemen and ladies that seemed to follow your progress while you reached the sanctuary of the „salon," the other reception room, where everything was cozy and friendly, as was also the dining room with its large french doors opening onto the balcony, and a beautiful vista of the garden.

These "no man's land" rooms were the battleground for our French and German governesses. The Franco-German war was recent yet, and though neither of them spoke the other's language, and only a few words of Russian, they managed to exchange glances that showed that the "Entente" was far from cordial. The ensuing orders to their "own" pupils were like enemy sorties and quite confusing to their flocks.

Actually, on the upper floor not everything was ideally peaceful either. Though Grandmother was actually the Grand Lady of the household, there was a certain tension between her and her daughter, Aunt Ludmila --a, generation gap. Grandmother was the "establishment", born and raised on one of the large estates of the last century, where life was flowing according to old rules, traditions and religious ceremonies established for centuries. The owner's mansion, surrounded by acres and acres of land tilled by the peasants of the villages that belonged to the domain. The landowners house was always full of people, swarms of servants, usually too many, and just hanging around; nurses, governesses, tutors of the children and the "prijivalschiki", an institution strictly Russian, and with no counterpart anywhere, I think.

They were just people; poor relatives, servants on pension, very often individuals that drifted in from somewhere, liked the place and stayed on, "lived in." They had no definite duties or assignment, just were hanging around. With usually no less than twenty people at the dinner table, the hostess would be very embarrassed if asked what half of the participants were doing there.

On birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, swarms of relatives with all their retinue would arrive and celebrate the event, not for a day or two, but for weeks. When a neighboring landowner had some happy occasion, Grandma's family did the same; half of the household migrated to the hospitable friend, and was dined, wined and entertained "ad infinitum."

Holy days and religious services were strictly observed. Living close to the peasant folks, the legends, superstitions and fairy tales of Russia were a part of life. The child of the "Barin" (master), wet-nursed, cradled and raised in his infancy by a peasant woman naturally became a part of the people's soul and mind, was integrated into what was the Russian nation.

This was in the past....The time of the large estates was over. Mismanagement, taxes, second and third mortgages had taken it's toll. The land was subdivided, taken over by the "Peasant's Bank",(supported by the government,) and resold to the farmers or for commercial enterprises. Very few of the land owners had put their properties on a working basis, or commercial use, as did our uncle with his factory.

He and his wife, our Aunt Ludmila, were the new generation; the ones that portested against anything old, past ideas, traditions and ways of life. They were called liberals, socialists or nihilists, according to the degree of their radical ideas; formed secret societies, and argued and talked and talked, as only Russians know how. The Actionists were the ones that resorted to terrorist acts, bombs, and shootings.

The milder were the followers of Leo Tolstoy, his "nonresistance to evil" cult, antireligious propaganda, and the inevitable in all protests, "communes." To the latter group belonged, before her marriage, our aunt; cut her hair short, wore glasses (that was part of the liberated woman's outfit) and took courses at the medical school. All this must have been terribly shocking to the family, but luckily she met our uncle, fell in love, mellowed down to a quiet life in the country estate, very much more comfortable than the one in the commune.

Still our uncle and aunt kept their ties with the progressive movement, had mysterious visitors taken directly to their apartment, propaganda literature delivered to them, read only the liberal newspapers, and had connections with the political emigres. Being a "revolutionary" was handy to cover many sins, and to be "liberal" was very fashionable, but Aunt Ludmila, being very devoted to her mother was careful not to hurt her feelings. So luckily for us children, many old fashioned ideas and customs were tolerated in our household.....

So it is why we, all the children, were in our room on the 24th of December with our noses glued to the windows anxiously scanning the clear sky for the first star to appear. The Christmas Eve "Sotchelnik" was a strictly fasting day--no food until the first star. We children were allowed some milk and rolls for breakfast, but nothing else all day, and hungry we were!

Forlornly we trailed after Klaudia, the housekeeper, whose very ample waist was encircled by a belt with dozens of keys to all the closets and cupboards in the house; the custodian of all the goodies stored in them: jams, jellies, pickles, hams, sausages and so on.

"Klaudia, please, oh please, a tiny slice of corned beef", we implored, only to be rebuffed by a stern: "No, you sinners, to indulge in wordly pleasures at such a Holy Day!"

"But you gave some to Peter, and marshmallows, too."

"That is something else--he is a baby yet. He has no sins on his soul, he is like a pure little angel. These rules don't apply to the innocent ones"

We did not share the opinion that Peter was an angel, but Klaudia was adamant. So we had no choice but to wait for the star....The park was like a white fairy tale, the snow sparkling under the lighted windows; the pines tall white ghosts around the clearing of what in summer was the flower bed....At last over their tops in the pale greenish evening sky appeared a lonely, but so welcome star.

"The star--the Christmas star," we shouted in unison, stampeding to the dining room to bring the news to the grown ups. How impatiently we waited for Grandma to come down and take her place at the head of the table, and give us permission to take our respective chairs with bundles of fresh straw tucked under our feet--a reminder of the manger.

How good everything tasted, though it was still a semi-fasting dinner--no meat, butter or sweets, except the traditional dessert "Kootia", a mixture of cooked whole wheat, honey, raisins and nuts. We did not like it very much, but had to eat all of our portion with "reverence", we were told.

Then, after a short thanksgiving prayer, we were instructed to follow Grandma. We were bundled in fur coats, snowshoes, and fur caps, and stepped out in the cold outdoors. Grandmother headed the procession, which included our somewhat reluctant uncle and aunt, all the children, and the retinue of servants. We trudged through snow covered fields to the crossing of four roads.

There Grandmother would take a spoonfull of the "Kootia" out of the bowl held by one of the maids, throw it to the east, cross herself, and invoke a blessing on the members of the family that were living in that direction. The procedure would be repeated to the north, south and west. After everybody was remembered, the ritual was over, and we could then retrace our steps.

Back home we were allowed to stay and listen to the carols sung by the village kids, who went from house to house carrying a big star, praising the Christ Child, and collecting small donations. Then early to bed, as next day was the Big Holiday, and the Christmas Tree.....

Weeks before a package had been delivered from the City. It contained gold and silver foil paper, cardboard of different colors, beads, strings, not counting all the wonderful decorations, candles and a huge star. A table was set up for cutting and pasting gold chains, stringing beads, making cornets for candy, wrapping walnuts in gold leaf--no end of projects. Under the direction and supervision of our governesses we worked as hard as we never did in regular classes, and a lot was ready for the event; but the results of our labors we would not see until Christmas Day. We knew the tree was in the big room; we heard it being brought in, and the whole house was fragrant and balmy, but the grownups were going to decorate it and we would see it only in the evening.

A drive to the church next morning on the sleighs through the white countryside, with the bells on the horses tinkling so gaily in the icy air, and everybody very holiday looking and smiling--even the sour-faced ones. Then dinner and an impatient waiting for the great moment.

At last we heard in the hall the shuffle of feet, whispering and giggling--our guests, the village children had come. Their coats and snowshoes off, they appeared dressed in their best: the boys in red, yellow, green shirts, and the girls in starched dresses with bright multicolored kerchiefs. The big doors to the ballroom were thrown open and, after a few moments of spellbound ecsatcy, we finally trooped into the room to admire the wonder.

From floor to ceiling the tree stood like a golden flaming column, lit by hundreds of candles, shimmering and shining with stars and jewels. The grownups gave us time to recover from the shock and admire the fairy tree;-but now it was time for action. Our governesses very nearly spoiled our happiness by arguing with our aunt about what should be sung first, "O Tannenbaum" in German, or "Noel" in French. Luckily the school teacher, a swell fellow, young and gay, settled the argument. "The pupils don't know either; let's sing in Russian."

Aunt sat down to the piano and started a gay old song, "Here I Bury the Gold, There I Bury the Silver." This was familiar to all. We made a circle and went round the tree faster and faster, holding tight at each other's hands, and singing one after another, Russian songs.,..Out of breath at last, we stopped to receive our presents, wrapped in bright kerchiefs. Our aunt had everyone of them marked by name, the contents all alike; for her children, us, and the village kids--practical things, candy,nuts and cookies. She was as ever, a staunch believer in democratic equality. Once more we danced around the tree, but the candles were beginning to burn out.

We were taken to the dining room to have tea and sample our goodies. By that time we were exhausted, and sent to bed, while our guests departed under the leadership of their school teacher. The great day was over, but the holidays lasted until Epiphany.

Vernon

The Christmas decorations were taken off after New Year's Day, and we were busy again. This time we used empty match boxes to make little containers to fill with bird seeds and bread crumbs. The tree was carried outdoors and propped in a snow bank. The feeders were attached to the branches, and there stood a "Christmas tree for the birds." They came in flocks and had a wonderful time until the tree dried out, was taken out and burned "with reverence".

During the two weeks vacation we could go skiing on the river, ride the makeshift sleighs with the village children, and take part in plays staged in the small school, where our aunt was helping the young teacher. She was very successful with the children; but in the hospital she had organized, she very often ran into opposition.

The older people trusted the methods and herbs of the "old woman" more than the modern medicines. New born children had to be baptized the first days, very often in icy water, to guaranty their admittance to heaven in case they died,-and they often did after that cold bath. When the doctor came from town for smallpx vaccination of the children, there was nearly a riot, and my cousins had to be vaccinated first to prove it was not harmful....

We laughed, but it was really a tragic event. The doctor had prescribed a medicine to an old sick man; a tablespoon every hour. Our aunt went the next day to inquire about the patient.

"Dead, my dear Lady, died last night, God rest his soul"

"But did you give him the medicine?"

"I sure did, my dear Lady, but what was the use of giving it by the spoonfull--I gave him the whole bottle to drink, and he died. God's will it was for him to go."

"It was God's will," too, for men who dived into pools chopped in the frozen ice of the river during the Epiphany church service, to survive instead of catch pneumonia; as it was in America to be able to handle rattlesnakes and, after being bitten, to be able to live to prove the Allmighty's power.....

Vacation over we settled down again to our studies of Russian, French, and German. And the winter settled down to business, too.

The dark clouds seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of snow; drifts were as high as half of the window panes. The tile stoves in every room blazed all day. It was warm in the house, but we were drowsy and listless. One could not go out much, and what fun was it to walk wrapped as a cocoon, and breathing air that cut like icicles. The days dragged so slowly. We liked to visit Grandmother's quarters, look at old photographs, listen to her stories of "how things used to be", admire all the precious knick-knacks, vases, cut glass stored in old fashioned sideboards with intricate mother of pearl inlays. But Grandma was ailing, easily tired, and the visits had to be cut short... As to the visits to Aunt's apartment, we dreaded them.

We were sent to see Aunt Ludmila when we misbehaved and needed to be "talked to". And what an ordeal that was! One stood a long time listening to her lecture. She never raised her voice; first she described the crime we had committed, and then what we should do to improve our behavior and become an asset to our country, society, and humanity in general--a marvelous speech for a university audience, but not for kids under ten....

The bear on the floor was listening, and being bored, too. It was an enormous bear skin rug, with a real stuffed head. I remember figuring what would happen if the bear would get up on his fours and start growling. Knowing my aunt, I am afraid she would tell him to lay down, finish her lecture, and only then let us happily escape to our own rooms.

The room we liked the best was the one of "Niania"

It was so cozy, lit by the candles in front of the icon, and the fire in the stove. We could sit on low stools close to the smoldering coals and listen to Niania's tales of beautiful princesses, monsters that kidnaped them, brave princes that came to their rescue--battled giants and dragons to save their lady fair, and lived happily ever after.

"The monsters aren't coming to carry us away, are they Niania?"

"No, no as long as you have your crosses (small baptismal crosses we wore on chains around our necks), no evil one will dare touch you. Bless you, and go to bed."...,

The wind would howl, the branches of the tortured trees hammer on the window panes, the snowdrifts wave their ghostly white arms; we would fall asleep, sure that our Niania's icon would protect us better than the prayers in French we had to recite with Mademoiselle.

"Es muss doch Fruhling werden", kept on Fraulein Elsa, quoting Schiller. And it did come. For three days other winds started to blow, soft, humid, melting the white snow, leaving only grayish mildewed patches. The trees lost their beautiful white gowns, and looked bleak and desolate. Flocks of blackbirds invaded the garden, and water, water running everywhere, breaking through the ice of the river and dripping from the roofs.

To greet the return of spring in the beginning of March it was a tradition to serve for breakfast the "Javoronky" (larks), little rolls shaped like birds with raisin eyes and a gold piece in one of them for the lucky finder. While we were busily exploring their insides Tania, our oldest cousin, burst into the room dancing and shouting, "Spring, spring is here!" In her hand was the delicate first flower, the snowdrop that she picked near a snow patch. . . . .

Our mother came to pick us up to take us back to the Orient, where Father was stationed, persuing his professional military career, very much frowned at by his sister and her liberal friends.

First the war, and then the big storm of the Revolution came in sweeping away everything, destroying, tearing life by the roots and leveling reactionaries, liberals, revolutionaries, nihilists in one common death and misery; substituting to all of them the triumphant name of "Bolshevik".

In 1933 we received the last news of our aunt; a post card informing us that her husband and her second brother, who took refuge in the country met with an accident and died (we guessed how). She asked that we not communicate with her until "further notice", and finished (hoping that the censor did not know Latin) with the tragic words: "Mea Culpa, mea maxima culpa".

III

Little George Washington Russian Style

There were two Cossacks; the big, wild Cossack, my Uncle Peter, and his son, the little Cossack-monster. Naturally, Uncle came first. I still have his picture--one of those faded photographs against a background of rose-garlanded Greek or Roman columns; a tall youngster in a long cossack coat, a tiny belted waist, blond baby curls, candid eyes, a little shy, but proud.

He had just graduated from military school and was a commissioned officer. He had mastered the theory of how to kill people and was being sent away to put his knowledge into practice. This was the time before the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. Mama's blue-eyed boy was dispatched to Outer Mongolia and put in charge of a detachment of native soldiers. It was a windpswept plateau with a few tents and a few hundred wild tribesmen. Only the sergeants spoke Russian. The freshly hatched lieutenant timidly gave orders that sounded more like suggestions.... It did not take long before the higher in command found out that things were out of hand in Lieutenant Nazoroff's sector. An old timer in the frontier service, Captain Ivanoff was sent to investigate. After a short talk with the top sergeant, he came to Uncle Peter's tent.

"You know, youngster, this cannot go on. The men say: 'What kind of Captain is he? He has been here over a month and not once has he used his nogayka (whip).' With these savages every order has to be spiked with the whip. They have been used to this system from time immemorial. I am astonished they did not kill you. You just "lost face." Now go ahead, make it over. Don't forget you have a strong arm and a good whip. Use it."

Uncle Peter learned--he learned many things on the wild Mongolian desert; the cold cruelty of man to man; the merciless destruction of the weak and old who were hindering the survival of the fittest; the bitter struggle for that survival. A few Russian officers were lost in that mass of yellow savages--trainers in a cage of sulking wild beasts. Always whip in hand, and a steady one,--never let them forget you are the master, the "Captain". Alcohol did help to keep up the bravado and drinking was heavy.

Uncle used to tell how he woke in the middle of the night gasping for breath. His best friend, a young officer with whom he shared his tent, had his left hand around Uncle's throat, choking him to death. With his right hand he was making the sign of the cross over Uncle's head, admonishing in the most gentle way: "Don't get excited, dear Peter, just take it easy--everything will be over pretty soon."

It took all of Uncle's terrific strength to shake off the madman. In a straight jacket he was shipped back to civilization....The ones who did not break down became tough. Uncle Peter became tough. So tough that even in that wild country he got the surname of "The Wild Cossack".

The Japanese war was declared and Uncle Peter was sent to the front. For his bravery in action he received our highest military decoration, the St. George's Cross. To friend and foe alike, he was known as "The Wild Cossack". His erratic moods, reckless daring and complete disregard of danger made him perfect for guerrilla and reconnaissance work. In one of those expeditions the cards were stacked against him. His detachment was surrounded by Japanese; there was a chance to try to ride through, but Uncle was wounded in the thigh. He could not get up into the saddle. The Cossack horses are taught to lay down to give a chance to a wounded man to mount them, but Uncle's faithful horse had a bullet in the shoulder and could not lift his great weight.

"Try to break through. I'll stay and shoot it out with the Japs; this might cover your retreat." The soldiers were reluctant to leave their officer, but--"Life is sweet, who wants to die--orders are orders"; and they galloped away. Uncle tried to send his horse along, but for the first time in his life he refused to obey, he was going to stay with his master to the bitter end. Protected by boulders and the horse's bulk, Uncle kept on shooting. The last thing he remembered was the almost human (Uncle always said "better than) look in the dying horse's eyes. When he came to, he was in a prison hospital. His first months in captivity were an endless suffering from his many wounds and from excrutiating headaches. A bullet had gone through his skull. He survived it all. The wounds healed, more or less, but the mental suffering was getting worse. To be a prisoner, to have the "little yellow "monkeys"as his "masters"--it was a thing he could not take. He had outbursts of wild rages, followed by epileptic fits caused by the pressure on the brain. During one of the attacks brought on the sight of an orderly hitting a wounded man, Uncle really went on a rampage. He threw the orderlies and male nurses, like peanuts, all over the room, broke furniture over their heads, very nearly tore the flimsy walls down. He was subdued by soldiers,and the rest of his imprisonment was spent in a cage like a wild animal...

The peace treaty brought the prisoners' release, and Uncle came home. I vaguely remember the grownups talking in hushed voices about Uncle Peter's terrible fits, the doctor's efforts to relieve the pressure, and some kind of metal band they were gradually tightening around his skull. The operation must have been successful. The headaches and attacks stopped, all the other wounds were patched. Uncle was left with one leg shorter than the other, a silver plate in the back of his head, and an assortment of scars all over his body.... The invisible scars on his soul were something our medicine had no cure for, so Uncle was proclaimed a "psycho" by the doctors and just plain "queer" by the laymen. He did not care, he had no love for any of his fellow humans; all he loved were horses, all he longed for was solitude, so he left us and settled on a ranch high up on the Mongolian plateau. There was miles of wilderness around, and all the horses he could have. There was one flaw in his plans; in a moment of weakness he got married.

Poor little bride, poor Aunt Shoorochka. From a pleasant, sheltered life in a provincial town, she was transplanted to the Cossack's mountain retreat--no more girl friends to gossip with, no more gay little parties at home, no annual grand balls and amateur theatre plays or summer picnics in the country. There was plenty of country now, but of formidable and forbidding aspect; mountains and gorges and deep canyons, with wild torrents tumbling in their shadows--not an inviting landscape for a gentle picnic. There is no fun picnicking by yourself anyway, and the poor bride was mostly left alone. A few people who came to visit them were mostly high mountain ranchers--strong sullen people. The conversation, if any, always turned to hunting, fishing, cattle and horses....Uncle Peter could be quite charming and entertaining when he wanted to be, but he wanted to so seldom. His moody days were many. After a hurried and silent meal he would disappear and spend the day in the stable, the field or the orchard. Many a night, instead of coming home, he would gallop all over the countryside. People hearing the thundering hoofs in the middle of the night used to say: "There goes the "Wild Cossack" again. At this rate he is going to break his neck someday." His neck did not break, but his marriage did.

According to Aunt Shoura, this is the way it happened. They were expecting the arrival of the baby, the future little Cossack-monster. The time was approaching, but, unfortunately, Uncle's favorite mare chose the same week to foal her colt. Uncle Peter sent his wife down to the city doctors--and stayed with his mare. He casually telephoned to find what was born and, informed that it was a son, happily announced that the new little horse was also a male.—This was the last straw. Divorce was very nearly impossible in Russia, so they separated. Aunt Shoura stayed down in the city and Uncle up on the ranch. The boy's time was shared between the parents. I am afraid the greater part of his time, though, was spent with his father and the horses. It was so much more fun for little Oleg--and his mother was not able to handle him. Why? We found out.....

War (number One) had patched many quarrels, misunderstandings and separations--they seemed so small face-to-face with the great universal tragedy. Aunt Shoura's marriage was no exception, and she went to the front for a visit with Uncle. She brought her son to stay with us for a couple of weeks. It was our first glimpse of our cousin, a big, blue-eyed cherub dressed in a Cossack uniform, a white fur cap rakishly perched on top of a mop of golden curls.

"What an adorable child, give me a kiss my little angel," exclaimed my maiden Aunt Anne, and quickly withdrew. The "little angel" had bitten the hand that was reaching to embrace him. "I don't like to be kissed. Men don't kiss. I am a man--a Cossack! We let women be." And the pearly little teeth clicked quite menacingly.

"It's a little Cossack monster," whispered my brother, and our cousin certainly lived up to his name. We were harboring a little wild cat in the apartment. Every memberof the family tried to entertain him with games, story

Vernoi

reading, and child plays to no avail. "It's no fun!"

"What do you like, Oleg?"

"Horses--wild animals."

"Ah, fine, fine," exclaimed Aunt Anne enthusiastically. "I will take him tomorrow to the zoo and then to the park for a pony ride." She did... A few hours later the maid opened the door to a strange trio: the little Cossack, unconcerned and seemingly quite pleased with himself and a newly acquired whip. Auntie in a state close to hysteria, and a kindly policeman who explained:

"The lady was so upset I was afraid to leave her alone, so I came along to see her safely home. As to the little fellow, he certainly can take care of himself. But, beg your pardon ladies, those are the instructions of my police captain. He very respectfully insists on your keeping the little-----" "Monster", whispered my brother.

"Beg your ladies' pardon, I completely agree with the youngman's opinion, but the captain said 'little boy'--to keep the little boy away from the park and public playgrounds."

The good man clicked his heels, saluted, and departed. It took quite a few drops of nerve medicine, smelling salts and cold compresses to enable Aunt Anne to tell the story. She took the boy to the zoo to see the wild animals. The tigers, leopards and lynxes were all dismissed with a bored:

"Bunch of mangy cats! My father shot bigger and better in the tayga (Siberian) forest."

That was true. I had two fur rugs in my room to prove it. They were pelts my uncle had sent me; one of a tiger and the other a leopard. In Siberian forests they change their color for winter wear from orange to silvery gray, keeping their dark stripes and spots--a perfect job of nature's camouflage.... The huge Siberian bear met with Oleg's approval.

"He is a good bear. We had one like that in Mongolia. We kept him for a pet. The soldiers wrestled with him and he liked sugar and vodka. When he would get drunk, he had the hiccups, but he could dance just the same. I will show you how to teach a bear to dance."

And before chubby Auntie could interfere, the boy started climbing the fence singing in his childish voice the ribald song, "Aye you S of a B peasant from Kamarinski". He was climbing as fast as a squirrel. Luckily, the keeper caught him, setting him rather hard on the ground.

"Keep away, youngster, from those cages! The animals are dangerous."

"That's you, big coward, who is afraid of them. Me, a Cossack, I am not afraid. I am not afraid of anything!"

"I can see that. If I had a brat like you I certainly would teach him to be afraid of a good whipping. But it's none of my business. All I am asking you, lady, is to take the kid away from here and keep him away."

Poor Auntie grabbed her charge's hand and dragged him away, followed by jokes and jeers from the assembled crowd.

"I am not going home until I see the horses," declared the little demon, "and I want a whip."

To pacify him, Aunt Anne bought a whip and they betook themselves to the meadow and the pony rides. The ponies got Oleg's approval. He was used to the small Mongolian horses, so it was not beneath his dignity to mount one of them. But as soon as he was in the saddle, he jerked the reins out of the hands of the groom who was ready to walk him sedately around the green. With a shrill "Whoopee" he let his crop fall on the pony's flank. It must have been a first experience for the little beast. He was brought up to be gentle and considerate, but after all, he was a horse and reacted as any horse would. First he reared, then he kicked, then he broke into a wild gallop around the meadow. The little Cossack kept to his saddle, whooping, shouting and waving his whip and his hat... The other ponies, demurely walking around the green started to get into the game.

The place broke into a pandemonium. The ponies kicking and snorting, the grooms trying to quiet them down, while the frightened parents and governesses were pulling their children out of the saddles. The nurses who were dozing in the sunshine grabbed their respective infants out of the perambulators and were climbing on the benches or trying to find a shelter behind the trees. Three policemen came running to the rescue. Oleg was pulled, kicking and screaming off his horse and unceremoniously marched, together with Auntie, to the nearest police station.

"To a police station like a criminal!" sobbed Auntie, "And then escorted in the cab by a policeman like some drunk taken to jail. The police captain said to keep him out of public places. What shall we do with him?"

It certainly was a problem. Our little monster was confined to the apartment house and court. Our trials began the next day.

"The child needs companions of his own age,"decided our nice neighbor. "Boys will be boys. I'll take him for a day to play with my little Pasha."

The day lasted only a couple of hours. Blood curdling screams were coming from Pasha's room. We found the host on the floor, his guest sitting on his chest with a knife in his hand.

"I am a Comanche, he is the "paleface." He lost the battle and I am going to scalp him. What does he holler like a pig for?"

Luckily the knife was a dull one and only a red scar across Pasha's forehead for about a week reminded him of the pleasant visit....

"I'll watch the little boy for a few hours," volunteered another nice neighbor, a maiden lady. "The child looks like an angel--so sweet, too. You just don't have the right approach. You like animals, don't you my little friend?...You do very much--then you can play with my cats."

The two beautiful cats were the pride and joy of the old spinster's heart. I have to admit the little Cossack monster had a way with animals. The cats were fascinated by him to the extent that one of them submitted to a strange experiment. Oleg was very proud of his invention and could not see why it raised such a hue and cry. He adjusted a wide belt around the cat's middle, secured it to a long string and decided to lower the animal from the third story down to the court.

"The kitty could take a walk then. I was going to pull it back". But as soon as kitty found himself hanging over an abyss, it gave the most heart-rending shriek that ever came out of cat's throat. It brought lots of people's heads out of the different windows. Unfortunately the lady in the apartment below looked out, too, while the cat had already descended that far. The lady was dressed to go out and the cat landed on her hat. It was her turn to shriek, and how!

By that time our spinster was at her window frantically pulling her cat back to safety. The kitty had other ideas. He had landed on something and he was going to hold on to it. So the cat sailed home clutching the hat and, securely pinned to it, the false curls of its owner. The poor lady whose luxurious "natural" tresses were the envy and admiration of all the women tenants, moved away a few weeks later.

We found our cousin's hostess clutching to her heart her pet, the neighbor's glorious curls and chapeau, sobbing over it all in the most distressing fashion.....

What came next? Was it the time that cousin Oleg played with the pushbuttons of the elevator and it stopped between the third and fourth floor?....People suspended in mid air, cursing and shouting, while our dear child immensely satisfied with his achievement, was dancing some sort of Indian victory dance in front of the elevator door.

Or was it when the policeman came again with the complaints of pedestrians who were bombarded with eggs from our windows. "It's Easter, they were far away, but I wanted to say a happy Easter to them." It sounded so cute, but by that time we knew what a little devil was lurking behind the angelic face.

Things were getting worse and worse. Masha, the maid, while taking the letters out of the mailbox had a live mouse run up her sleeve. The frightened mouse was whirling around and around inside the terrified girl's blouse, until Dasha, the cook, killed it with a mighty slap on Masha's back.

"We never had mice in boxes before Master Oleg came to stay with us", cried the maid. The cook chimed in, "We did not have wrong things in wrong places before Master Oleg came."

Dasha was referring to her broken romance with Ivan, the dashing fireman; Ivan, whose brilliant uniform and handlebar moustache made all the women folk swoon, had chosen Dasha and her cuisine. Envious and jealous females insinuated that what tipped the scales in Dasha's favor was a few bottles of Riabinovka (vodka) that Dasha had in her possession. We had prohibition during the war, and good liquor was hard to get, and the glorious Ivan was uncommonly fond of that kind of vodka. Whatever it was, love was in full bloom. Perfect happiness reigned in the kitchen where Ivan and his sweetie were enjoying a midday snack until. . . until Ivan reached for his favorite bottle, poured himself a nice tumbler full of the ruby liquor and downed it in one big gulp. The next moment found him spitting, suffocating, his eyes bulging out. The terrified Dasha watched him grab his helmet and stumble down the back stairs in search of the nearest first aid station. The doctor reassured our hero that his life was not in danger--he had had a straight shot of denatured alcohol. How the alcohol we used to heat our hair curling irons got into the vodka bottle remained a mystery. But, naturally, everybody had the same suspicions.

Explanations and excuses were of no avail. Ivan transferred his affections to the cook in apartment #7 on the floor below. "The cooking is not as good as in apartment #12" , declared the backstairs Don Juan, "but at least you know what you are getting. There is no viper lurking around."

The laundress, the porter--everybody had some complaint. It was evident our servants were going to quit. Our neighbors were avoiding us and we had a vague suspicion our landlord might ask us to move. Good neighbors, good servants, and good apartments were hard to find in war-time Petrograd, and gloom descended on the family. When the bell rang that

Ve[illegible]

morning we all caught our breath. What next? It was Aunt Soura. She never in her life had such an enthusiastic reception! We loved her, we adored her, she was our deliverance.

The Revolution broke. We never saw our aunt or her son again, but a mutual friend described an episode very characteristic of our little Cossack. Our friend met Aunt Soura after she was released from the Cheka (secret police) after a three months imprisonment. The Bolsheviks were trying to find the whereabouts of Uncle Peter. She did not know and could not give them any information. But the Chekist kept on questioning her using a "direct approach". They would put a gun at the child's head and tell the distracted mother: "You'd better come through or we'll blow the brat's brain."

The "Brat" would come back at the tormentor's: "Leave Mother alone. Don't you see she does not know anything. Women are cowards--she would tell. If I knew, I would not because my father said that a Cossack dies, but does not sell out a friend; and I am a Cossack." Our friend concluded that the lad meant every word of it.

"He certainly is a rough little guy. I think the

Chekists got convinced that your aunt really had no knowledge of your uncle's hiding place and released her."

For our part, we had a lurking suspicion that the little monster proved to be too much even for the Bolsheviks to handle....But I am way ahead of myself. For the George Washington episode, we have to go back to the pre-war years and Uncle Peter's ranch in Mongolia. As I said, it was on a wind swept mountain plateau. Local trees grew well except they were always leaning in one direction like weary travelers turning their backs to the gusts of the wind. But Uncle Peter wanted an orchard; not a big one, at least a family orchard. It took lots of perseverance and toil. First, big holes had to be dug in the rocky hill and carloads of good soil brought up from the fertile valley. When the young trees were planted, Uncle nursed them like babies. They had to be protected from the wind with a high fence, from the cold with straw padding, from the rabbits and deer in winter time with wire mesh around the trunks.

After five years of struggle, Uncle's efforts were rewarded. He had an orchard. The trees were blooming, he would have some fruit in the fall to prove to all the critics it could be done...At a little family and friends gathering on the occasion of Oleg's fifth birthday, Uncle was proudly inviting his guests to come back in the fall and taste homemade jams and jellies.

"He is so proud of his orchard", broke in the grandmother. "Shouldn"t he be proud of his son too? Such a strong, handsome child!" And the little fellow was brought down by his governess to be admired by all present.

"What has my little angel been doing this afternoon?" cooed Grandma. "I was reading to him". answered the governess. "We were reading about George Washington. What a good boy he was and could not tell a lie. Weren't we reading about it, my little Oleg?" cooed in turn the governess, trying to show off her charge.

"Sure," took over the brilliant pupil, "and he chopped his father's tree. Ha! I have a hatchet, too, and that George Washington--he was just an American boy. Me, I am a Cossack. So when Mademoiselle was having her nap, I took my hatchet and, Father, I chopped down all your trees!"

IV

Sarah Bernhardt

A few months ago a friend of mine returning from U.S.S.R, was describing to me a beautiful school the Communists had built in Moscow for their youth. The location and building sounded so familiar.

"Wait a minute", I interrupted my visitor. "The building occupies a whole block, the four sides of it, with a small park in the center and a gazebo on an artificial hill."

"How do you know, you have not been back."

The answer was simple. It was the school I attended years before anybody heard of the Bolsheviks. It was a palace of Empress Catherine the Second, given by her to the city of Moscow, sometime at the end of the eighteenth century to be used as a school for girls. The great Empress was very interested in women's education and founded the first boarding school for girls in St. Petersburg, the great "Smolny Institute", where generations of young ladies were educated.

Our "Institute" in Moscow had a later start, at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Alexander the Third, but still was named in honor of Catherine the Great, whose beautiful statue greeted one at the top of a circular flight of white marble stairs. Her big portrait hung in the place of honor in the huge ballroom flanked by the portraits of

Czar Nicholas, and one of Alexander the Third.

We loved the Empress. She looked so motherly. Czar Nicholas was a favorite, too, simple and human; but Alexander the Third, no, we were plain afraid of him, he looked so stern, his eyes so alive that many times in the evening when the big chandeliers were not yet lit, we would swear that he moved. Somebody would start screaming, there would be a panic and stampede, with everybody running to the big doors out in the lighted corridor, to be confronted by our governess, "Dame de Classe", who shamed us for being such "babies".

We were not babies, but very young--about nine years old, in the first grade (classe, it was called in Russian). It took eight years to complete the course. The last classe, young ladies already, were more or less our supervisors, and the object of our envy. They could wear their hair up, had pretty gray dresses, did not have to curtsy all the time, and at parties and receptions acted as hostesses.--We, the "little", and the "middle" ones had long to the ground blue dresses with tight bodices, white aprons, and long white sleeves attached to the shoulders. The only graceful thing in this attire was a pelerine that covered the rather open cut bodice and tied in front with a bow. The hair was to be worn in two braids for the youngest, in one for the older ones...The discipline was strict.

Each class had its dormitory, a "night lady" patrolling the corridor, watching for running around, conversations, and especially for night picnics.

Our food was good, but candy was not allowed, so we bribed our maids to buy some for us and smuggle it in the dormitories. The amount of candy we could consume was staggering--a pound at one time was not unusual. Unbelievably, we were, except for a very few, very slim, and in our dressy uniforms at parties with a "decolleter et manches courtes". our skinny arms and necks drove us to despair.

At seven the bell woke us up. After breakfast (Russian style tea and rolls) and a short prayer we marched to our study rooms. Each classe had its own room and every girl her desk, inspected by our "Dame de Classe" for neatness and order. The only exception was when somebody had a birth-day. Then in secret, the previous evening, the books were removed from the desk and presents and decorations substituted.

The lessons lasted one hour each, then ten minutes recess, and back to study until twelve and lunch. After one hour of playing in the garden: (there was tennis or croquet in the summer, and skating in winter,) ~~and the~~n back to another period of lessons until the five o'clock dinner. After that we had a couple of hours of relaxation and then to bed.

On certain days the routine was interrupted by classes of Swedish "gymnastique". This was very boring: one, two, three lift your arms, one, two , three move right , move left and so on. It was supposed to be good for our health and posture,—and frankly, we hated it.

The dance lessons were more amusing, thanks to our instructor, the balletmeister of the Bolshoy Theatre. A little Frenchman in knee length pants, black stockings and ballet shoes, he tried hard to make "Pavlovas" out of a bunch of awkward teenagers. He usually lost his temper and shouted in French: "Mesdemoiselles, a herd of cows let out of the barn are more graceful than you!"

Once he had an idea to hand us glasses full of water that we were supposed not to spill while trying the Polonaise. "Slide,..glide,..don't jump; one, two, three, graceful steps, "Mesdemoiselles." And then, "Hopeless, hopeless", he would cry, storming out of the ballroom that had begun to look like a swimming pool.

When we had Royal family visitors, the poor fellow was to rehearse the "Court curtsies". It was easy for him in his ballet costume, but try it in long dresses, starched under petticoats, a long apron always getting in your way, and high laced shoes!

Once in a while there were official balls. We had to go to bed for a couple of hours in the afternoon to be able to stay up late. Usually it was the time when, instead of resting, we were very excited and tried to make ourselves as beautiful as possible. We ratted our hair (it was the style of high pompadours), making huge bows of ribbons to plant on top of our hairdo. We rubbed our cheeks to make them pink, so hard they looked like freshly cooked beets, and our lips were bleeding from biting them for color. All of our efforts would be in vain. The "Dame de Classe", after inspection, would calmly pack us all in the bathroom and stick our heads under the water faucet, destroying our hopes of becoming dazzling beauties.

We would come out with our hair damp, blue from cold to line up in front of the authorities for a deep curtsy; "All at once, Mademoiselles". We had nothing with which to charm our dance partners. Those young men in groups on the other side of the ballroom stood rather unhappily until they were permitted to invite the girl of their choice for a dance...and one had to change partners; to favor one too often was not "proper". The only gay affair was the supper, which was usually excellent, and where we could sit in groups and flirt and laugh and have a good time. It seemed so short, we were called for a last quadrille--a final march. Everybody then went home--and we to our dormitories.

Vernon

IV

Our greatest pleasure was home theatricals. Naturally the plays were very "appropriate" for young ladies. This time it was "Athalie" in French, written by Racine in 1690 for Madame de Maintenon's Convent school for girls.

Nothing could be more proper: God's punishment of the wicked Queen Athalie, the daughter of the still more wicked Queen Jezebel. This play proved to be one of the greatest events of our lives.

Madame Sarah Bernhardt walked in. She was a good friend of our principal, Madame Talizine. and being in Moscow, dropped by to see her. Our Principal brought the great actress to hear us, which must have been amusing to her, but absolutely horrifying for us. We forgot our lines, our words, and stood there petrified by such a celebrity's presence. To ease the tension Madame Talizine asked Sarah Bernhardt if she would consent to read for us some part of the play. Madame graciously agreed.

She chose the monologue "Athalie's Dream". At the first words:"C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit", we stood there, spellbound in a trance, not daring to breathe, so as not to lose one word of this divine voice. There was never, and I doubt will ever be, anything comparable to the timbre, diction and pathos reproduced by a human being.

When she finished we stood there. Children as we were, we understood one does not applaud genius, one can just feel humble, and silently bow in reverence. Only one of us, one of the oldest girls, who was to play Athalie, broke the silence. Her head in her arms, dropped on a desk, she was sobbing hysterically.

Sarah Bernhardt went to her and kindly asked, "What is the matter, my child?"

"Oh Madame, Madame" cried our poor prima donna, "after hearing you, seeing what perfection is, could I ever dare imitate you. How could I go on,and how could I try, when you, only you, have everything?"

Madame lifted the tear stained face very gently and said, "My child, I don't. You have something I don't, and never will again, something that's more beautiful than good acting, more precious than talent, something whose mistakes can always be forgiven. And this is what God gives us only once, and never, never will it come back: "La Jeunesse" (youth)." This time we broke into wild applause; she threw us a kiss, and departed, leaving us so happy.

We were still happier the next day when our Principal came in with the news that Madame Sarah Bernhardt had enjoyed her visit so much that she invited all of the girls in the cast to be her guests at the presentation of "L'Aiglon" in the French Theatre. It was against the rules. We were allowed to hear only selected operas like "Life of the Czar", Boris Godunof", "Prince Igor"; even Verdi's "Aida" was too risqué." For some reason the ballets were on the approved list.... But one could not refuse a Sarah Bernhardt.

So one happy evening, special black carriages, curtains drawn, were awaiting us. Those vehicles, for some reason, were always used to transport the girls of all the different "institutes". They looked like a crossbreed between the coaches of the past century, and funeral carriages. Sometimes we even had seen some devout old lady, mistaking us for a funeral procession, make the sign of the cross, and no doubt whisper a prayer for the soul of the unknown departed...

But very much alive we were, when we reached the theatre, were seated in our loge just in time to see the curtain rise. Then the miracle began; the miracle of a middle aged lady, dressed in a man's Austrian Imperial Guard uniform, transformed by the genius of her talent into a twenty year old boy, Napolean's son, the ill fated "L'Aiglon".

It would be mild to say we were delighted. We were betwitched, hypnotized, carried away to another time, another epoch, suffering in common with the young prince. At the famous scene when the prince smashes the mirror in which Metternich tries to make him see the shadows of his Austrian ancestors to prove he has not inherited anything from his famous father, two of our girls fainted and had to be taken out and revived by the smelling salts, the universal remedy for swooning.

The last act, the death of L'Aiglon was lost to us. We were crying so bitterly that only the ovation accorded to Madame Bernhardt brought us to our senses, and we were quickly shepherded back to our carriages by our governesses, who were afraid of another outbreak of hysteria.

Back at school I remember the astonished exclamations of our maids who were helping us to get out of our uniforms. "Say, young ladies, how did you manage to get in the rain, when it is clear sky, and you were in covered carriages?"

It was hard to explain that our pelerines were soaking wet because we had cried our eyes out seeing a young prince die. It is very probable that if they had been given such an answer, they would have called the head nurse who in her turn would have decided we had suddenly contracted some mysterious general sickness , were delirious , and had to be put to bed in the hospital.

The hospital occupied one side of the quadrangle, and unless you were really very sick, was a nice place to be,..... after the usual dosage of castor oil. But later on, no lessons, no classes, the food was more carefully prepared than in the general refectory; you could read, talk, have visitors. Sometimes, to prolong the stay on the sick list, we surreptitiously took the temperature of the soup, tea or hot milk, whatever was handy and out of sight of the nurses. The temperature zoomed to over a hundred and a few more days of leisure were assured. Sometimes you were even allowed to go home to parents or relatives to recuperate.

V

Katia

The general rule in the school was to have visitors every Sunday, in the afternoon when we could entertain them at a "five o'clock tea," served at four. On long week-ends we could get off, and on Christmas and Easter, we had over two weeks vacation. This time was always impatiently awaited by every girl.

For me to go home would have taken eight days one way, as my father was stationed in the Orient, so I spent my vacations with my Great Aunt Liuba in dear old Moscow. Moscow was quite different from St. Petersburg at this epoch. It reminded one in many parts of a provincial town, but was Russian through and through. St. Petersburg was a young town (only two hundred years old), while Moscow dated from times innumerable.

St. Petersburg was the capital, the residence of the Imperial Family, the center of the government and official activity. It had a large foreign population, modern buildings, gorgeous museums and palaces, famous restaurants, theatres and operas, the Neva banked in marble quays.

Moscow was more modest. The Moscow river had plain sand banks, but its Kremlin, churches and monasteries were not only historical, but living and untouched monuments to the artistry and creative spirit of the Russian people through centuries. It's thoroughfares were not laid out in straight lines as in St. Petersburg, but meandered in a most hazardous way. Little squares, small chapels, blind alleys were found in the most unusual places. Even their names very often referred to events, accidents and happenings of lost and forgotten years.....

In one of those tucked away streets lived my Grand Aunt Liuba. In former times it was quite an estate, but years had encroached on it. The garden was overgrown, big bushes of lilac and jasmin hung over the untrimmed alleys, the fountain was dry, and the statue of the boy supporting it had lost part of his cute little nose. I loved to spend my vacation in that unusual place, play with my cousins in the thick "jungle" of the garden, run through low ceilinged rooms that had a peculiar musty smell of old wood and tapestry. It was so much fun to rummage in the attic, full of discarded furniture, lamps, knickknacks, look in the huge coffers where were stored ancient uniforms, military belts and sashes, and what especially interested us: dresses worn in the past centuries by our Great Grandmothers.

We tried gowns with long trains, petticoats with hundreds of ruffles, even some white wigs and bonnets covered with faded ribbons and flowers. How many interesting stories those old rags could tell us if they could, the same as the portraits of stiff looking gentlemen and pretty ladies whose portraits in tarnished gold frames hung in the living rooms! Great Aunt lived with them in the past, surrounded not by well trained modern servants, but by her old staff, most of them her own age. My favorite was Katia, Aunt's personal maid for, I presume, sixty years. She insisted on calling Granny "Miss Liuba" though her "Miss" had been married, lost her husband, had grown up children and grandchildren.

For Katia the greatest event of her life had been Miss Liuba's wedding, and she loved to tell us all about it. Great Grandfather had four daughters, all beautiful, talented, who had a wide choice of admirers. Aunt Liuba chose our Great Uncle, and the date of the wedding was set a year in advance. "But why such a long time to wait?" we modern children asked.

"Well, this was not like now a days; one, two, three--you buy this junky stuff in stores, make hasty arrangements and before you know, you are married to somebody whom you hardly know. In the old times, decent young men started by courting the lady of their choice, got in well with her family, and had to be approved by her parents.

"And if the parents did not approve?"

"Well, then they did not marry".

"And died of a broken heart?"

"Not that I heard of, but usually married the second best."

"And lived a miserable life?"

"Not always, mostly got used to it, had children to get their mind off romantic fancies. But not Miss Liuba; she was very happy, loved her fiancé--so we started to prepare her hope chest."

And then came an exact account of how much silverware, dishes, glassware was set aside, how many dozens of sheets, pillowcases and towels were cut of homemade linen, how many hours the girls from the village spent making lace for same. Even the wedding night shirt of the bridegroom was all edged with lace "with rose buds in the middle of each linen square". I wondered why the shirt was so important, and possibly could not visualize the very stern gentleman with black sideburns, whose portrait was prominantly displayed in the drawing room, wearing this kind of outfit.

Then came the description of what the happy father was to supply. Not only the dowry, but so many acres of land, with the house, the carriages, horses and retinue of servants.

All this plus the wedding: guests, the great ball, fireworks in the park, a ballet in the house theater. Many landowners had their own ballet troups and specially built stage.—Our Great Grandfather had four daughters and, as we modern youngsters figured out, at that pace no wonder he died very nearly broke.

Easter vacation started with the "Masleniza", the last week before Quadragessima, the fast that lasted seven weeks up to the great Ressurection Sunday. We could go with Katia, no governess trailing, reminding you all the time "to walk straight, don't dangle your arms, don't smile at people you don't know, close your mouth--you are not a horse to show your teeth"--and so on. With Katia you could do all this, mingle with the people on the big fair ground that was laid out in the Red Square.

It was a very democratic minded crowd: high ranking officers and officials, ladies of the Society, hobnobbing with poorly dressed people from the suburbs and peasants of neighboring villages. Everybody was having a good time, buying lots of trinkets, goodies and stuff one did not need, laughing at the side shows on primitive little stages, or listening to ancient ballads sung by wandering musicians.

V

The numerous very rich merchants of Moscow would conspicuously drive their troika (three horse carriage), trying to outdo each other by the beauty of their horses, covered by gold , silver, or colored nets with matching sleighs, coachman, and fur/trimmed rugs. Their wives would be wrapped in gorgeous sables, reclining on brocade covered cushions displaying, as much as the weather permitted, an assortment of dazzling diamond brooches, necklaces and earrings.

This was the week, too for the traditional "blini", and their husbands had regular contests to see who could eat the largest amount, doused with sour cream and butter, served with caviar, smoked salmon and other delicacies.... These were the last days of gorging oneself on food, as from then on, there would be seven weeks of fasting. Devout people did observe it with no meat, dairy products, sweets, and the last seventh week, "Our Lord's Suffering", one even cut out fish. Theatres and restaurants were closed, and no kind of entertainment was allowed at that time, so all the town was subdued and solemn....

It was the week when our Easter vacation from school started, and my cousins and I, under the leadership of Katia, did our penance.... At seven in the morning the sky is just beginning to get a rosy tint when you walk between patches of melting snow, the air crisp and clear, to a small monastery not far from our house. The dimly lit church is full of people, some standing, some kneeling; all you hear is the deep sighs and mumbling of the parishioners, the priest's invocations, and the rumbling basso of the deacon giving the responses. You begin to get tired, as in our churches we have no pews, you stand up. But you forget it all when the singing starts. In our monastery we had especially good singers. The choir was divided into two groups, the sopranos and contraltos. Many of our great composers had contributed to the church music, and the results were superb.

On Thursday of Holy week, after the reading of the four Gospels, there was an evening service we delighted in. Every person in the church held a lighted candle. Instead of blowing it out at the end of the service one would carry it, carefully protecting it from the wind, so as to bring the flickering little light safely home. The streets looked as if thousands of fireflies had descended from the sky and were slowly moving in all directions.

After the sad Good Friday, we went to confession and communion on Saturday. "Now your souls are pure and clean, try to keep them free of sin until the Great Holiday" was the admonition of Katia. Easy to say, but hard to do with all the temptations at the house. It was buzzing with activity, preparations for the midnight feast after the Easter night church service. Special dishes were being prepared like "pashka" of cream and cheese, "coolich" a tall tower of a cake, a short plump cake "babas', hams, roast, suckling pigs, turkeys, puddings, jellies and dozens and dozens of eggs dyed in the hues of the rainbow. Too many things to tempt you to commit the sin of gluttony, or worse, snatching some cookie or pastry....

Hyacinths: blue, lavender, rose, tall and stately in the show windows of our famous Podesta and Baldocci store on Grant Avenue in the golden days of San Francisco--how many memories they bring of the golden days of old Moscow. Their fragance, the past of two glorious cities, and the sad feeling of "nevermore"....

Easter night was fantastic in Moscow: Spring in the air, and a happy expectation in the hearts of men. The churches full of people for the midnight service. It started with not much light and dark wall hangings--still an atmosphere of mourning and funeral. Then a part of the choir and volunteers carrying holy pictures and banners leave the church and circle the building three times with the priest knocking on the closed door of the church repeating the words of Mary Magdalene,"We came for the body of the dead master". And the choir from the insdie answering: "He is Risen". . The procession reenters the church; as if by magic, the lights go on, the dark vestments change to white ones, while our wonderful choir happily sings, "Allejuah, Christ is Risen"....."Boom" starts the biggest bell of the church of Ivan the Great, and all the bells of the countless churches of Moscow catch on in a happy carillon that will last all the Easter week. We kiss each other three times, always repeating the "Christ is Risen" greeting, and feeling on the seventh heaven, walk back home.

The streets are all lighted now and crowded with people, happy, smiling and really full of good will to each other.... At home, the midnight supper around the table loaded with all the wonderful things prepared so laboriously during the week. There are flowers everywhere, the first comers of Spring: hyacinths, blue, gold, rose with their sweet pungent smell forever associated for me with the festive table. Like my gay uncle used to say: "Not a table--a color and gastronomic symphony." This "symphony" lasted all Easter week; people dropping in to wish you a happy holiday; the display of food, replenished all day, and the hostess watching that everybody has a sample of each item. How people survived this gastronomic extravaganza is still a wonder to me.

If our uncle was present in Moscow It was a feast for us youngsters, too. He took us to the opera, ballet, sightseeing and to the only restaurant allowed to teenagers. High on the hill overlooking the Moscow River, it had an open terrace where the best Shasklik was served. Waiters in caucasian uniforms brought it to your table on flaming swords and sliced it off to order with their razor sharp daggers. Caucasian wine for grownups, the famous "Kvass" for us--the spring blue sky, all the bells ringing across the river, the gold domes and crosses of the churches--we were really living it up! Every minute was precious as we knew the next week was back to school, and the hardest time, the final examinations.

" Birds are singing, trees blooming, everybody having a wonderful time picnicing on the new sweet smelling grass, and we have to sit here caged in and trying to remember why the war of the Roses started, or who destroyed the city of Carthage." Were we moaning, but it was no joke, the examinations. If you did not pass, you were left for the second year in the same grades, had to suffer the humiliation and shame, lose all your companions and spend the whole next year with the inferior younger ones.,,

The questions on the particular subject were written on separate sheets and disposed face down on a long table covered with a green table cloth. For some reason that bright green color had a demoralizing effect on many of us, and was the theme of pre-examination nightmares.—The principal, inspectress and teachers were seated in a semi-circle like a court martial jury, or so they looked to us, when one by one we walked the "last mile', picked up a ticket, curtsied and returned to our own desks to study the proposed questions. Then one by one we were called to face the conclave, and answer "clearly and intelligently," "what country raised the largest amount of corn. Who built the Pantheon. How many miles between Moscow and Pskov", and so on according to the scientific subject.

After sweating out the oral examinations, you had to go through the written ones. This was easier as we had dozens of clever ways to cheat or copy from a better pupil's papers.,...

There were lots of sighs of relief, and lots of tears, too, when the ordeal was over, the verdicts were announced. The summer vacation started, and goodbye until September.

VI

The Last Vacation

We were going to spend our vacation on the estate of our Uncle Nickolai near Mooromsk, in the heart of Central Russia. After having had his steel factories in the Ural Mountains destroyed by the revolutionaries of 1905, our indefatigable uncle had started all over with a new venture, a large sawmill industry on the River Oka in the middle of the dense pine forests of the province of Riasan....

After a short trip by train from Moscow, we had to get off at a small railroad junction, where a troika was waiting, for the longer journey through the rural country. We were delighted to meet our old friend the coachman, Nikolai, our hero of early childhood.

He did not seem as big and impressive as of yore, but years had passed, we were teenagers now, and the world and Nikolai looked smaller.

The horses took off at a brisk trot on the well kept but unpaved road. We left a trail of dust behind us, but around us everything was so beautiful: the fields of wheat, the blue bachelor buttons, and little red poppies bordering the road, the dark line of the forest ahead. The bells attached to the lead horse's

VI

bow tinkled gaily as an accompaniment to the songs of the larks high up in the blue sky.

Pretty soon everything changed. We were in the greenish semi-darkness of the pine dense forest; frightened rabbits and squirrels darting across the road; maybe disgusted by all the noise that disrupted the quiet and peace of their home.

A faint ringing of distant church bells attracted our attention. "We will pretty soon get to the monastery where the ferry across the river is", Nikolai informed us. "They are already ringing for Vespers, I am afraid we are rather late for the crossing. Maybe we will have to spend the night at the monastery."

That was perfect for us, especially when we reached it--an ancient monastery, surrounded by a high wall, heavy towers on each corner, a big archway with a heavy iron nail studded door guarding the entrance to the enclosure, the church, and the monastery buildings.... How many sieges and attacks by the hordes of Mongolians, Tartars, and in later years, Polish troops those old walls withstood was left to our imagination.

We were hoping it was too late to continue our journey, and were delighted when a nice old monk told us we had to stay overnight in the hostelry provided for the pilgrims. He led us to the two story white washed building and showed the rooms we could have. They were white washed too, spotlessly clean, but naturally monastic in style: a bed, table and chair, an icon on the wall with a votive candle's flickering light.

Our hospitable host apologized for the scant meal he could provide; it was a time of fasting (one of the many prescribed by the church before different holidays). He really need not have done so, as the cottage cheese, home baked bread, milk and honey were excellent.

"If you desire to attend the Vesper service we will be happy to have you join the brotherhood."

We certainly wanted to. The church was at the end of a long alley of linden trees, and must have dated to the early seventeen hundreds. The icons were primitive frescos painted on the thick walls and, as my cousin remarked, "Look at the devils, broiling a sinner on the eternal fire, they have the cutest little mugs. As to the angels guarding the pearly gates, they look so severe and forbidding, you begin to doubt if you should enter."

But our flippancy died out pretty soon at the solemn ritual of the service, the semi-dark church's high dome echoing the priests deep voice, and the singing of the beautiful choir.....and all those black robed monks so fervently praying for the salvation and peace of all the world.

Very small and subdued, we walked back to our hostelry; our cousin Nicki so impressed that he made a decision right there to renounce the world and enter the monastery as a novice. Next morning, waking up very early, he had forgotten his conversion and hastened with all of us to the ferry landing.

The horses and carriage went first followed by the people. "God bless, and Christ be with you", came from the group of monks on the shore, and the wooden ferry started off so smoothly that we did not feel that we were moving--the other bank was moving in on us.

After landing on the other side, the country was different; the woods darker, denser and rather forbidding. My "romantic" brother Peter insisted that he could see the wolves' eyes shining in the underbrush, while Paul, more practical, was trying to explain to him that the wolves showed up only in winter, when hungry. Nikolai settled the argument, "Very few wolves in these parts....plenty of foxes though, weasels, and all the birds, snakes, porcupines and such you will find, boys....and you certainly will have a wonderful time."

Right he was, and a glorious time was had by all. The boys enjoyed hunting, fishing and going to the sawmill to watch the workers cut the big trees into long shiny boards and load them on the small narrow guage train cars to be carted to the river. Big flat bottomed barges were waiting there to take the lumber down stream to unknown destinations.

We girls preferred to tramp in the woods, pick up baskets full of wild berries, gather dozens of different kinds of mushrooms and present them to the cook. At supper the mushrooms in sour cream and fresh berry compotes seemed to taste especially good.

We liked to visit the villages and get acquainted with the inhabitants, especially with young girls like ourselves. For instance, we found out that girls of a marriageable age did not turn in their earnings to the family fund, but saved them for their hopechests.

The peasants in this part of the country were well to do. Their houses were built of wooden logs with solid roofs and intricate designs around the beams and the window frames.

The men in the villages had some knowledge of the outside world. In summer they went down the river with the lumber boats, in winter transported their wares on sleigh-caravans to the cities, sometimes as far as Moscow. That was a good market for their wooden handcrafted bowls, kitchen ware, toys and handwoven and beautifully embroidered cloth items. – There was the military service, too....

But the women kept closer to home, and when you told them about the rest of our country they replied with a disdainful, "We are the roots of real Russia, the rest is a bunch of tramps, newcomers and Tartars." After eight hundred years that had passed since the Tartar invasion the people could not forget, and the word "Tartar" was an insult.

We liked to get up early in the morning, walk through the still wet grass of the meadows to the village. Usually the old sheppard playing his flute would beat us to it. One after another the gates of the yards would open to let the cows out, red, black, spotted ones that with a pleased "moo" would follow their leader. A few shaggy dogs kept them in good order until they reached the common pasture.

Then the men departed for the heavy field work, the girls and young boys in tow to help with the lighter chores. The housewives usually stayed home to take care of chickens, geese, home, kids, and old folks, too.

Wooden benches in front of most of the houses were provided for the old ones to sun themselves and tell to the willing listeners (for which we qualified) about the old times and customs. Some of these customs dated centuries back to the beginning of Russia.

Curiously many pagan rituals survived and were somehow linked to Christian holidays. The day Forty days after Easter was "Krasnaya Gorka", the little red mountain. —Why such a surname nobody could tell.- After church all the people walked to the cemetery, and there among the tombs of their "departed ones" had regular picnics and parties. Maybe this was a reminder of the dawn of times when a dead Chief was buried with all his slaughtered wives and favorite horse, a huge mound built over his tomb, and a "wake" celebrated for three days. Some of his warriors fought duels in order to send a few more men to the other world to keep company to the departed prince....

On the days of Holy Trinity at the end of May, branches of the Russian's favorite tree--the birch--were taken to church to be blessed by the priest, while the same evening birch branches were made in wreaths to decorate the heads of old and young and then thrown in the river to float.

The songs accompanying this ritual had lost their meaning, as well as the answer to the riddle of the difference of where and how the wreaths drifted. At night campfires were built and the young people jumped over them. Were those the purifying fires consecrated to "Peroon", thunder and fire god of the pagan ancestors?

Another odd and weird happening was the march of the twelve women. When there was a cattle sickness spreading in a village, the women held a meeting in deep secrecy and choose three widows and nine girls to exorcise it. At night fall, clad in long shirts, their hair undone, they would leave their home, four of them hitched to a plow, while the others followed chanting some strange incantations.

Everybody stayed at home that night as the weird procession knocked at every door asking always the same question, "Is the cow's death here?" The answer had to be negative, otherwise one ran the risk of being beaten by the infuriated women.

After having made a deep furrow encircling the village, they would return to their respective domiciles. Whether or not it helped the cattle epidemic is left an open question....

The interesting part was that in all those rituals one had to take off the baptismal cross that everyone of us wore, and that was supposed to protect us from evil, but at the same time carry a candle from the church or a piece of charcoal from the incense burner to make "a circle on the ground that the devils could not cross."

You had to use this protection when you ventured for the quest of the "Eternal Rouble". First you had to find a cat (a black one was required) and take him to the crossroads, draw the magic circle, and wait for a black troika to appear at the stroke of midnight. A dark stranger would step out of the carriage and try to buy the cat for a fabulous price, but you had to insist you wanted one rouble only. After some wrangling the disgusted stranger would throw it at you, pick up the cat and disappear. And that rouble would be the unchangeable magic rouble that would reappear in your pocket over and over again for a lifetime, and make you rich....

My brother decided to make the experiment. He found a cat as black as coal alright, but the big tom refused to be put in a potatoe sack to be delivered to the devil. He fought tooth and claw, and Peter, instead of the "Magic Rouble" got scratches all over his face and hands, and a shameful admission of his defeat.....

The last pleasant day in the country--we did not know it would be the last--was when we went to the mowing of the grass on the river meadows. The village girls and young women seemed to work so easily, the scythes coming down in unison, the grass laying in neat rows to be put in bundles

Vernon

8C.

by the young boys. Laughing and joking they dragged the hay packed tight toward the older men who stacked it. To make a haystack properly was an art, and only experienced men were entrusted with the job.

At sunset the work done, there was supper, songs and dancing, again circles, "horovod!" The magic of the circle seemed to have an important role in our folklore; as to singing--it was a part of life in joy and in sorrow.

Our uncle sent some sweets, candy, nuts and cookies for the young toilers, bottles of some more potent refreshments for the older ones. As to us, we had a picnic around the boiling "samovar," the table cloth spread on the sweet smelling new mowed hay, listening to the songs and watching the moon rise over the dark line of the forest.....

With all the fun we had, the days passed too quickly. We did not notice the preoccupied look of our older people. Some disturbing news was coming from the city; diplomatic tension, war talks, the newspapers saying, "The air is charged with electricity."

As if nature wanted to share in the general discomfort, the splendid weather we had up to now changed for the worse. Not a drop of rain fell for two weeks. The heat was oppressive; the crops were drying out, the leaves on the trees lost their lustre, and hung down, the birds were silent and even the flies did not want to move.

The ill-fated day of July 18th, everybody was exhausted. We were sitting on the porch hoping for a breath of fresh air and watching the sun setting in a red hot haze. A dog across the river was howling lugubriously, monotonously. Old Katia broke the general silence. "I wish he would stop--bad omen it is-- the dogs howl for the dead, God help us."

The darkness was oppressive, a maid came in bringing a lighted lamp and a telegram for Uncle. We all saw his face become tense and worried while our aunt, reading over his shoulder, turned pale.

"Children, it is bad news. The country is in full mobilization--we are at war. The thunder has struck."

As to support his words, a distant rumble started far away among the trees. It became louder and louder, a tremendous gust of wind blew out the lamp, dead leaves started a wild dance on the ground. Somewhere in the house a window crashed with the tinkling of broken glass. A blinding, tremendous lightening cut across the sky, and the roarof the thunder drowned the noise of the rain pouring in torrents.

That evening when I went to say "goodnight" to my beloved Great Aunt Liuba, I found her sitting in her favorite armchair near the open window. A pitiful little

Vernon

figure, slow tears coursing down her sad, wrinkled face. I sat on a low stool at her feet, my head on her lap. For a long time we remained at the window staring at the darkness outside....The dog had started howling again, maybe for the millions who were going to die. The steady light rain did not seem to let up. Was it the heavens crying for us, for Russia, for all the unhappy mixed up mankind?

Vernon

VII

The Vultures

Year 1918 as of our Lord, and year 2 as of the Revolution; Petrograd, the former St. Petersburg. During the war the name was changed. It should not have been done. There was a legend that when the construction of St. Isaac's Cathedral would be completed, and the capital's name changed, the end of Russia would come. Maybe because of this superstition, there were always scaffoldings someplace in the old cathedral, and some sort of repair or painting going on.

The Revolution put a stop to this work as well as to many other things, and here we were witnessing the dying of Russia and the birth of U.S.S.R. It is true that the pillars that were supporting our old empire's structure had been crumbling one by one during the war and the Revolution of 1917. Then slam, bang! The Bolsheviki October uprising, and the roof caved in over our heads. It was not unexpected, but the population was dazed, in a state of shock. How often have you seen a devoted wife whose husband has dropped dead of a heart attack keep up the pretense of living the everyday life: "Children are your hands clean? Mary don't forget to buy some eggs; it's old Mrs. Smith's birthday--I'll have to bake her favorite cake." Everybody marvels at the new widow's courage. The friends whisper behind her back with an occasional: "And I thought she would take it hard--they seemed so devoted."

How often, after a terrible automobile collision have you seen the driver talk and act quite normal? He can make dispositions about the wreck, calls the garage, his insurance company? Everybody marvels: "Look what is left of the car and the man walked away unscratched."

Are you sure that he is, that for the rest of his life there won't be a crack somewhere deep inside, a little hurt that will never, never heal?...All of us who survived the revolution in those fateful months of 1918 kept up the pretense. Nothing irrevocable had happened; life, however absurd, hungry and crippled, must go on. Don't think, don't look too closely around you--keep on going.... "Did you reach home safely after the ballet?" "Oh fine, nobody stopped us. Had to wait, though, in front of our house quite a while to get back into the apartment. The secret police raided Apartment 3."

"Did they take anybody?" "Yes, a couple of students." "I guess they'll shoot them." "I guess so. How did you like the performance and the new prima ballerina?"

"Beautiful, beautiful--but the great Pavlova-- nobody will ever be able to approach the perfection of her swan dance." "Yes, yes, I completely agree with you. Did you hear there will be some dry beans for sale at our cooperative?" - "Indeed? I'd better hurry home and tell the wife; we will try to get in the waiting line as soon as possible. Goodbye." "So long!"

Two ordinary citizens talking about every day topics; the ballet, two students who are going to be shot, dry beans. And the beans are the most important of all. Tomorrow maybe it will be your turn to be taken by the Cheka and liquidated, but today the struggle, the efforts, the countless hours in the waiting line for a package of dry vegetables--salted herring--a piece of bread; bread that looks and tastes like an adobe brick, there is so much straw in it.

That little hurt deep, deep inside--it is still there. After all those years, in nightmares you see the young mother in the bread line. She had waited hours for her turn and when at last she received her ration (about a pound of the abomination the Bolsheviks called bread) her children were too hungry to wait. So she divided the piece between the three of them and while they devoured their portions, sat on the curb. She watched every mouthful with the eyes of a starved dog--long strings of saliva running from the corners of her drawn mouth.

A famous professor, a friend of my father-in-law, came to visit us and received from my mother-in-law a wonderful gift--a jar of pre-revolution jam. His hands were shaking so badly when he picked up his precious present that he dropped it and the jar shattered in hundreds of pieces. The professor dropped to the floor. His coat and hands smeared with the sticky mess-he was picking up the broken pieces and licking them clean, while huge tears rolled down his cheeks....

Our Niania (my husband's nurse), the only one left of all the household servants, came running to my husband in the early morning: "My little dove, give me your sword and quickly!" While we stood open-mouthed at such a martial request from the old woman, she explained: "A horse just died on the quay, let me have the sword quickly and I'll get down there and get a chunk of meat before the other housewives see." Very chagrined by our refusal, she stood at the window watching a group of women who, like a flock of vultures, were tearing and hacking the bleeding carcass in the middle of the pavement. Two well fed Bolshevik soldiers stood by convulsed with laughter: "Just like a bunch of witches at the Sabbath on the Bald Mountain. It's what you look like,comrades. So help me, God, I'll die laughing."....

We, the people had our laughs too. While the money still had some value in the peasants' estimation, they were willing to trade with the townspeople. Some peasants were bringing their products to town; some courageous city dwellers went to the villages in search of food. A whole class of those strange tradespeople was born; they were called "bagmen" as they always carried their wares in bags. A risky business it was! You had to fight your way into the crowded trains, very seldom sit, mostly stand for hours--and you never knew if a search by the police would come your way. The goods might be confiscated, the enterprising businessman beaten or shot, according to the disposition of the Commissar in charge. So naturally, all those purchases were conducted in a "cloak and dagger" setting.....

– First entrance of our maid Masha whispering in my mother-in-law's ear: "She has arrived in town. She will be here as soon as it gets dark." "She" is Daria, the sister of our porter Nikodim, and our chief purveyor of food supplies.

Then late in the evening, second entrance of Masha--hardly able to control her excitement--and another dramatic: "She is here!" We all troop to the back room to personally greet our famous bagman--a skinny little woman with a bust ample enough to put to shame Gina Lollabrigida, Bridgette Bardot, and Sophia Loren combined.

"My dear Lady, here it is for you. All the way down from the village I brought it to you." One shawl, one kerchief, and one blouse less, we discover that the tremendous bosom of our Daria is a leg of mutton hung from her scrawny neck by a very ingenious system of strings and rags. We don't dare laugh; actually she is a heroine and expects to be treated accordingly. She is seated at the head of the table, a tea substitute is poured, and we surround her to listen.

"My dear ladies, what one goes through nowadays, it's hard to believe. With our Lord's help, thanks to the prayers of his Holy Mother and all the Saints, here I am and my mutton leg. Naturally you pray, but you have to use your wits, too. After a few trips back and forth you begin to feel your way, find how to get around those accursed search parties. You know my approach, but Olga from the village--she has them all beat!

She has a son, fourteen years or so, husky for his age and strong like an ox. Feeble-minded, though, always hangs his head down and stares at you just like a bull in the pasture. Well, Olga got the idea to make a hunchback out of him. Made him a harness with straps--fits his shoulders perfectly--then attaches to it a 200 pound sack of flour.

With his blouse on his own father would believe he was born a hunchback. 'Steupa' she says, 'don't answer, don't move when the soldiers start shouting at you". And sure enough he'll stand for hours like that looking straight at you, just like a sheep at a barn. What can you do? The policemen get hoarse shouting questions at him, so they say: 'To hell with the idiot', and let him go. That's a smart woman, that Olga for you! A real go-getter. Me and her and some other women--you might say we are professionals by now; but some of those amateurs--they are really in a jam. First rule in our business; watch for the perishable goods. We had a case not long ago:

A nice young woman on the train; we all thought she was pregnant. It was a bad trip--no place to sit down. We stood shoulder to shoulder for hours. We tried not to push her too hard--the poor thing. Then came the usual search. The soldier flashed his light in her face: 'What are you hiding?' She just stands there, eyes like saucers,-lost her speech. Then the so and so pokes his gun in her face and she just bursts out shrieking and crying and would have fallen if there was a place to fall. All we women thought she lost her baby from fright, and got real mad at the soldier and told him off. He quickly sneaked away, gun and all. And the poor thing sobs and sobs and at last we got what she was saying: 'Sugar--sugar.' It was not a baby--it was a sack of sugar she had under her skirt. Well, you understand. We had not left the car for hours--then the fright--all that sugar was spoiled, a fortune lost. You can see right away it was the girl's first trip--no experience. Heavens, we laughed and laughed all the way home.!"

We were laughing too, and thanking our stars that Daria chose to carry our leg of lamb close to her brave old heart!...We had other visitors from the village who came to barter their goods. They were stocky, silent peasants from the north. They did not seem to be afraid of the Bolsheviks. Just walked past them as if they did not exist. And our insolent militia men stepped aside. They came by water, tied their barges along the waterfront, and trooped from house to house in search of business. There was no bargaining or arguing with them.

"Two pood" (160 pounds flour) would mumble some towheaded giant pointing to a piece of furniture that caught his eye. Whatever you said, it was "Two pood." Usually the giant was the winner. We could not chew up Grandmother's Boule writing desk while his flour was real flour.... Once I could not resist asking one of those monolith like women what she wanted the baby grand for. "My son likes the sound it makes and the inside of the box is a grand place for the hens to hatch. We live on the lakes up north--gets damp on the floor."

When we wondered how they would stand up a pier-glass in their low-ceilinged huts, the answer was simple too: "We'll lay the thing on its side."... Business deals closed, they departed, their barges loaded with the most incongruous assortment of houseware: brooms and mops sticking out of an Empire Commode and pots and pans resting under the top of a grand piano.....

Petersburg was dying and over its prostrated body were circling vultures--grabbing, tearing, carrying away. The larger vultures even formed a new class of "nouveau rich". The commissars who liquidated the bourgeois and "nationalized", helped themselves to their apartments, jewels and furs. The enterprising business men who saw a good chance to buy, bought on one cent a dollar, or less.

I remember one of them--a stocky little fellow with an oversized head and oversized diamonds in his tie pin and rings. A former Army supply man, he wanted to buy my sister-in-law's dining room set for his new home in "Tsarskoje Sello", a fashionable suburb of St. Petersburg. He underlined the name so that we should realize his importance.

Vera was arguing with him. The price he offered for the beautiful set (especially designed for an oval dining room) was ridiculous. But he stood his ground--not a ruble more.

"My dear lady," a step back, he strikes a pose--a-la-Napoleon--one hand at his coat lapel, a sweeping gesture with the other to include all the family portraits on the walls, "42,000 rubles is my last word--but I will make a concession. I am leaving you your ancestors."

Oh my goodness! He was buying the old folks, too--dawned on us. Wildly laughing, we started talking French. Obviously good manners were things of the past, as well as the ancestors. Vera told me to go upstairs to the maid's rooms, pick up all I could in bric-a-brac, shooting gallery prizes, what nots, and put them in the best glass case in the living room..... From there on it was not an ordeal anymore--it was fun. The 'Vulture' got the dining room set at his price, but paid a fancy one for lots of junk. Vera persuaded him he needed all those genuine "antiques" and rare pieces to decorate his new home....

"How is everything?" "Fine, we just finished 'eating' the living room--starting on my husband's studio."

"Give me the name of your dealer--would he be interested in a good Fragonard or Greuse?" ___

We are still putting up a front but it is daytime. Night is different, it is quiet--so quiet over the city. The familiar chimes of the St. Paul-St Peter Fortress are stilled, no street traffic, no restaurants open. The people are holed up in their houses. "Qui dort dine" says a French proverb, and we are trying to sleep on an empty stomach. But try as hard as you can--you wake up at 1:00 AM. Against your will you are drawn to the windows of the living room overlooking the Neva. Pressed against the cold glass you wait, listen, and hope it won't happen tonight. But no, here it starts.....

Somewhere across the river the brr..br..br of a truck, two, three truck motors running in high gear. We know what it means: the Cheka covers with this infernal noise the sound of gun shots and the cries of its victims. We stand there ten, maybe fifteen minutes. Then it is over--quiet again. The oppressive, ominous quietness of fear that seems to reach from the dark buildings to the pale sky of our city's "white night".

My mother-in-law motions to us: "Go to bed, young ones, you will need your strength for tomorrow. We, the old ones, me and Zoya (her sister) will pray for them." We slowly close the door on two little shadows kneeling at the foot of the picture of Our Lady of Sorrow and the murmuring of prayers...."and grant rest and peace to the souls of those sufferers recently departed whose names you only, Our Lord, knowest."

Get out of this--escape this slow annihilation. Our young men were making plans. My husband and brother joined a conspiracy. A group of young officers, cadets from military schools, university students, former regular army soldiers were to enlist in a red regiment ready to leave for the front against the anti-communistic "white army." We women were supposed to follow as nurses in a field hospital. As soon as we would reach the front lines, we were to desert--pass over to our people and freedom. We were a group of hopeful youngsters; the plan was childish and the Bolsheviks naturally got wind of the contra-revolutionary plot. The Cheka came to arrest our leader, Colonel Morren, a thirty-two year old hero of the German war. He was not a man to surrender, he put his gun to his temple and fired.

The Bolsheviks were searching high and low for the other members of the conspiracy. There was no time to lose--we had to get out. To get out you had to have money, so in search of it I ventured forth... An antique shop tucked in a dark corner of an apartment building court--a fat little Armenian opens the door, looks at the jewels I brought: "The sapphire is not bad, nice shade, but I have so much of that stuff. Look." He opens a drawer; brooches, rings stars, hundreds of them. "Look." Loose diamonds. He opens envelopes and pours into his palm yellow, white, blue diamonds--handfuls of them. "See, isn't this beautiful? An exquisite crown, all diamonds. It belonged to the Countess Gehrikoff, Lady in Waiting. You know their situation is not so good. The crown is worth 400-500 thousand rubles. I gave her eighty thousand; she took it. Their situation not good, not good at all! As to you, my child (he dares to call me his child!) this is nice, quite nice this sapphire--it is worth eighty thousand-- I will give you forty for it, and the other trinkets. That's only because I am sorry for you, my child. You are so young! We are not informers, you understand, but business is business. We have our leads, every little bit one knows helps and....." He bends towards me, his eyes become two malignant slits, "and I happen to know that Colonel Morren blew his brains out yesterday."

In a panic I grab whatever money he hands me....the door, the fresh air....quickly home, and get out before it is too late.

[illegible]

VIII

The Escape

The first one, the senior partner, Mr. Sherman, I never met--my brother-in-law made all the arrangements. Mr. Sherman pulled some strings, paid whomever should be paid, and got us false passports and permits to leave Petrograd. The Bolshevik organization was green yet; a few months later we would not have gotten away with our passes. After one look at my husband's and my brother'~~s~~ IN LAW'S hands, no experienced Chekist would be naive enough to believe they were steel workers sent by the Soviets to spread propaganda in Unkranian factories. My brother was supposed to be a kind of military bodyguard--we women tagged along.

At this time the Ukraine was occupied by the Germans with a puppet government under Guetman (President) Scoropadsky. Whatever qualms we had to ask the protection of enemies, were dispelled by Mrs. Gartong, my sister-in-law's mother. Her husband had died in a German war prisoner's camp, but she was the first to say: "Anything, anybody but the Bolsheviks!"

We heartily agreed, especially after the famous speech of Comrade Zinoviev: "Death to the bourgeosie is the slogan we have to put in practice. That does not mean that we must exterminate a few representatives of that class only. No, we must cut the throats of the whole class."

We were between the devil and the deep sea--we decided to take the plunge. Our small group was met at the station by Mr. Bergman, the junior partner, who was to be our guide as far as the demarcation line. A tall, handsome man, impecably dressed, he courteously, but firmly took command. He herded all six of us in a small compartment on the train.

"Lock the door, I'll stay outside; don't open or answer unless you hear my voice. And to be sure you don't make a mistake, the password is 'Honneur et patrie'; we might be reasonably sure no Chekist speaks French."

The endless night began. Many times we heard heavy footsteps in the corridor, rifle butts hitting the floor, gruff voices asking questions. But our guardian angel stood at the door and it remained closed.-- Rattling over the points, groaning at the bends--slowly as if intentionally prolonging the journey our heavily loaded train crept towards the unknown.

A pale dawn shone through the dusty windowpanes when at last the train stopped at our destination--the small town of Orsha (Russian). Over there, over some barbed wire and across the no-man's land, was Orsha (Ukranian). When we opened the compartment door we found our angel, Bergman, a little darker from the stubs of his unshaven beard--but as debonair and business-like as the previous evening. He called the strategic directives: we had to have our passes validated by different suthorities; so my brother, who spoke good German, was sent to the German Commandant. My husband and my brother-in-law as representatives of the proletariat, were to see the Commissar in charge. Mrs. Gartong, who was a distant cousin of the "Guetman" had to stress her relationship to get the approval of the Ukrainian border patrol. My sister-in-law, Vera, Mr. Bergman and I went to the incredibly dirty waiting room of the station. Never had a room been better named....."waiting"....everybody was waiting. Crowds of people standing, squatting...the weak ones lying on the filthy floor. The tension, the suspense was in the very air.

What next? The only ones who seemed to know what was ahead of them were the policemen. Mostly young men in long military coats, laden with guns, ammunition and hand grenades--they were circulating through the crowd. At their passage people stayed away, seemed to cringe and flatten themselves against the walls. Those cocky boys were the masters of our destinies. The Cheka left to their discretion the interpretation of a "counter-revolutionary" and the power to dispose of same without a trial.

"Keep smiling, ladies," instructed Bergman, "you are the happy wives of two staunch Soviet citizens--don't forget it." And every time one of our Chekists passed by we stretched our faces in an idiotic grin while Bergman raised his voice to tell us some jolly story.

Vernon

At last all our emissaries returned--they were all successful in their missions. "Thank God this is done--now it's my turn to act.".. And the most amazing transformation happened to our Mr. Bergman. He pulled his stylish hat down in a shapeless mass over his ears, forcing them to stick out, and buttoned his coat collar up to his chin. His sleeves suddenly became too long and covered his hands; his back hunched, his shoulders sagged dejectedly. Lo and behold, our dashing boulevardier was transformed into a lean, hungry looking and melancholy local Jew. With slow shuffling steps he went down the stairway into the square. We had a glimpse of him waving his arms and jabbering in quick Yiddish, then he was lost among the hundreds of similar shapes milling around.

It was not too long before he reappeared with a cart pulled by a skinny horse and a skinny little fellow in the driver's seat. "This is little Etzke, he will take you over the line. Give him all your valuables and money. They won't search him; he will return it all to you when you cross over."

Good Bergman, he said "when" not "if"! He stopped our effusive thanks with a characteristic gesture. Was it the ham actor in him, or was he covering up his pity and sympathy? But his parting speech was in the best tradition: "You people are really poor actors. Here I am supposed to fetch you a carriage and you start thanking me as if I saved your lives. Tut-tut...to anybody watching us, we are casual acquaintances; we met and now are parting cordially, like that." He lifted his hat, made a general bow and nonchalantly walked away--out of our sight and our lives forever.

We were left with the third member of our Jewish rescue squad, little Etzke. And little, truly he was, a diminutive figure lost in the long lapsardack (traditional habit); the dark side curls sadly drooping around a very thin, pale face. Only his eyes were remarkable, enormous, dark, full of intelligence, kindness and sadness--the great two thousand year old sorrow of his race--eyes you could trust, and we trusted little Etzke. All that we had left of money and jewelry disappeared under his voluminous coat. We loaded our luggage on the cart and started on the last leg of our journey toward freedom. But between us and the open field over there was the last obstacle and the most frightening one: the search post on the frontier of the U.S.S.R. It was a huge barn; really two barns joined by a massive archway. The carts loaded with the belongings of the travelers one by one passed under it and were searched by a swarm of red soldiers. Meanwhile the documents were checked by a commissar seated in a little office, formerly, I guess, used by the farmer's superintendant. The left wing of the barn was downhill and you could see the open

Venin,

backdoor and a trail leading down and getting lost in a dark ravine.

The procedure for every cart took an awfully long time. Some of the carriages kept going, passed the red sentry and disappeared in the dust of the no man's land. Others were stopped, the luggage dumped in the barn--and as to the passengers--a quick gesture of the commissar; "Down the hill!" We knew what it meant, and every time an empty cart returning to town passed us, our hearts turned to stone.

We were third from the end and we were waiting and waiting. "Sheep going to the slaughter house...sheep going to the slaugher house," kept turning in your brain, until at last a dull peace settled in...you did not care anymore. One way or another, the hours passed.,. The sun was below the horizon when at last we heard the rough: "Your turn!" Jzke pulled under the arch, it was pretty dark there already. The first red soldier picked up our papers: "Seems to be all right, delegates from the steel workers Soviet. Do we have to search their things?"

A few voices broke in: "We are so damn tired--worked all day! They did not send anybody to relieve us from the commissariat. We are hungry, it's long past dinner time... time to close and go back to town."

We were waiting. Hearing the disgruntled voices of his soldiers, the Commissar came out of his cubicle: "I am damn tired myself. Such a day! Three carts left only...to hell with them, let them pass!"... We were so spent, so exhausted that we came to only as we pulled in front of the German and Ukranian border patrol station. A quick check of our passes, the sentry opened the gate. We were over, past the barbed wire--we were free. We stood there stunned, not able to realize we were out of hell, we were alive.

A gentle tug at my husband's arm...it's our little driver: "Sir, it is getting dark, I have to drive back to Orsha. Mr. Bergman paid me for the trip, you don't have to bother. Here are your valuables and money."

Only then it dawned on us: little Etzke was sharing our danger all the time. He was risking his life smuggling our jewelry. If things had gone wrong he might have gone with us "down the hill". Mrs. Gartong impulsively turned to the little fellow, put her arms around his skinny neck and kissed him. "Go back, little Etzke and may I bless you?"

Little Etzke's great heart understood. He bowed his head and the old lady made three large signs of the cross over the dark curls. "May God protect you, Etzke! What difference does it make--what we call him...'Christ', 'Jehovah', or 'Holy Spirit'...it is the same God for all of us. May he protect you through the days to come! Go back in peace and God bless you!" And our hearts said, "Amen!"

Vernon

Portrait Of A Gentleman

A huge bougainvillea plant climbing up along the wall of a white stucco house--"Villa" they would have called it in the South of Europe. An incredible blue sea beyond, a radiantly blue sky above ....the Monterey coast. Something clicks in my memory. The switch is thrown back; back ten, twenty, thirty, forty years.

Another flamboyant bougainvillea climbs the walls of a white villa; one, two stories high, dropping its carmine petals all over the sundeck. To the great delight of my baby son , they fall in his bath--a large basin on the floor; splashing water all over the deck. He runs crab-fashion on all fours picking more and more blossoms to throw in his bath tub. The sea down at the beach is as incredibly blue, the sky as radiant, as in California, but it is South Russia on the Black Sea coast near the city of Novorossisk. The cheerful voice of our hostess, Mrs. S. calls: "Come down, we are having tea on the porch, the toast is ready." The wonderful smell of bread toasted over charcoal, the gentle splashing of waves (not waves--wavelets) at the beach--the bougainvillea petals stuck to my son's fair hair. So peaceful is that last summer in our country!

But the peace and quiet are very limited--up to the hedge that encloses our oasis. Past the gate runs the highway buzzing with war-like activity: trucks ramble loaded with tired troops; tanks and guns stream in an endless line going or coming from the different war fronts. Our city is the hub of all this traffic. A sleepy little town of about forty thousand before the Civil War, now it is stretching and stretching to accommodate the hundreds of thousands that have fled south to escape the Bolshevik paradise.

It was stretching to a bursting point. Housing accommadations had been exhausted a long time ago. People were sleeping in public buildings, schools, warehouses--anywhere they could find a few spare feet to lay down on a dirty floor. The food supplies were not adequate for those mobs, and naturally prices skyrocketed. Soup kitchens did the best they could; it was not much. The orchards and vineyards were plentiful but it was dangerous to venture too far in the green hills surrounding the town. The hills were not only green, they housed the "greens". That was the surname given to bands of bandits that did not have any party distinction--they robbed and killed the "reds" and the "whites" alike. One of those bands was very much in the spotlight lately. It was rumored its leader was a very beautiful and clever woman. A lady of easy virture, a former streetwalker, had used her charm and wiles to bind together a group of desperados: Dunka's Band. She rules them with an iron hand, but under her leadership the "organization" prospered. They had plenty of ammunition and were even dressed in English army uniforms. An officer from one of the English battleships tied up in our bay had been so imprudent as to take a ride up into the hills with the beautiful girl he met downtown. He never came back--as with many other prosperous looking admirers of the "forest siren". In his pockets were found the keys to an English army storehouse on shore and the next day, after his demise, the gang was beautifully equipped and supplied.

In their raids they were becoming bolder and bolder every day....So it was quite an excitement when our husbands came home from the military headquarters with the news that the bandit queen and her two closest aids had been captured. The town was under martial law. Justice was swift. The court martial met in the afternoon; the three were sentenced to death--to be shot at dawn.—Though it was late, we were still sitting on the porch discussing the events when in stumbled Captain R., a friend of ours. He looked ghastly.

"Give me a drink, a good stiff one!"

"What next?" was our mute question as we waited for him to gulp his drink and recover sufficiently to tell his story. Captain R. had been assigned on guard duty in the military quarters where Dunka and her two associates were spending their last night. And that night was beautiful; velvet and silver, the moon playing with the waves on the bay around the long jetty where the executions were carried out. The thought that the prisoner could see it from her window too was not a pleasant one.

"A night like that--to be young and beautiful and to know that in a few short hours there on that sandbar, everything would be over! Heck, she is a monster, a murderess", and the poor Captain kept walking back and forth, back and forth, trying not to look down; cursing his bad luck. "All the other guys sound asleep at home and me drawing the prize lemon--a death watch, and over that accursed woman, too!"

"Excuse me, Sir, a gentleman to see you." A soldier was mounting the steps followed by a tall, handsome British Naval Officer. The young man was out of breath, embarrassed, fumbling for words.

"I was told, Captain, you are in command here. Let me introduce myself: Reginald King, Lieutenant aboard his Majesty's ship, The Crafton. I have a request....I know it is irregular. It will seem strange to you, Captain, but me and Dunka--we have known each other for some time--you know how it is. I have a little apartment for her in town; when on shore leave I would visit her--you know!"

Sure the Captain knew; you don't have to speak the same language--love is the same in any one. Dunka might be a criminal of the worst kind; a murderess, a horror in the eyes of other men. For him she was "the girl". Poor boy!

And the poor boy was struggling along--anxious and desperate.

"I heard about the arrest, the courts, the conviction. I have to see her just for a moment; just a few words--a question. Could you manage it, Captain? Please do, just a few minutes!"

The Captain was suffering, too: "I know, I understand, Lieutenant. I sympathize, but the sentence has been passed. The law is 'no visitors' until...until... I hate to have to tell you, Lieutenant,...until 4:00 a.m. when the sentence will have to carried out."

"So there is no hope." The young man sounded so forlorn the Captain could not take it..

"Wait here, Lieutenant, I have no authority, but I am going to see the Colonel, my Chief; maybe he can do something."

It took quite a bit of talking, but at last the Colonel relented: "Well heck--after all, love is love. We all are human. It is bad enough to execute a woman. Don't see if it would be too much a breach of rules to let her say goodbye to her lover. O.K., Captain, you have my permission--but be sure he does not get too close--one never knows. You will have to be interpreter anyway; I don't imagine she knows English, or he Russian."

Back to jail hurried the Captain to arrange the last interview with Dunka. One look at her when she caught sight of the tall figure in a white uniform--and the Captain understood why Reginald King was spared the fate of all her other admirers. "The poor thing did love him; it made it still worse for me. Here were two lovers facing each other for the last time and me--like some idiotic messenger in an idiotic Greek tragedy--in the middle of everything. I was the one fumbling for words now."

'Lieutenant, I hope you understand how I feel. I am sorry but orders are orders. You cannot approach her. I have to transmit your words to her. What did you want to ask or say?'"

"Oh yes, yes, Captain. Awfully kind of you. You see, I gave Dunka some jewelry; it is quite valuable. I searched everywhere in the apartment. Would you please ask her where she put the jewelry box?"

"It was as if he hit me in the pit of the stomach. I lost my breath. It took me a few moments to recover; it could not be.....the fellow had not understood."

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant, you did not understand. My English is not too good. It is not just a visit for you. This woman, Dunka, has been sentenced to death--she is going to die in a few short hours."

"I understood you perfectly, Captain. There is not

Vernon

much time left--it's why I was in a hurry."

"I don't know how I managed to cross the room and repeat the Englishman's question. I know no power on earth could have made me look at her at that moment. A few minutes of silence--her hand was on my sleeve... "Thank you Captain, thank you for feeling the way you feel. It will make it easier for me afterwards...later. But now, tell this...this fellow there that his stuff is back of the baking oven, behind the loose brick. And will you spit in his face for me? Will you?"

"I could not carry out the last request of Dunka's--diplomatic relations you know--but I certainly could refuse the extended hand and the hearty 'thank you' of Mr. Reginald King. He gave me an astonished look, shrugged his shoulders and left in a hurry--I bet to check on the poor girl before it was too late. I followed him into the garden and proceeded to be sick. It was there my sergeant found me retching and heaving. He called my substitute and they sent me home. I saw your light on my way and stopped for that drink. I desperately needed it to settle my stomach after the encounter with that 'gentleman'."

As to the bandit queen, the reports were that she walked to her death with great calm and dignity. Her epitaph was voiced by a young soldier of the firing squad:

"This Dunka, she certainly lived like a whore, but I'll be damned if she did not die like a lady!"

Vernon

Forget It

Gray seagulls against a backdrop of gray sky, gray angry waves, the dark hills in a gray mist......

It is February 1920 and we are leaving Russia forever on the "Hapsburg", a former German cargo ship chartered by the White Army Commander in Chief to take us away--where to? No one knows--but away from the horror of falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks, away from the advancing Red Army that is coming closer and closer and is, perhaps, already there behind this last range....

"We" are 600 women and children and 400 men, most of them badly wounded, the others old or unfit for combat duty. Our men, husbands, fathers, brothers, are still there fighting step by step but falling back, always back, toward the Black Sea. Will there be ships to take them away too?

As the ship begins to move, not one of us stays on deck to watch. We are like so many "Lot's Wives"--one look back and the pain will be too great to endure. Instead we busy ourselves settling down, and I mean "down".

Our quarters are the three cargo holds of the old "Hapsburg", three circles of Dante's Inferno in a modern version. The lower hold is taken by the childless women, able bodied men and older children. The middle one by women with babies or on the way to having them, and the upper by wounded men and their nurses and doctors. The latrines and the galley are located on deck and you have to climb holding your baby with one hand and clutching the slippery cold rungs of the ladder with the other while the ship rocks and rolls.

And don't look back,--never look back. Bad enough to look around when you go through the upper circle of our Dante's Inferno. All those wounded men lying there on the bare floor with the nurses trying to brace them with bundles, luggage--anything to prevent them from rolling with the ship. Two of our doctors, one tall and skinny, the other short and puffy, hurry back and forth. What for? There is very little medicine, no sedatives, and not much water either.

The wounded men have realized the hopelessness of it all a long time ago. They don't groan or complain any more. They even seem to be sorry for the poor doctors who cannot help them, and for the little old priest who tries so hard to comfort everyone. Once in a while, when he kneels near a prone form somewhere in a dark corner, and his big silver cross flashes in the dim light of their hell, the men know: another comrade has left it for the land "where there is no sickness, no sorrow, and no regrets," The words sung in our beautiful requiem prayer.... Don't stay too long, you won't have the strength to climb the last ladder to the decks.....

At last we are settled; the gray skies and the gray water, and the poor old "Hapsburg" puffing toward the Dardanelles.

There are cabins on deck; they are taken by a detachment of English soldiers and their officers. We don't envy them or protest against it. They won the war and to the victors belong the spoils.

The skipper and the officers are Italians. The crewmen are all dark and are, as they explain to us with friendly grins showing an expanse of flashing white teeth, the "Fellahin from Egypt".

Eventually we find out that our floating tower of Babel is headed for Constantinople. Will they let us land there? Or perhaps in Greece? Well this is the future, the present is what we have to cope with; not to fall down the ladders, try to wash the kids, feed them--and this is the hardest. You wait a long time in a line, an army tin plate in hand for what in the morning is called "tea;" at noon, "porridge," and in the evening, "soup". Tastes the same--lukewarm dishwater. On top of that, a can of very salty and dry corned beef (for some reason people insist it is monkey meat from Australia), and extremely hard "hard tack". My friend Helene (she used to be the gayest girl in our gang back home) still manages to laugh despite her last month of pregnancy and ensuing problems--like climbing up and down the ladder. "Maybe if I try it with my back toward the rungs", --and we both choke from laughter. It does help to be only eighteen--even on a hell's ship. Helene used the hard tack to hammer back her heel that was loose, dunked it in the (I think it was called "tea" that time) --and ate it. "Food is too precious to waste", and again we were convulsed with laughter.....

One morning when we emerged on deck we discovered we were in Constantinople, the fabulous Istanbul we knew so well from the novels of Loti and Farrère. A dream of one thousand and one nights; an oriental jewel; an arabesque of unbelievably beautiful colors, sounds and smells.—It was not so for us, the "blue" Bosphorus was lead gray and the city under a gray, melancholy sky, drab and colorless. The old mosque cupolas looked like sand dunes in a brown desert--their minarets menacing and mean--while the old Turkish houses were so forlorn among the dark cypress trees. All of this smelled musty, old and was infinitely sad.

While a Western city, like Petersburg of my young days, San Francisco of my mature years, they say London, too, have a particular charm on a misty day; an oriental or tropical city needs the sun to make it glisten and sparkle.... One of the attributes of Istanbul: the"sounds" were there, and what a noise! Ours was one of the first of the refugee ships to reach Constantinople and the news had spread, somehow. We were flying a yellow quarantine flag so nobody

Varna

could get aboard. But a Greek is primarily a business man and figured right that we were short of food and fresh water. Business to be made--and our "Hapsburg" was at once surrounded by a flotilla of small boats.

Fruits, fresh and dry; oriental sweets; and water--wonderfully tasting water in big oak barrels--were there for sale. But the enterprising Greeks had made one mistake. We had no money, or so little of it that after this supply was exhausted the business stopped dead. However, a good merchant is not that easily discouraged, and somehow a barter exchange was established. On long ropes, people from our deck were lowered into the bobbing little boats; rings, brooches, little valuable trinkets, wearing apparel, leather jackets--even shoes--anything to get a bucketful of that wonderful fresh water, a few oranges or sweets.

After inspecting what came down, the Greek merchant would attach to the rope what he considered an adequate amount of his wares and the buyer would pull it up. The Greek was at the receiving end and the refugees were at his mercy. An old lady leaning precariously over the guard rail was trying to shame the men down there in the boats. "You are an Orthodox, we go to the same church. See, we cross ourselves the same way, and here you rob us; shame, shame on you!"

It was in vain. Obviously the Greeks did not make it out. Suddenly she remembered from our church's excommunicating office the terrible Greek word: "Anathema". "Anathema, anathema", she shrieked at the Greeks, when suddenly the Hapsburg joined with a terrible bellow of his siren and started moving again.... While all the little boats scuttled to safety, we passed the City of cities, the jewel of the Orient--the fabulous Istanbul--our siren wailing like a banshee and our old lady calling the wrath of God on the heads of its inhabitants.– Soon the news spread; no landing in Constantinople or Iles des Princes.....so on to sea forward. No permission is granted to land anywhere. It looked as if our ship was doomed to become a modern Flying Dutchman--but the original had one advantage over us, the ghostly crew did not have to eat.

At last when we anchored in the port of Solonica, with our skipper by then, I imagine, in a state of desperation, two Serbian officers came aboard with a message for us from King Alexander of Yugoslavia. The message read: "We are offering you the entry into our country and although it is burned, ruined and devastated by the war, we will be happy to share with you what little we have and thus repay some of the debt of gratitude we owe to Russia."

With enthusiastic shouts and tears we pack and at last step down on terra firma which proved to be not too firm, though, as we were loaded into rickety box cars (of the 40 men and 8 horses type) and whisked through Greece and

Macedonia. The scenery was nonexistent as the big sliding doors of the cars were bolted. After a few hours of this semi-darkness the doors were thrown wide open and we saw the friendly faces of soldiers of the Serbian Frontier Patrol and, alas, we saw too what the good King meant. The devastation of the country was a shock even to us who had lived through war and revolution and were used to sorry sights.

Here and there, stark black chimneys as markers of what used to be a village, a prosperous farm or a small town. The snow had mercifully covered the ground, but the burned skeletons of trees stretched their gaunt arms to the sky as if asking: "Oh God, how far can the inhumanity of the human kind go."

After this desolate valley the railroad started to climb. Pretty hills first--then beautiful mountains, higher and higher. The train was shorter by now. Our wounded had been taken to hospitals, as we wondered by what miracle had any hospital escaped the universal destruction. The rest of us were divided into two groups. We were to be taken wherever shelters could be found......

Night: the cars were swaying gently, "Cannot travel too fast--the road has not been repaired since the end of the war; have to take it easy," explained our friendly Serbs. That is fine but why do we stop in the middle of nowhere?

Lots of running between the cars, lantern lights dancing on the snow; our man talking to the Serbian soldiers. "Very simply, the engineer drank too much slivovitja (home-made prune brandy) to keep warm--he is dead drunk."

"Another man to take his place?" – "Oh no! We are lucky we have this one; not many engineers left after the war."

We tried to wait until our engineer slept it out, but by 4:00 A.M. we knew we had to move on or freeze. The bitter wind was chasing snow in all the cracks of our cars, we had not much warm clothing, no way to build a fire in a wooden car--no "slivovitja", either. A few of our men and four of the Serbians were deputized to see what they could do with the engineer. What they did we never found out, but suddenly there were shouts--all the doors were closed--the whole train gave a terrific jerk and we went into action..It was a nightmare ride: we roared through forests, swished around sharp turns of the mountains roads, over deep ravines, passed without diminishing speed on dozens of bridges--all of this through a howling wind and blizzard.

Our car was like the inside of a cement mixer. The baggage was rolling all over (luckily it was light, the Bolsheviks did not leave us much); but the kids! They were many in our car, and light, too; we were holding them trying to protect them from the flying objects. In the darkness

page 119 missing from original manuscript filtered between two jagged peaks and behold--the miracle! The lake became a shimmering surface of rose petals speckled with rhinestones; the hills a mass of soft velvet folds of gold--pale pink and lavender with incredible purple shadows in their creases. It was breathtaking beauty, pure, sheer beauty! It lasted four, maybe five minutes. The sun's ray disappeared and we were back in gray ugliness.... Somewhere in my brain a memory cell clicked--Helene was back smiling from her dark corner in the box car--her voice gaily calling: "Well girls, the drunken engineer provided the ride, I the music; I hope the old time Valkeries were bumped less."

We all laughed a little hysterically but the tension was broken. A few minutes later the train gave one more tremendous jerk and stopped for good. The word ran down the line; "the engineer had passed out", but we were only a few miles from our destination. The morning was beautiful--snow here and there on the ground, the rising sun shining over a wonderful little valley--and a cozy little village down--way down. The problem was how to reach it. Loaded with our few belongings and our many kids we started on our trek. There were just a few miles, but they were long, long, long. Our group: Helene, another pregnant girl, and three of us with babes in arms, were the last to reach the village. The night had fallen, the little houses were dark, the air bitterly cold. The first snowflakes were whirling in the light--a light--a door, we pushed it and were in a "Kafana"--the village saloon. The long low room was full of people , smoke and noise. All the male population of the village, their wives and children safely in bed, were having their "slivovitja" nightcap. At our entry they all turned around, but after a fleeting glance resumed their drinking and singing. The patron of the establishment came to us, he understood Russian, understood that we could not walk one more step. He motioned to a corner of the room: "You can sleep here on the floor, put the children on the bench and God will take care of tomorrow."

Quickly spread your coat on the earthen floor, close your eyes and sleep---sleep! – I'wake up with a jerk. Somebody is shaking me. In a panic I see everything very clearly. The Serbian Kafana, the lights are low--just a few of the men left. A group near us, drunk, terribly drunk. One of them, a tall fellow swaying on his long legs is shaking me.

"Gospa (lady) wake up! Your boy was rolling off the bench. I put my leather coat under him so he wouldn't get hurt. In the morning give it to the patron for me, Danila", and he is gone.

Later on we found that a woman is always absolutely safe among those crude mountaineers. As to the children; we were awakened by our children who somehow managed to get off their high perch. There are people coming and going, tradespeople, peasants, women with baskets. Two of our boys who can talk are all excited: "Look, Mommy, money", and they open their little fists which are clutching a few pennies.

"Where did you get this?"

"The men gave it to us." I pry open my son's hand, sure enough he has some money too. Oh God, that's too much! I can take anything, but not charity. I start toward the group of men talking around one of the tables, but the patron overtakes me.

"Please, Gospa, don't--don't give it back. You don't understand--it is a custom. You will offend these people terribly. It is an insult, a horrible insult to give the children's present back."

Indeed it was a custom, a very beautiful one. Any old man meeting a little child would give him something--a penny, a sweet, even a little piece of bread or cheese, and the little one was taught to kiss the giving hand. Eventually we got used to seeing our little fellows always clutching something....We got used to many things except one--not to eat.

Our destination proved to be Vranska Bania, a former resort in the beautiful Serbian mountains. A hot spring bubbled directly out of the rock, so hot that you could boil eggs in it. A mineral source ran parallel to it for some distance until the two merged to form a gay little lukewarm river that ran to the end of the valley and then tumbled down somewhere through the thick pine forest. Later we saw gypsies (there was a tribe of them in the vicinity) wash their laundry in the hot spring, rinse it in the cold, and bathe their children in the mixed one. The resort consisted of quite a few small cottages, a very picturesque village with a tiny church and even a summer palace for the King himself. The palace, to be candid, was more like a farm house, a not too prosperous farm at that. As to plumbing, there was none, and the King, in the quite democratic fashion prevailing at the time, bathed with the gypsies in the warmish Vrania river and took his constitutional walk up the hills like the rest of his subjects....

Everything looked very cozy from the train and only as we reached it could we see that in retreating the Bulgarians and the Germans had burned all the furniture, smashed windows and doors, leaving but the empty shells of the buildings. Unable to smash the people, they went after inanimate things. The Serbians had centuries of experience in warfare, of guerilla wars against the Turks. In their struggle against the new invaders they resorted to the old methods. Men, women and children took to the hills, living for two years in mountain caves, and from their secret hideouts attacked where and whenever they could. After the Armistice, the peasants had come back to their village, patched what was left of it, and started from scratch again.

The government did the best it could to provide us with hasty accomodations. We at least had a roof over our heads, a few windows and doors were replaced. There was plenty of wood to burn and an abundant supply of hot mineral water, hot enough to boil things in--but no "things" to boil. Our Serbian peasant-neighbors were not too well supplied either, but we could have bought some of their extras, if we had the money. What we had was worthless: the beautifully printed old Imperial bills, the shabby scraps of paper issued by the temporary governments.—There were rumors about the Serbian government exchanging Russian roubles for their own curren so a delegation from our group left for Belgrad to see what could be done. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion" wailed the ancient Hebrews--as did we on the shores of little Vrania, while the river skipped merrily bubbling over barren rocks and barren itself--as it was empty of fish.

Everything was enveloped in gloom. It was pre Easter lent, and we were really fasting. All the silver money we had was pooled to buy milk and eggs to be rationed among the children. As to the grown-ups--we drank lots of water.

Tin cans in hand, we were standing around our hot water spring--waiting for what? For some miracle to appear on the dusty road? And behold, the miracle happened--down that road came not a fairy chariot, but something more tangible and wonderful to us: a truck. A big, battered, noisy truck. It clattered down the rocky village street followed by barking dogs and a crowd of gypsy children, their bare little feet splashing in the mud. The Serbian population was not taking chances with an unknown element and were barricading their houses and getting the rifles ready....The truck did not seem to have any hostile intentions toward the village, but passing it by, came to rest, with a squeal of brakes and a deep sigh, in front of us. From the seat of this chariot clambered down not two enchanting fairies with golden wands, but two forms--they were human, no doubt, but for a few minutes we could not make out if they were male or female. Heavy goggles and helmets, long gray-green coats, and all that splattered with harddried mud and thickly powdered with dust. With all this excessive attire removed, the figures emerged as two tall, very efficient looking middle-aged women. "We are American volunteer workers for the Red Cross; heard about you being hard up--drove down to see what can be done."

We were completely dumbfounded. Two women driving a truck hundreds of miles by very nearly impassable roads, through a desolate country where a frightened mountaineer was very apt to take a shot first and ask questions later--all this just because they heard that we were "hard up." But all our gushing thanks and flowing speeches of gratitude and appreciation were cut short by the older lady's curt: "We came here not to talk--these kids look hungry, let's start working".

In an incredibly short time our able bodied men were organized in gangs unloading the big truck, hauling bricks from ruined houses, building a large outdoor barbecue pit and rummaging through the ruins of the resort hotel for pots and pans. Next day a huge fire was burning in the clumsy but serviceable stove and we had our first hot meal in weeks--some kind of beans, I think, but they tasted out of this world. For a whole week the two ladies ran our soup kitchen, no words were wasted, just short commands to the obedient crew.

The truck load seemed to be inexhaustible. Case after case was unloaded from it and we had three meals a day; beans mostly, but wonderful beans. The children had canned milk, pablum, some canned fruit. From morning till night the two ladies toiled taking care of us--but still not talking much.

All we knew about them was that they were Americans and that the tallest one was named Florence and the other Betty....

Our delegates to Belgrad returned with money and instructions as to permanent settlement. "Guess you will need us no longer, will shove off", said our ladies.

A committee was formed to give them a send-off. An English speaking member worked for hours to compose a speech: "thanks, appreciation, will never forget, our saviors," and so on. There was even a proposal to sing the American Anthem, but it had to be voted down--we were not sure of the words. At last we all trooped down to our ladies' camp... There was no camp--their tents had been taken down, the truck loaded, and our two ladies in goggles, scarves and trench coats were climbing back to their high drivers' seats. In our group the speaker advanced holding his paper: "Our dear ladies, we came to express our appreciation." Florence interrupted him: "That's O.K.--nothing to it." "But", stammered the speaker, "we don"t even know your names, we should write to your headquarters, express our thanks." This was interrupted again: "It's all in a day's work, hope you will be OK now. No thanks necessary--forget it." She was interrupted in her turn--the truck gave a roar, two or three backfires, a jerk--and started moving. A cloud of dust closed around our fairy chariot. The last we saw of them was at the turn of the road. The wind blew the cloud away and Betty was leaning out of the truck waving to us and shouting something. We could not make out whether it was "Goodby" or "Forget it".

I did not forget. I have not forgotten.

Vernon

The Statue of Liberty

There she stands, so majestic in the early morning sunshine against the backdrop of the New York skyline.

Our "Piroscafo", the "Belvedere"that carried us for twenty days from Trieste and the Mussolini revolution, is anchored in the middle of the bay.

We impatiently walk the decks hoping to soon step on the land of the brave and the soil of the free. "When do we land?"

The little Italian steward is busy quieting down everybody: "Pronto, pronto, as soon as they are ready!"

"Who is going to be ready?"

"The commission, the inspectors of the immigration detail. They are in the Captain's cabin."

"Examining the papers?"

He bursts out laughing: "Examining the labels on the bottles." With a characteristic Italian gesture, he snaps his fingers at his collar.

"I let you know when they are done."

It is prohibition in the United States, we are on foreign ground, and it seems those inspector fellows have an enormous capacity for sampling the forbidden liquids. The sun is high by the time they are "done" enough for all the passengers to be lined up in alphabetical order for the checking of the passports and visas.

The line is long, the passengers are tired and so are the members of the immigration commission. Without the help of the stewards and crew members it is doubtful they would be able to distinguish one immigrant from another, nor check their credentials or rights to enter the country.

The gay Italians are busy: "Sure, sure, Mr. Commissioner, this lad is the lady's son."

It is hard to believe a very young blond Swedish girl could be the mother of a twenty year old dark haired youth. But it is O.K., pass--the papers are stamped.

"Those two girls are the daughters of this man."

The pretty senoritas giggle, smile, get a tap on their well rounded little bottoms, and depart with a lawful entry blank, escorted by their "Papa", tall blond and decidedly German.

We don't have the sixty dollars per person required before landing, but I still have one decent dress, a small sable stole and my last jewel in my last alligator bag. A bleary look from the gentleman across the table: "You have the money, have you?"

"Not enough, but I have this"--one peek inside my bag.

"Is it a hundred and twenty dollars worth?"

"Oh yes, yes."

"si, si, Mr. Commissioner", chimes in the steward.

The poor inspector is really "done". All he wants is to be finished with all those people that seem to increase in number, and go home.

"O.K., they pass." The stamp is affixed with an uncertain hand and we are free to land.

And we do, running as fast as possible down the plank clutching our meagre luggage and followed by the gibes and jokes of the assembled stewards.— Boarding the ship in Trieste, and during the trip, we had tipped them rather lavishly.

On our far-from-luxurious vessel, there was one class only and the steerage. So we were considered "persona grata". But those early tips were in Italian liras, now we could not afford to part with the few dollars left for an uncertain future.

Custom inspection did not take long, a quick look through our skinny suitcases, and they let us out in the frightening open spaces of Brooklyn and New York. A taxi we boarded naturally took the most round about way to a very modest hotel.

During the interminable trip we were munching (I imagine to the great amusement of the taxi driver) on a package of dry corn flakes--the cheapest "cookies" we bought at a near-by grocery.

The hotel and taxi paid, we found out that our destination, California, was like a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

To follow this rainbow you had to have railroad tickets and money to buy them. So after some inquiries, off we left for the Sixth avenue, far from the glamour of the famous Fifth, looking for the three gold balls--the international sign of a loan shop.

At last we discovered one that looked friendly, reminded us of some small store in Russia--and sure enough, the owner was a nice Russian Jewish patriarch, who greeted us in our own tongue.

"You certainly are in a mess, young people. Give me your jewelry. I will lend you some money and give a receipt. When you get to California and your parents send me the amount with the American Express, I will return your piece by the same company."

So thanks to the dear old man, our American "Shylock" in reverse, we found the rainbow: the money, the tickets, the railroad station. The helpful "red caps" put us on the right train that departed, to our astonishment, with nothing but an "all aboard" by the conductors.

In Russia we were "conditioned" to board a train and hear the first bell and announcement of the destination, second bell for good count, and if you missed the third one you really deserved to miss your train, too.

The inside of the cars was another surprise: chairs in the daytime and the strange arrangement of curtained beds at night. We were used to compartments with permanent cushioned benches, made into beds at night, a table, reading lamp and your own small dressing room.

Those cars were extremely comfortable and made in the United States for the Russian railroads. The walls were upholstered in leather of such quality that, according to U.S.S.R. travelers nowadays, after sixty years it is still in good condition. The United States manufacturers were certainly "delivering the goods" in the good old days!

It was the month of June: hot in New York, stifling hot in Chicago were we had to transfer. There awaited us another discovery: "red fezes" instead of "red caps", and a completely dumbfounded look of a Shriner, who was on his convention, and never expected to be loaded with our luggage and asked to put us on the right train.

Hotter and hotter it was getting along on our journey, and remembering our geography; "California is one of the warmest states of the Union", we were expecting to be boiled alive in a tropical heat caldron.

The Sierras were crossed at night and we woke up in the most blessed cool air and fresh breeze--but in a terrible fright. We had taken the wrong train for sure!

In my best English I tried to get information from the conductor. "Are we headed for Canada? Are we on the way to Alaska?"

The good man burst out laughing. "Dear lady, you are in California--it is always nice in our state."

So we found out to be true, and made it our residence for fifty years----with no regrets.

The Russian Tea Room

For our generation of San Franciscans there were two periods: B.D, before the depression, and A.D., after. And was this a most wonderful, friendliest city in the happy years of B.D.!

While so many European cities had not welcomed us, refugees of the red terror, San Francisco greeted us with a smile. Naturally for some of us things looked a little different from former visits. For instance, sorting the linen in the St. Francis Hotel's basement was not the same as occupying a suite on the upper floors on your honeymoon.

To a former officer on a Russian Imperial Navy ship the city was decidedly more pleasant while being entertained by his American comrades than when working as a stevedore unloading cargo on the same waterfront. But we were free, safe and thankful to the country that gave us a chance to try to learn to live a different life.

With a characteristic shrug of the shoulder and our Russian "kak niboode--somehow", everybody pitched in. Professors, doctors, generals running the elevators or serving as night watchmen; younger and stronger men working longshore, janitorial service or in factories.

Let's give credit to the American employers and managers of this time, who overlooked poorly mopped floors, patiently explaining to a neophyte what this or that gadget was for, and that you did not wash oil paint brushes with water.

How many yards of good material was ruined by our women, who never had seen a sewing machine; how many dishes broken by girls who tried to be waitresses, beds made up all wrong by others who had their first experience as chamber maids! And in most cases the employers looked at these blunders with good humor and a kindly: "Honey, you do it all wrong."

In this atmosphere of friendliness the"Russian Tea Room"was born, high up on the Russian Hill in the Paul Verdier's home, "The Haunted House" for many native San Franciscans. The building was like a castle with terraces, stairways, dark gloomy underground passages, sunken garden, fountains, paneled walls, a huge ballroom with double story windows. It was started by some lumber millionaire for his future bride, but the girl changed her mind and the house went begging for a tenant.

For awhile, hoboes, homeless derelicts, slept in the basement, and the flickering lights of their candles started the ghost stories, especially after one of the poor fellows chose one of the closets as the place to hang himself. The eccentric Hadahishi Hoffman occupied the house for awhile. His performances reciting poetry, dressed in long flowing robes, in the company of Isadora Duncan's brother wrapped in a Roman toga--all this on moonlight nights on the upper

Vernon

terrace added to the weird reputation of the place.

I guess this romantic European atmosphere appealed to the French personality of Monsieur Paul Verdier (the owner of the famous City of Paris department store). He bought the house and finished the interior in expectation of the arrival of his young bride from France. But, alas, Madame Verdier gave one look to the place--the "vibes" were not right--she was not going to live there.

The house stood empty until the Hillcrest Club rented it and the Russian Tea Room took over the sunken garden and the dining room. We loved the place, it's quaintness, the gorgeous view; even from the kitchen you could see all of the bay with it's ferry boats, which looked like giant white seagulls, the hills back of Oakland's skyline, the Campanile in the charming university town of Berkeley.

The club was quite respectable, but I am afraid we Russians added another chapter to the legends of number 1001 Vallejo Street. The Russian decorations, our dresses, the "balalaika" orchestra, the cossack dances, the"Song of the Volga Boatman" and the "Dark Eyes" repeated over and over by request from our dinner customers must have been novel, if not annoying to the quiet neighborhood.

Once, especially, everybody was shaken by the booming voice of our Chef, Vladimir--and a voice he had "a la Shaliapin"--you could hear him across the Bay! His hat perched as a Cossack's "papaha" on top of his curly hair, he was leaning out of the kitchen window brandishing his largest carving knife and shouting at the top of his lungs: "Just give me this 'so and so', this dirty Commisar, this lousy Bolshevik, and I am going to slice him as a turkey!"

It happened that the Club had invited as a lecturer for the afternoon meeting Professor Fruinze, the brother of Commisar Fruinze, who had not only been a member of Lenin's gang, but was the one who signed the separate peace with Germany at Brest-Litoosk LITOVSK. This was considered by us "white Russians" the greatest disgrace the Bolsheviks inflicted on Russia. Our last Czar, by refusing to sign the treaty, sealed his and his family's doom--as the Germans would have saved them.

So it is understandable the uproar that the appearance of this person aroused in our group. Mr. Fruinze, having seen the apparition of our Vladimir and his knife, was not too happy to go in, and inquired anxiously where the kitchen door was located. During his speech he very often looked back over his shoulder--so we were told.

When I refused to serve tea to the party even if the president would give me for same a hundred thousand dollar check (which she could), I got a completely astonished look: "Those strange Russians!"

XII

Vernon

I did not blame her; the lucky lady did not live through a revolution and witness the destruction of her country.

We tried not to think about the past, enjoy and take part in the life of gay San Francisco, "The city that knew how". And so many interesting people you could meet: Our mayor,"Sunny Jim Rolph", boots, white carnation in his buttonhole, a smile to all, especially to pretty girls.

Maynard Dixon, the painter of the gorgeous California landscapes, always attired in high cowboy boots and a ten gallon hat; old man Giannini, the fabulous banker, busily running his bank, turning off the extra lights"for economy sake". Misha Elman, whose sister lived across the street playing on his marvelous violin Russian songs that made us cry. Ramon Navarro, and all the dishes broken by our girls that were dropping everything in their admiration of the dashing movie hero. Mimi Imperato, the impressario turned bootlegger, whose speakeasy's walls were covered with autographed photos of most of the great singers of the "Belle Epoque" including Caruso's, and whose pianist "The Marquis" could play as an Italian Rubinstein, and better and better with every drink.

Drink--that was our problem. Prohibition was the law, and we had left a lawless country not to disobey the rules of another. It was a constant struggle to ask the customers not to use their pocket flasks, fill the water glasses to the brim so they would not be used for stronger drinks, watch the people going for a stroll in our gardens. Gradually we began to feel like guards in a penitentiary, short of frisking every customer or going through the contents of ladies purses.

The only solution was to leave our beautiful secluded retreat and move downtown to a more populated thoroughfare. — Downtown we did not have any liquor enforcement problems--just to take care of feeding a large amount of people, and instead of liquor flasks be on a look out for rats.

Downtown San Francisco was infested by those horrible rodents. The basements, the attics, the palm trees in Union Square were their living quarters and nurseries, and the many restaurants their dining rooms. The Board of Health organized regular safaris, using poison, traps and even shot guns.

The Chefs laughed for weeks at the beautiful performance by our Russian girls that proved our national gift for ballet dancing. In the middle of a busy lunch, a doped rat walked into the kitchen, and all the waitresses present, in one unrehearsed leap were standing on whatever was closest: salad table, bread counter, even the hot steam table, clutching their trays, eyes closed until the culprit was disposed of by the kitchen helpers.

"Rats, little baby rats are playing on the wrought iron window", shakily whispered Tania, the closing girl. "Thank goodness there are not many customers. I told them that Madam's little boys' pet mice escaped from their cage."

One of the Filipino boys went with a basket to pick up the "pets", while the nice ladies having a late dinner, admonished him to be gentle and not to hurt the "cute" little things. All he did was to ring their cute little necks and "gently" carry them away in his basket.

I guess the customers had lots of fun watching us struggling not to dump the Russian meatballs in somebody's lap, explain a foreign menu in broken English or try to walk gracefully with a loaded tray.

Once there was nearly a riot when nearsighted Liuba descended the mezzanine stairs with a tray in one hand and holding a lorgnette in the other "to better see where my table was."

But everybody was so good natured and patient. "Poor sweet child, she does not understand English so well", some nice lady would excuse a mistake made by Gloria, born and raised in Oakland, and whose knowledge of Russian was "da" and "niet". "Naturally our nice waitress does not know what poached eggs are--it is so American", would comment another when Inez (from Ohio) would deliver a plate of fried eggs.

But most of the girls were Russian and played pranks on the Americans, "russified" by their peasant costumes, teaching them (to preserve the atmosphere) sentences in Russian that made our musicians very nearly fall off the stage.

Most of our problems were on the funny side: "Another one is choking!" And I had to bang on the customers back to dislodge the prickly part of the artichoke that many people tried to eat....

There was not much traveling in those days and many tourists had never tasted artichokes, avocados, broccoli--all new California vegetables. In our tea room we very nearly introduced marijuana. When the produce man came for his order I told him: "Earl, we had such a success serving broccoli, I heard about a new Mexican vegetable, marijuana. Maybe we could feature it as a new and different dish, put it on the menu with sauce "Hollandaise" or "Au beurre noir".

Earl collapsed on a chair and between fits of laughter explained to us: "That's dope, you dopes." Since then on the order blank he would write,"and one pound of marijuana, 'sauce hollandaise'".

"Stop her, stop my waitress", a lady came running to me. "She took my teeth away!"

"But how could she?"

"In my soup, I dropped them in my soup."

[illegible]

"Oh my! Then they are thrown away in the garbage can"

"What shall I do, my goodness, what shall I do?" And the distressed lady was away to hunt for her waitress and her dentures.

In a few minutes the girl in question came down in time to stop the dishwashers from emptying all the cans in quest for the lost teeth.—The lady had found them in her salad.

Many incidents like this one enlivened our working days. Timid old little ladies inquiring if it would be safe to walk alone in Chinatown (around the corner from the tea room), and us reassuring them that for them there was no danger.

But not only little old ladies were patrons of our establishment. We really had a variety. The gay boys from Finoccio's, that was in the same block, coming in groups, white orchids in their buttonholes, calling each other "dearie" and ordering peach and cottage cheese salad--that in this time and age was considered a "ladies" dish.

Our very rich and very handsome young guest, who ordered an elaborate dinner and asked for an empty table to deposit the presents for his friend's birthday party. And some presents they were! An endless procession of gorgeously wrapped boxes from all the best and most expensive ladies stores in town. All our girls were so envious: „so rich, so handsome, and so generous. Oh, the lucky girl!"

Venus

Come dinner time and everybody was awaiting the entrance of the interesting pair. But even our blase musicians chocked in the middle of a song when our"answer to a maiden's prayer" walked in with a boy in tow.

The gorgeous Myrna Loy of the movie fame proved to be a very friendly and unassuming, but rather plain blond. While Miss America, Fay Lamphier of Oakland, was breathtakingly beautiful: a figure of a Venus, the golden hair of a Lorelei, eyes of an incredible violet hue, shaded by the longest dark eyelashes. And all this was real with no beauty parlor help. Yet seeing her in the newsreal on screen you wondered if the beauty contest judges had lost their minds awarding the crown to such a homely girl.

The rotund Hardy and lean Laurel team; Laurel with a poker face who imitated so well a growling dog that our bus boys were crawling on their fours looking for the beast hiding under some table.

Mr. Timothy Hopkins, of the famous Hopkins clan: white spats, cut away coat, silver handled cane and top hat strolling in with a condescending smile for all of us "peasants".

Mrs. U., widow of the famous professor whom we nicknamed "Queen Mary", whose exact replica she was: chock pearl collar and hat included--gliding down to her table, acknowledging her many friends greetings with a truly queenly smile.

And so many interesting and nice people we could see and entertain the best way we knew how. The tea room was a busy place, long hours and hard work, but we were young and eager to become a part of American life.

It was hard not to join in the excitement of the"Big Game" night, when the orchestra had to play consecutively the Stanford and California University theme songs, and the winners courteously applauding louder those of the loosers.

It was a delight to watch the crowd of the Easter (after church) brunch when the dining room looked like a beautiful garden; all the ladies so chic in their new flowered spring hats, all the girls-white angels with their halos of gay Easter bonnets. And the gentlemen? Well, the gentlemen were a bit self-conscious, but very distinguished looking in their formal suits and parading their spring straw head gears.

In the winter it was impossible not to get the "Christmas Spirit fever" and not to join the happy crowds of shoppers, admire the dazzling displays in the stores, the decorations of the streets and private homes, that used to outdo each other in original and beautiful ideas.

Speaking of building decorations, everybody's fun was to drive around town to admire and judge the Christmas decorations of the firehouses. The fire department boys for weeks ahead planned and worked in deep secrecy how to decorate the fronts of their respective buildings.

The result was really fantastic! The fire company with the largest amount of votes received the first prize--quite a considerable amount of money. The cash was supplied by Gus Oliva, nicknamed "The Mafia Robinhood". Nobody questioned how he made his money, as he spent it as fast as it came--all for good purposes--charitable institutions, summer camps for needy children, Easter egg hunts in the Golden Gate Park for hundreds of kids. Naturally, he died broke, but I am sure, contented.

San Francisco knew how to make money and how to spend it--with a smile. Dear old San Francisco, where even the evening fog, drifting over the grim Alcatraz Island peninten-tiary seemed to be caressing, soft and gentle.

The sun has set, the fog is coming over the hills. Is it me and years gone by?.......but this fog is gray, gloomy and sad. The tree is only a silhouette against the misty backdrop--the leaves are still falling, but I don't see them anymore--just a soft rustle--it is getting cold.

Time to go in and shut the door.

RICHARD A. PIERCE

Born in California.

Undergraduate and graduate training at the University of California, Berkeley, specializing in the history of Russia, particularly of Russian expansion in Central Asia, Siberia, and Alaska.

Since 1959, on the teaching staff of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Since 1982, Professor Emeritus.

Author of Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1960) and Russia's Hawaiian Adventure, 1815-1817 (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965). Co-author (with George V. Lantzeff) of Eastward to Empire, Exploration and Conquest on the Russian Open Frontier to 1750 (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, New York and London, 1974). Co-translator (with A. S. Donnelly) of P. A. Tikhmenev's History of the Russian-American Company (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1978).

Editor, Alaska History series, The Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, from 1972.

Travels include eight trips to Soviet Union, 1960-1984.

Project director, California-Russian Emigrés Project, Regional Oral History Office, 1958-1986.

134153

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C087744451