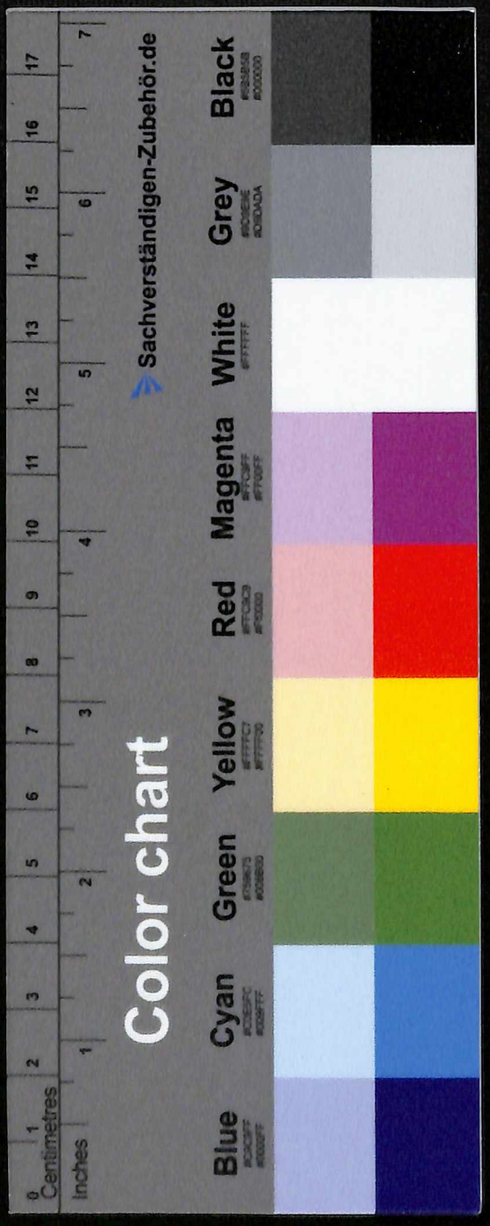
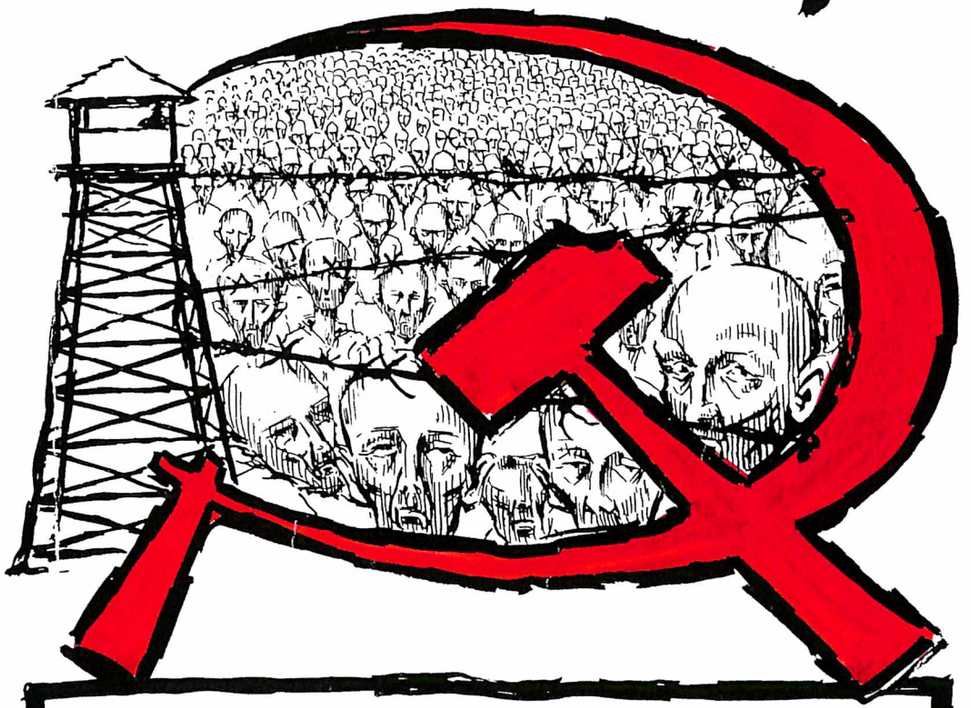


Dear America!



THE ODYSSEY OF AN AMERICAN COMMUNIST YOUTH
WHO MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED THE
HARSH LABOR CAMPS OF KOLYMA

BY

THOMAS SGOVIO

Dear America!

DEAR AMERICA!

Why
I turned
against communism

by
THOMAS SGOVIO

Copyright ©1979 by Thomas Sgovio - 17384OCT1679

All rights reserved, including the rights to reproduce this book,
or portions thereof, in any form.

Published by
PARTNERS' PRESS, INC., ABGOTT & SMITH PRINTING
1881 Kenmore Avenue • Kenmore, New York 14217

September, 1979

Anasthatic reprint June 2009
by Edizioni dal Sud
Via Dante Alighieri, 214 - 70121 BARI - Italy
www.dalsud.it - info@dalsud.it

I dedicate this to all those who did not survive,
those who are still perishing in communist prisons
and labor camps,
and to my Father and others like him
who become victims of their own illusions.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I started to write this book nineteen years ago, immediately after returning to Freedom. The first version was a collection of notes, events, and dates. Since then I have painfully rewritten the manuscript several times until it reached its present state. There were many times I felt like throwing my pen away in despair at my inability to convey on paper that which I felt in my heart, soul, and mind. Sitting down to write was like climbing into a dentist's chair; I kept forcing myself to relive the agony of the past. A persistant voice inside me kept repeating, "Get it out . . . get it all out of you."

I did not intend this book to be just another account of Soviet prisons and labor camps — instead, a journey through human experience . . . my transformation from a communist, atheist child born in the revolutionary movement — into a God-fearing Christian.

My first attempt to leave the Soviet Union resulted in two long, continuous journeys of prisons, transports, concentration labor camps, and finally exile. It all started in 1938 when I was arrested by two NKVD agents after I left the United States Embassy in Moscow. Not until 1960, twenty-two years later, did I finally succeed in extricating myself from a captivity into which I had unwittingly blundered.

This book covers the periods of my childhood and youth in Buffalo, New York; my father's involvement in the American revolutionary movement — ultimately resulting in his deportation as an undesirable alien; my father's early days in Moscow; the events leading to the arrest of my father and myself; my father's death in Moscow after ten years in the labor camps; and finally . . . my many years in that frozen hell called Kolyma.

Since 1932 millions of prisoners were sent to die in Kolyma, the vast penal territory of the NKVD. To this day there are prisoners suffering there. And still, the overwhelming majority of Americans have never heard of Kolyma.

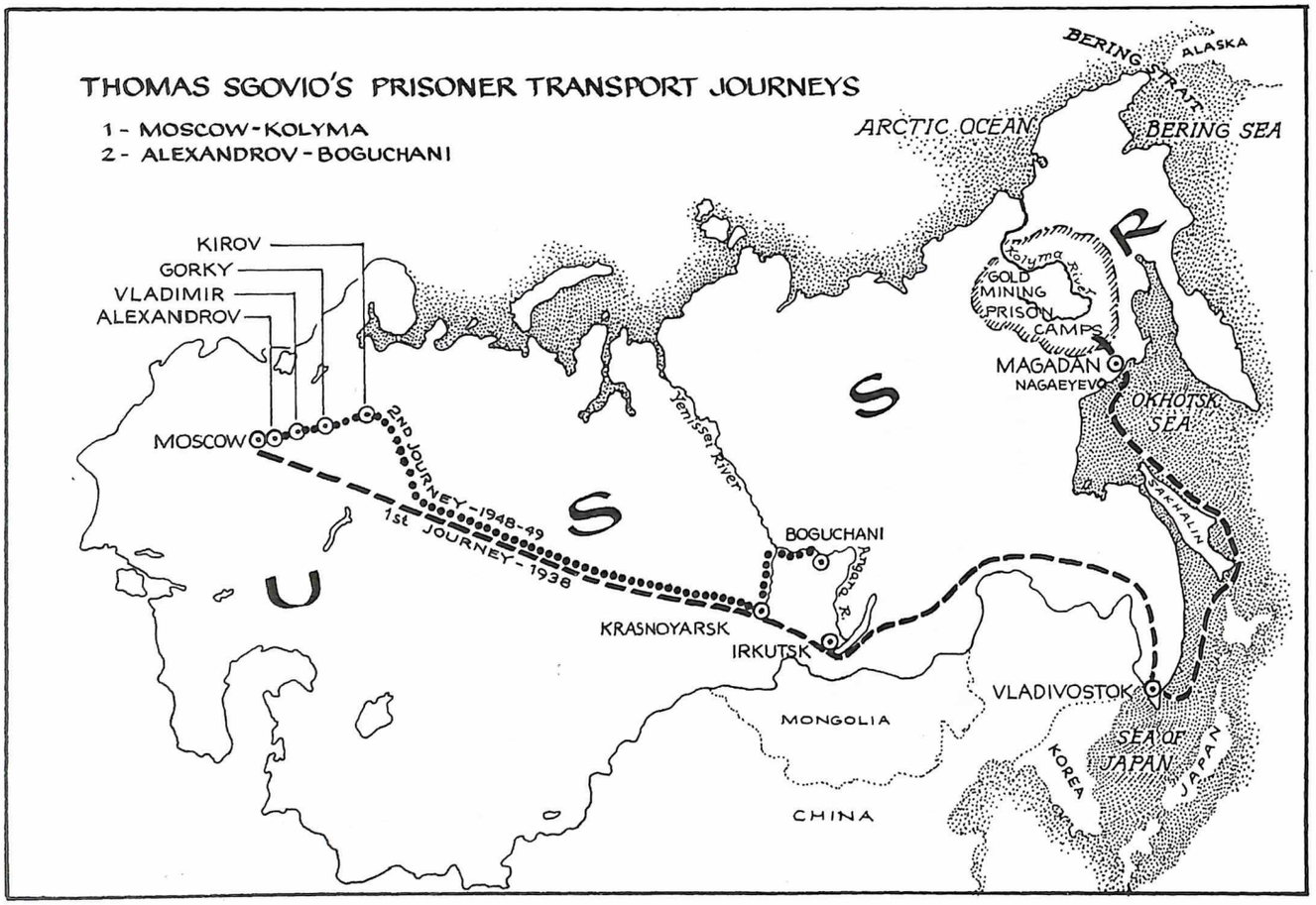
The events and names in this book are authentic, excepting for the names of five persons. In all cases I have indicated in the passages that I did not recall their names and gave them fictious first names for convenience's sake.

I have identified a few others with initials for personal reasons — to protect the innocent.

Finally, heartfelt acknowledgement is due my dear wife Joanne and children Robert, Joseph, and Annette for the many days and evenings they patiently bore without me — so I could write it all down . . . the way it happened.

Contents

PART I


THOMAS SGOVIO'S PRISONER TRANSPORT JOURNEYS
1 - MOSCOW-KOLYMA
2 - ALEXANDROV-BOGUCHANI
BERING STRAIT
ALASKA
ARCTIC OCEAN
BERING SEA
KIROV
GORKY
VLADIMIR
ALEXANDROV
KOLYMA River
GOLD MINING PRISON CAMPS
MAGADAN
NAGAEYEVO
OKHOTSK SEA
MOSCOW
2ND JOURNEY - 1948-49
1st JOURNEY - 1938
Yenisei River
BOGUCHANI
ANGARA R.
KRASNOYARSK
IRKUTSK
SAKHALIN
VLADIVOSTOK
MONGOLIA
SEA OF JAPAN
JAPAN
KOREA
CHINA

I opened my briefcase and looked at the rumpled towel and underwear. Well, I certainly would not be going to the bathhouse to-day. When I looked at these people, about fifty in all, I could tell by their dress they were all Russians. They could not be arresting them all. Besides, the arrest always took place during the night. Surely they were merely checking us all out and in a minute or two they would release us all and tell us to go home. Perhaps I would even have time to call Lucy and go out dancing after all.

Late in the evening agents began reading out names from pink slips of paper. In parties of three, those called left under escort. My turn came. I was called with Ina and another man. Outside, I looked across the street. It was already dark and the lights were shining in the Metropole Hotel. How many times I had danced there! A black Ford, its door opened, stood near the curb. We were hurriedly pushed into it. Besides the driver, there were two agents in civilian clothes. Moscovites were going about their business as usual.

Huddled in the back seat of the Sovietized Ford sedan, I attempted to observe everything we passed, each building and person. Somewhere in my mind, so muddled with mixed emotions, a voice was warning me, "This is the last time you'll be seeing these Moscow streets."

I remember seeing a clock on a tall building. It was nine o'clock in the evening. The Ford sped on cobble-stoned Kuznetsky Most. We passed the studios of Vsyekokhudojhnik where I studied art in the evenings and painted in oils on many a Rest Day. This was my favorite section of Moscow. I had often shopped for art materials in the stores and studied the paintings of Soviet artists on display in the shop windows. There was the foreign book shop where I always bought the *Moscow Daily News.* The Soviet citizens were trudging along, just like I did until then, oblivious of black sedans hauling innocent victims to Lubyanka prison — only a few blocks away from the 50th Militia precinct.

Ina groaned as we approached Dzherzinsky Square. I remembered Marvin V. He had taken me to his girl-friend's apartment two or three times when I first arrived in Moscow. At the time I was vaguely impressed. Her name was Sarah Berman, daughter of Matvei, the chief of the GULAG[3]. They lived somewhere on this very square, on the seventh or eighth floor of a luxurious apartment building.

The car stopped in a very narrow, dark street off of Dzherzinsky Square in front of a gloomy building. Our escorts and the chauffeur quickly alighted and bade us to do the same. We climbed a few stairs to the entrance and passed two NKVD soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets. Our escort handed over three envelopes containing our dossiers to a uniformed officer who signed receipts for us. The agents left, their task accomplished.

I did not realize it at the time, perhaps my two fellow-victims sensed that we were now caught in the "meat-grinder."

[3]GULAG — Acronym for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps

Chapter 2

LUBYANKA-TAGANKA

We were taken up several flights of stairs into a long corridor and ordered to sit down and wait. Ina was called into another room. I never saw her again in Moscow. A man was led down the corridor, hands behind his back. An NKVD guard walked behind him. The man's head and face was covered by a short stubble of hair. His dejected mien and pallor made a strange impression on me. I realized later that he was a prisoner being taken to *doprоss* (interrogation). However, to this day I cannot explain why that prisoner was allowed to see us sitting in the corridor. It was against the NKVD procedures. Always, when a prisoner was led to interrogation, the guard kept tapping a large key on his belt buckle as a warning to other guards who might be escorting other prisoners to interrogation, thus preventing encounters.

We heard occasional frightful screams upstairs. I could not imagine what it was all about. A young man sitting next to me did not seem the least surprised. Noticing my perplexity, he leaned over and whispered, "They're beating up some poor soul upstairs." I looked at him with amazement, unable to believe that anyone could be physically tortured in Soviet prisons.

My name was called and I was led into a small office. A young man wearing military trousers and boots closed the door behind me. A gray turtle-neck sweater was tucked into his pants. A gold-fringed emblem with a serpent entwining a sword was sewn on the sleeve. My second interrogation began.

The questions were the same as in the militia station, mostly biographical. His matter-of-fact manner of asking them made me feel at ease. He was very patient when I did not understand, using simpler language. At times he smiled and joked.

I never knew my interrogator's name. He never introduced himself to me. I never thought of asking who he was, his rank or title. It did not seem odd then. I realize it now, as I write these memoirs, how much easier it would be if I could write, "Lieutenant Ivanov asked . . ."

His whole attitude changed when he came to the question, "Why did you go to the American Embassy?" He leaned forward on the desk, both fists under his chin, boring me with his eyes. I told him why.

"Did you tell the Americans you wanted to go to Spain?" I answered that I did not.

He asked me why. I was incredulous! I started to rise from my chair, but a quick gesture of his hand bade me to sit down. "Why? Surely you under-

stand why I could not tell them. If I told them I wanted an American passport to go to Spain and join the International Brigade, they would never give it to me."

My interrogator's manner changed completely. His penetrating eyes dropped only when he wrote down my answers to his questions. "What did you tell them you wanted an American passport for?"

"To return to the United States."

"Did the Americans ask WHY you wanted to return?"

I answered, "Yes, I told them I am homesick."

His attitude seemed to be changing again. Slyly, with an unbelieving smile, "Are you really homesick?"

"Of course I am."

"Oh! Then you're not satisfied with our system."

"But I am, comrade! I'm an American communist. I feel it is wrong to live here in the Soviet Union where the Revolution is already accomplished. What would happen if all the foreign communists came here? How could the Revolution take place in their own countries?"

My interrogator rose, pointed a finger at me, and roared, "Remember what I am going to say, Sgovio! From now on, you are not to address me or any other official of the NKVD as comrade!"

I sat dumbfounded, not knowing what to answer. I looked at my hands, at my shoes, at the walls which seemed to be falling on me. I started several times to ask why and he added, "You may address us, 'Citizen.' Do you understand? Citizen! As long as you are here under investigation I don't want to hear the word comrade from you."

He asked me to sign the protocol, explaining it was a mere formality. I tried to read the questions and answers as best I could. He insisted I take my time, which I did. When satisfied the protocol was correct, I signed each page.

He looked at his watch, offered me a cigarette, and became amiable. I wondered what time it was. I asked him. He replied, "It's pretty late, but time is of no consequence to you now. Are you tired? You'll get some rest soon."

He arose and asked me to follow him. When he put on his tunic, I noticed there were two square service ranks on his lapel. I was led into the corridor and then into a larger office where a fat individual with black, horn rimmed glasses sitting on a shaved head sat at a desk. He was about fifty and resembled an ugly toad. He wore a full NKVD uniform; two rectangular service ranks were attached on his stiff collar.

My escort placed the protocol on the desk. The older Chekist[4] read it. He asked me a few questions, then whispered a few words to his subordinate. I was led out of the room, through several corridors, upstairs, downstairs, until I finally reached an open courtyard surrounded by very high walls. Then, after passing through a small armored door and down a flight of steep steps, we reached the infamous cellars of Lubyanka Prison.

I was handed over to a squad of young guards. In a small room, they compelled me to undress. They inspected my body and clothing, laughing and joking during the procedure. I had about fifteen rubles on my person. One of the guards stuffed my money and all my pocket's contents, excepting for my cigarettes and matches, into a large envelope which he sealed.

[4]CHEKIST — One of the CHEKA — original name of the Soviet secret police, later renamed OGPU, then NKVD, then MVD, then MGB.

They took away my belt and shoelaces, cut the metal buttons off my trousers, and told me to get dressed. One of the guards led me out into a dimly lit corridor. We walked on until he ordered me to stop in front of one of the cells.

He opened the heavy, iron-plated door with his huge key. I entered; the massive door closed with a muffled clang behind me. This was my first Soviet prison *kamera* (cell). It was completely bare, about two hundred square feet. There were no windows. Three or four men were lying on their overcoats, flung on the grey, concrete floor. There were only two objects in the cell, an electric light bulb high in the center of the cell, and the *parasha* (latrine bucket), standing next to the door.

I held my trousers with one hand, since I had neither a belt or buttons to keep them up. They had even cut the metal clip off the fly. I stood there wondering what to do. I did not want to lie down on the cement. The others looked at me with interest. Wearing a navy blue beret on my head, I looked like a foreigner. I was often taken for a Spaniard.

After listening to my story, one of the inmates remarked, "They're even beginning to pick them off the street." I was advised to spread my overcoat on the floor and lie down while there was plenty of space. I hesitated, loathing to get my overcoat dirty. Surely this was all a mistake. Perhaps in the morning they would set me free. We had no watches. In prison one loses all sense of time. I felt it must have been about midnight. I wondered if my mother and sister Grace already knew I was arrested. Lucy surely must suspect it because I had not called her up.

I finally forced myself to neatly fold my overcoat, place it near one of the inmates, and sit down on it. It was an American overcoat. My mother had bought it in Buffalo after much shopping around. I remembered it had cost fifteen dollars. I placed the black, silk scarf in my jacket pocket. It had been given me by one of the Buffalo comrades just before we departed for the Soviet Union. I looked at my brown sport oxfords. They were expensive shoes, given to me by Eddie S., another Buffalonian. They never seemed to wear out and I wondered where they were going to take me now.

Soon the door opened and another man was shoved in. This continued all through the night. By morning the cell was packed. No one could lie down fully stretched. We sat with our knees under our chins. I was the only one without belongings. All I had was what I was wearing and change of underwear. The other prisoners, who had all been arrested that night in their homes, carried blankets, pillows and extra clothes.

For two days and three nights I did not sleep or rest, constantly being transferred from cell to cell. Every few minutes the guards opened the door and pushed fresh meat into the grinder. There was a constant commotion as we were shuffled like cards in a poker game. I began to realize how worthless human lives could become. We were no longer men. We became things. Refined men, snatched away from their loved ones in the early hours of the morning, feebly protested as they were hurled into cellars already crammed full to capacity. Those on the bottom sat groaning, twisting and pushing the bodies of those on top.

We knew it was morning when the guards handed out mugs of boiled water which we spilled over each other as we passed them on. Some put the two sugar cubes in their mouths, others in their pockets. We handled the six-hundred grams of black bread — our daily portion. How few of us ate it that first day and on the second and third! Oh, that heavy, sour rye bread

which makes the stomach turn over, growl, belch and force out the foulest of gases! Nevertheless, it was to become holy, sacred and sweet, the mainstay of our lives. We were to treasure it, dream of it and kill over it!

During my confinement in Lubyanka we were fed in the cells — one hundred or so men squeezed in two hundred square feet. We were not taken to the toilet. The latrine bucket was constantly overflowing. Imagine those old professors, doctors and intellectuals — sixty and seventy years old with weak bowels. But one who is determined to survive must always think — not how bad conditions are; instead, how much worse they could be. After all, they allowed two of us at a time to carry the stinking bucket to the toilets and empty it! What if we had to do it on the floors? But the floors were covered with ourselves, what if we had to do it on ourselves?

I came into contact with about three thousand newly arrested men, among them, many acquaintances from the Foreign Workers' Club. One American, whose name I do not remember, had come to Russia as an engineer. Ultimately, he decided to become a Soviet citizen and help build Socialism. Now, here he was in Taganka. I remember asking him why he had never visited the Foreign Workers' Club. It seemed his work in a Moscow plant was of a secret nature and he did not wish to associate with foreigners.

Despite the conditions we found ourselves in, most of us were not depressed. The elderly especially, suffered physically from the crowded conditions, the lack of oxygen and sleep. It all seemed too unreal. Everyone was being arrested. We were all in the same boat and most important of all, we did not know we were actually caught in the meat grinder. Thus, self-delusion kept our spirits up. To many, this was even a great adventure and something to tell our friends about later, when we were freed.

Sometime during the night of March 24th, my name was called and I was taken to a room upstairs. There were four desks, each occupied by an NKVD officer. One of them waved to me and told me to sit down. "Are you Sgovio? What's your first name?"

I answered, "To-mass." That was the Russian pronunciation, with a long o.

"What year were you born?"

"1916."

The officer shoved a slip of paper toward me. "This is the order for your arrest. Sign here."

He handed me a pen. I stared at the half sheet of paper on the table but could not read a single word. My eyes ran over the text several times, but I could not get my mind to concentrate on reading the few words. The official stamp and the scrawling signature in purple ink on the bottom of the order, like a magnet, affixed my bewildered stare. The stamp seemed to change shape, then I saw a million scenes from my past all on that slip of paper. Only a few nights ago, Fedor had signed a similar order in the apartment.

The voice across the table interrupted, "Well, are you going to sign?"

I asked, "What am I charged with?"

"Oh, you'll find out in due time."

I protested, "But I'm not guilty of any crime. Why have I been arrested?"

"That's no business of mine. You'll be investigated and if you're innocent, you'll be set free. Sign here, it's not an admission of guilt, only an order for your arrest."

I looked at the other desks where the same procedure was going on. I signed, as did the others. We were hustled out and others led in. I never knew whose signature was on the order of my arrest even though I can still see it near the huge, purple official seal of the NKVD.

I was taken into another cell where I met other arrestees. Here, it was not so crowded. Men were sitting on the floor, some were walking in circles. No one slept. We felt that something was about to happen. This feeling is a common one among prisoners. As soon as there is a variation of any kind, whether it be in the prison regime, the conditions we find ourselves in, even if instead of the customary barley soup we suddenly receive pea soup, we become apprehensive. Something is going to happen. Here we were in a cell with elbow-room. Why?

I could not have been in that cell more than a couple of hours. I had stretched my bones and although I had not slept for three nights, the thought of sleep was impossible. My name was called. I was walked through several passageways and suddenly through a door into the night air.

My head spun from the freshness. It was a joy to breathe. I felt as though I had been cooped up three years instead of only three days. The guards escorted more prisoners in a courtyard surrounded by high walls until there were sixteen of us. A van with the Russian word *Khleb* lettered on both sides stood in the middle of the yard. It was a bread van, a common sight on the Moscow streets, especially in the early hours of the morning. Ordered to enter from the rear door, we passed through a very small compartment with one seat on either side. These were occupied by two guards after we had all been seated in the interior of the "Black Raven" (the Russian equivalent for "Black Maria" or paddy wagon). Inside, we lined up, eight men on either side, in complete darkness. There were no windows. The doors were locked and bolted. We knew we were being transported to prison. I had come to the Soviet Union to receive a higher education. I had not succeeded in entering an art institute, now here in a bread van, began the first semester of the education I was to receive instead.

My naive, innocent mind received a jolt. I was actually witnessing a planned, deliberate deception conceived by the Soviet authorities. I had seen police vans on the streets of Buffalo and Chicago so many times. Communist demonstrators were arrested and taken away to the police stations in Black Marias. But it was all done in the open. In the Workers' Fatherland they disguised the vans so as the people on the street would not know prisoners were being hauled to prisons. If what they were doing was right, why all the secrecy?

In the blackness of the guts of the Raven, huddled among fifteen men, my thoughts carried me back into the past to another world . . .

I was fourteen, a freshman at Hutchinson Central High School, located on Buffalo's west side. I hurried from school one warm, spring afternoon and walked to William Street, on the east side. I was to join some fellow Young Communist League members and distribute leaflets in the vicinity of Tech High School and Public School No. 32. The leaflets had been mimeographed in the joint Communist Party and YCL[5] headquarters and called for residents of the east side to attend a meeting. I do not remember

[5]YCL — Young Communist League

the exact purpose of the rally, there were so many of them for propaganda purposes at the time. The Great Depression had firmly gripped the country. We were making hay while the sun shined, wooing the workers with slogans such as, "WORK OR WAGES!", "DEMAND UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF!", etc.

I spotted my comrades at the assigned meeting place and took my share of the manifestoes. I had not been handing them out to the students more than a couple of minutes, when there was a commotion down the street. Noticing the blue uniforms of the police, I sensed trouble and hurried to the corner. A crowd was collecting. A police officer was handcuffing Elvi W., a YCL'er. Another policeman was unlocking the police telephone box to call the Black Maria. I felt my arm being tugged and turned to see "Red" (Ethel) Stevens, the YCL District Organizer, hoarsely ordering me, "Yell as loud as you can! Protest! Start a hullabaloo!"

I pushed my way through the crowd towards a wooden platform laden with fruit and vegetables in front of a grocery store. I jumped on it and began my speech of protest, "Comrades and Fellow-Workers! The arrest you are witnessing can only take place in a capitalist country! The fascist police —"

My speech was interrupted by a burly policeman who yanked me off the platform. I resisted, yelling as loud as I could. One of the legs of the platform broke and the fruit and vegetables spilled onto the sidewalk. On the corner, I stood next to comrade Elvi, all the while spewing out my revolutionary philosophy. The police were amused at my oratory and condescendingly listened. One of them asked, "How old are you, son?"

"Fourteen."

Laughingly, he said, "Oh, I guess you're old enough to ride in a police van to the station."

The crowd seemed to be taking in the whole affair as a joke. The onlookers were accustomed to such scenes in those days. I occasionally heard screams from the crowd, "Down with the fascists!" The yells came from my comrades who hustled in the crowd, trying to arouse the spectators — but of no avail.

We had been trained, when arrested in a demonstration, never to go to the police station submissively. A true communist must always protest, loudly vociferate to attract as much attention as possible.If you were mistreated in any way, yell, "Police brutality!" "Fascists!" (The word "pigs" had not yet been coined.) If you were not mistreated, provoke them to do so. The innocent proletariat would wake up and become class-conscious.

The Black Maria slowly wedged its way through the throng and stopped at the corner. Elvi and I hopped in, yelling and protesting, fulfilling our tasks as true revolutionaries should. My young voice was the more robust of the two and could be heard over Elvi's. I imagined myself a hero, obeying Red Steven's orders. Although only fourteen, I was plunging in my second arrest in Buffalo. Not even Lenin or Stalin could boast of being juvenile political prisoners.

And there were grated windows in the Black Maria through which the warm sunshine could enter. The two of us could laugh or shout and peer outside. We could stand or sit or lie down. The good-natured policeman inside the van was amused at our revolutionary fervor. And all the people on the street could see us being carted away. The kids ran after us, excitedly

calling to others to join in the fun. The whole world knew about our arrest. And to-morrow the details would be printed in the *Buffalo Courier-Express,* the *News* and the *Times.* Elvi and I would be booked in the police station and in an hour's time, the International Labor Defense and American Civil Liberty Union's lawyer would arrive to bail us out. There would be the inevitable mass meeting, arranged by the Communist Party and YCL to protest our arrest. Elvi and I would be the guest speakers and I would be introduced as "the youngest political prisoner in America."

Yes, we loved to consider ourselves politicals, even though Elvi had been charged with distributing leaflets without a permit. I was charged with trespassing and damaging private property (the fruit stand). There could be no political accusation because there were none in the books.

Comrade W., about twenty years old, was tried in City Court and found not guilty. She was freed.

The judge presiding at my trial in juvenile court remembered me. This was my second appearance before him. After listening to the testimony of the policeman, and then my impassioned denouncal of the capitalist system, he announced the verdict. I was fined FIVE DOLLARS! Five dollars for damaging the fruit stand.

I glanced at the ILD[6] lawyer, who asked the court's permission for a conference. Several comrades were present, including Red Stevens, our leader. Their decision was swift. A TRUE COMMUNIST MUST NEVER PAY A FINE IN A CAPITALIST COURT. I faced the judge like a puppet, "Your honor, I refuse to pay the fine because I am not guilty. The Constitution guarantees free speech. The policeman did not allow me to speak on the fruit stand. Had he left me alone, the stand would not have been broken."

The judge studied me sorrowfully for a moment, shifted his look to the lawyer, to Stevens, then to me. "Very well, as of now, start serving a five day sentence."

I bade farewell to my comrades. My father was not present, but do not recall why. Most probably he was out of town on some communist mission or serving a fifteen day sentence in Wende, the Erie County jail. At the time he was a full-time Communist Party worker, Head of the Unemployed Councils and the Trade Union Unity League.

The custodian, a lean, middle-aged man was about to lead me away, when the old, stout, bespectacled judge summoned me. I stood before the desk (there was no bench) and listened to his words, "Tommy, I was greatly impressed two years ago, when you first appeared before this court. One does not often encounter twelve year old revolutionaries. I thought the speech you made came from you, yourself. I thought the ideas you expressed were yours. I realized today they are not yours. You are a gifted orator, but the words you so passionately utter are someone else's. Perhaps you have heard them from others or read them. I realized this when you refused to pay the fine only after being ordered to do so by . . ." He pointed to Red Stevens.

Children's Court was in the same building with the Detention Home, a large mansion on Main Street in north Buffalo. Serving those five days there was more of an adventure than punishment. The food was very good and plentiful. There were classes in the morning and I studied with the other children. The boys had manual training in the afternoon. There was a library and books to read.

[6]ILD — International Labor Defense

I felt very important, a seasoned veteran and class struggle warrior. How proud father would be!

Upon being released, I was met by my comrades. A meeting was held in the evening. I learned that while in the Detention Home, the YCL had distributed leaflets at Hutch High School, calling on the students to protest my arrest. That is what the communists thrive on. They could rant, rave and cry about capitalist injustice.

And it was all done in the open! The whole world knew about it. My fellow students and teachers had read about it in the newspapers and were amused. It really was one big joke. How few Marxists there were in those days! I returned to school in the month of May, became involved in a few fist fights because of the ridicule, received a few demerit slips, and was expelled from Hutch.

. . . back in the Black Raven the engine started up, interrupting my train of thought. Someone spoke up, "If the van turns the right, we're bound for Butirki; if to the left, it means Taganka."

The Muscovites could tell our destination by the turns the van took. Some of them said, "Oh, Only not Butirki!" It turned out we were headed for Taganka Prison. We considered ourselves really lucky. I of course, listened attentively to these people. They seemed to know what they were talking about.

Conditons in Taganka were better, they thought. Later I learned that Butirki had a reputation for the bestiality of its keepers. It was considered a prison for politicals, the "enemies of the people." Taganka, on the other hand, was largely for the "friends," the criminals, believed to be closer to the "people." My companions were right; Butirki indeed had a worse reputation. What they did not know however, was that during the Yezhov purges (the purges of 1937-38 — the ones we, ourselves were caught in), Butirki and Lefortovo had been stuffed to the last cell and that Taganka had been turned into a political prison.

It could not have been more than a half hour's ride when the back doors of the Raven were thrown open and we stepped down in the courtyard of Taganka prison. I tried to examine the inside as we passed through the small guards' compartment. There was enough light to notice that it was armored, thus establishing without a shadow of a doubt the fact that the Black Raven was deliberately designed and constructed for the transportation of prisoners. The paint job on the outside even had the name of the Peoples' Commissariat of Food Industries lettered! What a complete camouflage! I believe history has never recorded such acts by any people or civilizations! During the French Revolution the condemned were carted to the guillotine in carts through the streets and the whole world knew about it. The same can be said of those who were burned at the stake by the Inquisition. Jesus Christ was led to the cross in the open and the whole world knew about it. Here in the Workers' Fatherland they innovated the Black Raven — black inside, bright blue and white letters on the outside. How many of them sped through the city streets in the middle of the night and early hours of the morning? A dozen? A hundred? A thousand? Ten thousand? The world will never know! Surely the NKVD destroyed all the records. It is very probable Nikolai Yezhov himself, the Head of the Organ never knew. And if he did, he can never testify . . . because he was shot and executed a year later.

Dawn was just breaking. We stood looking around, but not for long. I remember seeing a large clock on one of the buildings. It was a few minutes before seven. Officers and guards were bustling about. To my surprise, I saw no barred prison windows anywhere, except on the administration building, the one with the clock, directly ahead. Sheets of iron were clamped over all the other windows! These iron hoods stood out at the top and tapered to the bottom. Inside the cells, a prisoner could see nothing outside! Another innovation! If those inside pressed themselves right against the barred window and looked up, they could only glimpse at a tiny strip of the sky.

We were hurried into the *vokzal* (the depot). This was a huge hall with no chairs, benches or other furniture. Even the walls were bare. It was very unusual to see such a huge gathering place and not even a portrait of Lenin of Stalin hanging there. I did not know then that prisoners were forbidden the privilege of gazing upon the images of the Soviet Gods.

There were about six hundred men in the *vokzal.* All of them had been arrested during the past few days and were going through the process of being booked. I met many acquaintenances — Germans, Poles, Austrian *Schutzbunders*[7], Latvians, whom I had met at the House of Political Emigrants or Foreign-Workers' Club.

There was an Esthonian commercial artist. I do not remember his name. I had seen him several times at Jourgaz (a TASS organization). When I told him how I had been arrested, he seemed surprised, thinking they would surely release me. He asked me to memorize his telephone number, call his wife as soon as I was freed, and tell her where he was.

Meeting so many acquaintances in the *vokzal* buoyed my spirits. I am sure they also felt the same. It seemed all the foreigners were being arrested. There must be a logical explanation for all this.

By then I was very tired and wanted to sleep. It was March 24th, a "Free Day." At the time the unique Soviet calendar still was in effect. Sundays were abolished after the 1918 Revolution. Everyone worked five days and rested on the sixth. The sixth, twelfth, eighteenth, twenty-fourth and thirtieth of each month were rest days. I thought of my mother and sister. They must be terribly worried about me. They surely must know I was arrested. What had happened to my room and belongings?

We were fed — a mug of hot water, two lumps of sugar and a hunk of black bread. Then began the long process of booking in. In groups of about fifteen, we were herded from room to room, finger printed, and questioned by the Chekists, who filed our dossiers. There were long waiting periods in between. We sat on the floors and drowsed until rudely awakened, then to a next point. Finally we were hurried off to the bath. This was the longest procedure of all.

Oh! those Soviet prison and camp bathhouses! A separate volume should be written about them!

First we took off all our clothes, tied them all in bundles and handed them in for disinfestation (de-lousing). Our bodies and clothes were searched thoroughly. They looked into our mouths and rectums. We rolled back our foreskins. No belts, suspenders, shoelaces, bits of rope, or anything with which a person could hang himself were permitted. Items of metal

[7]SCHUTZBUNDERS — Austrian Social Democrats who were given asylum in the Soviet Union in 1934 after their defeat in Austrian civil war.

were confiscated. Watches were taken away. Those with metal teeth were taken to the prison dentist for examination, x-ray, and in many cases, extraction.

Four guard-barbers cropped our heads with clippers and shaved all the hair from our bodies. I saw the black, curly hair fall to my feet and was seized by a clammy, sinking sensation. This was stark reality . . . prison . . . and I could find nothing to buoy me up, reassure me that all this was not a mistake.

The whole booking procedure could have been completed in two or three hours, but we were not through until late in the evening. Between the many procedures we waited in various cells. When we were led from one wing to another, through an open courtyard, we saw only the high, red brick walls surrounding many prison buildings. We were warned to keep our heads down, hands behind our back, and eyes directly in front of us. If a prisoner tried to look around, he was promptly hit on the head.

While we were being led through a dimly lit corridor, a guard pounced on one of the prisoners and began to beat him savagely. The poor fellow had broken some regulation. How enraged the guard was! Battering the victim's face to a bloody mess, he kept screaming, "Fascist — You Fascist bastard!"

By evening I could hardly drag myself along. I hadn't slept for three days. We all looked forward to the night. Surely we would all soon be assigned to cells, throw ourselves upon our cots and sleep . . . sweet sleep.

The guards told us we were through. Now we were being led to our cells. Upon entering one of the taller buildings, the guard on duty conferred with the guards who were leading my group. We were told to sit on the stairs of the landing while they whispered so we could not hear. We thought we would all be placed in one cell. It seemed ages until two names were called. Those responding were turned over to the corridor guard who opened a massive door with a strange peephole leading to a cell block.

At each landing this was repeated, two by two, until my name was called and that of a tall man in his early forties. I do not remember his name. I do not remember the exact number of the cell we were assigned to. It started with a six. I think it was number 69.

Chapter 3

CELL 69

The armored door clanged behind us, its monstrous key rattling and clicking as the guard locked us in. We stood with our backs pressed to the door facing a room full of men, all on their feet. I no longer held my trousers up. In Lubyanka, copying the ingenuity of others, I had torn two strips off my towel, tied each of them to the belt straps on either side of my fly, and tied them together. Clutching my briefcase with its torn-off metal clips, I stood there wondering — was this all a dream? When would I wake up?

This was *kamera* (cell) 69. I couldn't believe it! How many more shocking surprises were yet in store for me? For a moment I stood dumbstruck, adjusting to the change from the chlorate smell of the prison corridor to the new, sickening stench of the cell.

A caged, solitary electric bulb hung high in the depths of the *kamera,* feebly glowing through a yellowish vapor on a sea of cropped heads. There had been some grumbling when the guard pushed us into the cell. Now with the door locked, the inmates were silent.

I soon understood their mixed emotions. They had been arrested within the last four months. Extreme care was taken in interrogation cells to isolate the prisoners from the outside world. A new arrival meant news from *navolye,* which literally translated means: "Out in freedom." I am hesitant to using the English translation. It is not appropriate because in reality there is no freedom, there cannot be freedom under totalitarianism. The expression "out in freedom" was coined way back in Tsarist times by the criminal element, handed down to us, and we used it — always with a bit of irony.

So here were two fresh, green ones who could tell them what was going on in Moscow. On the other hand, one-hundred sixty-five men were crammed in a cell intended for only thirty. (Taganka prison was built before the Revolution). Newcomers meant even less room, less oxygen.

A young man in a short, black leather jacket pushed his way excitedly towards me and whispered in my ear. I did not understand him. My companion and I were being bombarded with questions from all sides. I was still in a daze from lack of sleep, and what I saw and smelled.

Suddenly there was silence when we heard a rattling noise. The heavy door creaked and a guard stuck his head in the cell, as if loathe to breathe our stench. He warned us to move away from the peephole.

The young man in the leather jacket, still tugging at my sleeve, repeated his message, "Fedor C. is here in the cell! Don't let on you know him!"

I examined the sea of faces and recognized him as he wedged his way towards me. Fedor had been arrested in my presence only a week ago. How he had changed in a few days! The prison pallor was emphasized by his cropped head and a stubble on his face. Someone asked, "Got anything to smoke?"

"No, I had half a pack when I was arrested. It's all gone," I replied.

Fedor was at my side. His first question was, "When did they arrest you?"

I told him — then remembered the warning not to let on we knew each other. "Why?" I asked.

"If you're in any way connected with my case, they wouldn't allow us to see each other. That's their procedure. They'd put us in separate cells. Either they've screwed up somewhere or you don't figure at all in my case. We'll have to wait and see." then he continued, "Did you tell Robert? What about my possessions? Any letters from Ann?"

I told him all I knew, how I had visited his brother-in-law the morning after Fedor's arrest. No, there were no letters from Ann.

The young man in the leather jacket said, "Do you remember me?"

He looked familiar, but I could not place him at first. How prison changes a man! The youth in the leather jacket with a small hole in the breast pocket was Braisen, a Czech communist. Prior to his arrest he had been a Soviet pilot. For his participation in the Papanin Expedition of 1937 to the North Pole, Braisen had been awarded the *Order of the Red Banner.* When arrested, the Order had been stripped from his jacket, leaving the hole which looked so odd. I had met the young pilot and his American wife, Josephine B. several times at the Foreign Workers' Club.

The other newcomer just shoved into cell 69 was a veteran of the Bolshevik Revolution. He once served as a cavalryman in General Budyenni's famed mounted division. We looked at each other wondering where we were going to sleep, then he took a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket, looked at it, withdrew one, and lit up. Immediately a chorus of voices rang out: "Leave me a drag!"

The cavalryman took a couple of deep puffs and passed it on. I was dying for a smoke. Then, someone wet his finger, carefully dampened the paper around the burning edge, and handed it to me. I inhaled and became giddy.

Finally the men lay down for the night. About half of them, according to seniority, slept on the cots packed around the walls — five men lengthwise on two cots. There was absolutely no space between the cots. The rest slept on the concrete floor. Jackets, coats, and bundles of belongings served as pillows. When everyone had laid down, you could not see a square inch of the concrete floor . . . There were men under the cots . . . men everywhere.

The cell elder, appointed by the inmates, shook his head and dispassionately pointed at the men, "As you can see, there's no room at all."

A large can filled with boiled, drinking water stood under a table next to the right hand side of the door. During the day it stood on the table. At night it was placed underneath so as two men could sleep on the table. The cavalryman, who had been arrested a day or two before me, was assigned a bit of space under the table next to the water pail.

The latrine bucket stood on the floor on the left hand side of the door. I sat next to the *parasha* all night, my arms on my knees, my briefcase under

me, dozing and frequently startled by someone climbing over heads, hands, legs, to lunge on me to relieve himself.

At other times my dozing was interrupted by the creaking of the door as the *vertukhai* (turnkey) summoned someone for interrogation. I fingered the stubble on my face. My cropped head felt funny and I craved a mirror. What did I look like? My mind kept mulling over the recent events. Oh! If only my friends back home could see me now!

Sitting on the floor next to the latrine bucket, head dangling between my knees, I fell asleep. How long I slept — I cannot say. It could have been an hour, two or more. I was startled from slumber when a harsh voice boomed, *"Podyem!"* (Get Up!) It was six in the morning.

It took a few moments to realize where I was. No, it wasn't a bad dream. I was still in cell 69.

Men rose slowly, stretching and yawning. They looked around, picking up their belongings. A long line formed at the latrine bucket. I arose and took my place at the end of the queue. Finally it was my turn. The need to go was urgent but I stood there for a long minute or two, unable to relieve myself. It was embarrassing. I felt all those eyes behind me, impatiently waiting for their turn.

While we urinated we were jostled by the cell elder and the supply man, (elected by the cell inmates, following the Russian prison system tradition) who were receiving the bread and sugar portions from the hatch in the door. The food slot had been opened from the outside. The portions were handed to sixteen "ten-men," who in turn, distributed them to their respective groups of ten.

Thus, this system of breakdown into tens facilitated us to remember the exact number of prisoners in the cells. The Budyenni cavalryman and I were assigned to the sixteenth group which until yesterday consisted of five. Now there were seven.

The door opened. Two men under the turnkey's supervision entered the corridor and soon returned carrying a large canister of hot water which was placed on the table. Mugs were handed out. The supply man threw a package of pressed, dried fruit and cherry pits into the hot water, giving it a brownish color. Taganka breakfast — a mug of hot, brown water, two lumps of sugar, and six-hundred grams of black bread. We had to divide it in portions, as it was our daily allotment.

I cut one third of my bread portion with a wooden spoon handle, then placed the remainder in my coat pocket. The men all sat on the cots. There was more room now. Famished, I glutted down the bread and drinking water. I noticed some men, especially the younger, ate their whole bread portion — being careful not to leave a single crumb. Hardly any dumped the sugar cubes into the mugs. They sipped the water, nibbling at the sugar.

While we were having breakfast, we heard doors in the corridor being opened and shut, shuffling of foot steps as prisoners of our cell block were being led to the toilet. When it was our turn, the guard opened the door, called the cell elder and told him to get the men ready for toilet in parties of thirty. We formed in line and slowly walked out, carrying towels (our own). Those who had none, had torn off some part of their clothing as a substitute. As we passed out of the cell, three prison officials counted us. (We recognized them by the color of their insignias — dark blue and red.)

As I walked down the corridor to the toilet, which was located at the end, I tried to count the number of cells. From cell 69 to the toilet there

were twenty. There must have been another ten the other way, to the other end. Assuming an average of 160 men per cell, and multiplying it by thirty meant there were 4800 men in our cell block.

Even the toilet had a peep-hole. We were watched as we squatted evacuating our bowels in the holes in the floor with one hand holding the wall behind us, so as not to fall forward on our faces. There were about ten of these holes. Again we stood in line, waiting our turns. We had to hurry. Some washed at the faucets before relieving themselves. There was no toilet paper. We tore off pieces of our clothing. Some cupped their fingers and scooped up the water running behind them to wash themselves, eastern style. Many squatted, forcing themselves, for we had to train ourselves to move our bowels in the morning and evening. We were not allowed to go to the toilet in the daytime.

There was something strange which left me uneasy about this Soviet prison lavatory. I of course, was aghast at the conditions, the humiliation, and the degradation these men had to withstand. Yet, there was something else, something important which had to have an explanation — and I could not define it. Like the others, I was absorbed in my own problems, not yet having recovered from the impact of the drastic change in my life. I could find no logical answer to all this. It struck me much later — a year and a half later — that during the period we were in prison and being transported to the camps, we never saw a mirror. We never had the opportunity to take a look at ourselves, what we looked like!

There are two reasons for this:

1) A prisoner could break a mirror to use a piece of it for a weapon or to commit suicide.

2) A psychological device. It greatly affects a person's ego. After months, sometimes years of not seeing his or her face, one loses fortitude and will-power, especially when one has to gird one's self to face his interrogator. Just imagine a nervous actor or singer about to go on stage without a mirror in the dressing room!

During the exceptionally crowded conditions in Taganka prison at that time, prisoners were allowed to sleep during the day. Those who slept on the floor at night occupied the cots. The fifteen-minute daily walks outside in the "kennels" were banned. We walked in a ring in the cell, ten men at a time for exercise. There were two large, barred windows but how could air penetrate the sheet metal coverings (muzzles) on the outside?

MUZZLES! What diabolic mind had invented them!

I remembered the graphic symbol of the International Red Aid — a hand waving a red handerchief, protruding from the barred window of a capitalist prison. Yes, so the whole world could see! And then the leftists would demonstrate and protest and shout about imperialist or fascist injustice!

And in the Workers' Fatherland they devised "kennels" and "muzzles" for millions of innocent men and women, perverting them into animals! And it was all done in secrecy! And who would protest and demonstrate to demand our release?

Nearly all the men in our cell were "accused" of espionage. There was no formal accusation. We found this out during interrogation when the leading question was bellowed at us: "Tell us of your espionage activities!"

There were Latvians, Czechs, and Hungarians who had fought for the Bolsheviks during the October Revoltution in 1918. The former heroes,

stripped of their medals, were now "enemies of the people." There were Polish communists. Most of the Russians in cell 69 had at one time or other visited or lived abroad. Some had been in communication with relatives who lived in foreign countries. Others collected stamps for a hobby, had corresponded with foreign philatelists. There were teachers and students of Esperanto, the popular international language of those years. They also communicated with Esperantists abroad. This was the basis for all these men being charged with espionage.

There were Red Army officers, and a Latvian Militia captain. His military great coat was of a better, very soft texture. Their great-coats were shorn at the knees. And there were two ex-NKVD men. Although their insignias had been ripped off, they were unable to hide their identities. Several of the inmates recognized them as their former interrogators. Their lot was unenviable. They were harrassed by almost everyone in our cell.

Two recidivists were thrown in our midst. Both had been charged with "Terrorism." One of them had been seen using part of a newspaper with a picture of Stalin for toilet paper in a public lavatory. (I never saw or heard of toilet paper in the Soviet Union. In Moscow everyone used newspaper. It is never discarded or thrown away after reading. Another use; — wrapping paper in the stores.)

You may ask, "Only one of them used Stalin's photo. Why was his companion arrested?"

The answer: "He was charged with seeing the act of 'terrorism' and failing to report it!"

Totally out of place in cell 69, they talked to each other in a strange, prison jargon hardly any of us understood. I received the impression they were making fun of us, our naivete, ignorance of the ways of prison life, and what was in store for us.

Besides Fedor C. and Braisen, I met the following men in my first Taganka cell:

Abe G. — a Jewish communist from New Jersey who had come to the USSR with his wife and child. He had worked as a mechanic in a Moscow factory.

Only a month ago I had seen him and his wife at my sister's apartment. Grace and her husband Joe had invited a few friends to mark the birth of their first-born, Eleanor.

Abe G. had been arrested early in March. His wife became seriously ill after her husband's arrest. Abe's first question was, "Have you heard anything about my family? Is my wife still "free?"

"I haven't seen her since that evening at Gracie's. But she's bearing up ok," I lied . . . "No, up to the day of my arrest, they hadn't taken her."

I still remember the American, gray, woolen work shirt on Abe's short, wiry frame — how he gesticulated when he talked. Abe G. suffered in prison, argued back with his interrogators, was beaten badly, steadfastly refusing to admit he was a spy. My conversations with him left me with the impression that he was still a devoted communist and simply could not take BEING IMPRISONED AS AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE! Like Fedor, he was absolutely sure that when his friends in the American Communist Party found out he was in prison, most certainly they would intervene on his behalf — AND HE WOULD BE FREED!

I must confess, although I had no high ranking friends in the American Communist Party, I also deluded myself and was just as stupid as Abe G.

and Fedor C. My sister Angela, who had remained in the United States as a communist sympathizer, and her husband Joe, a member of the Buffalo branch of the Communist Party, learned only years later that my father and I were prisoners.

Ten years later I met Abe G's wife and daughter clandestinely in Moscow in Grace's apartment to tell them all I knew. I learned from them that G. had died shortly after his arrival in the concentration labor camps.

Round, pudgy, bald Sam Bass, the jokester from New York City, was in his early thirties. I had never met him before our encounter in prison, although we did have mutual acquaintances. He knew Lucy F. through his associations in the elite, American communist circles.

What he did for a living, I do not know. His sexual experiences and the good life he led in Moscow was the main topic of his conversations. An opportunist by nature, he joined the "movement" only because it served his purposes. He talked quite frankly (with those who understood English) about his machinations, like obtaining American clothing and goods which he sold or gave to high ranking Russians in exchange for favors.

Sam colored his narrations of his shady dealings with jokes and humor. Some beautiful Russian woman was involved in every one of them and inevitably ended up sleeping with him. In every transaction, shrewd Sam made a sucker out of someone.

Now, as I look back, I wonder — was Bass really a fool? Or was he playacting? Perhaps he knew more about Soviet justice than did the rest of us. If a cell stoolie reported his machinations to the NKVD, there was ample ground for his being sentenced as a *speculyant* (profiteer). In that case, he would receive a shorter term of imprisonment, be considered a non-political — which meant smoother sailing in the labor camps.

I have known of many such attempts by others, but none that succeeded. As for Sam Bass — where did he end up? I do not know. Most probably he perished in some remote region, as did many millions of others.

Webster — a Canadian who came to the USSR in the early thirties, had worked as a technician on the construction of the Palace of Soviets. He married a Russian and became a Soviet citizen, relinquishing his Canadian passport.

I can never forget the hullaballoo when the grandiose plans for the Palace of the Soviets were unveiled. I had seen photographs of the model in Soviet propaganda magazines which were sent abroad while I was still in the USA. I had been in the apartment of the chief architect, Boris Iofan, several times shortly after I arrived in the Moscow. I saw the model which won first prize in a national contest. Even though Stalin had selected and approved the model, I was not impressed with it. In fact I did not like it — but never spoke out. How could one criticize that which was chosen by Josef Vissarionovitch? The Palace, which was to be the largest and tallest building in the world, reminded me of a huge wedding cake with a statue of Lenin on top of it.

Excavation had begun about a year before my arrest, then rumors spread that work could not continue because of water seepage from the Moscow River. It was one big fiasco. The Soviets never acknowledged this publicly. All the top management and engineers were arrested and accused of wrecking and sabotage. I met a few of them later in other cells. The "trees" were chopped down, and Webster, one of the hundreds of "chips," found himself in Taganka prison.

I liked him immensely. A quiet, simple man in his late forties, I doubt if Webster could hurt a fly. I remember his eyes, one of which was blue, the other a bruised gray — from which a liquid incessantly trickled. His heavy, black stubble was streaked with white. I can still see him sitting on a cot during the day-time, slowly stroking his beard and looking into space, oblivious of what was going on around, until someone spoke to him.

Although he had lived in the Soviet Union longer than I, he hardly spoke Russian. I wondered how Webster communicated with his Russian wife. The rest of us called him "Silent — ." (I don't remember his first name.)

I received the impression he had no interest in politics. He was not a communist, had traveled to the Soviet Union purely for economic reasons. Oh, dear Webster! My buddy from Cell 69! — Where did they send you? Vorkuta? Kolyma? Krasslag? Norilsk? Wherever you may be interred, may God have mercy on your soul.

I had seen Carmelo Mica, the only Italian in cell 69, once before my arrest. It was at a meeting of approximately 400-500 Italian political emigrants at the International Club in Moscow. He sat at the presidium as the Head of the Italian Communist Youth Section along with other top Italians: Enrico Ercoli, Paolo Robotti, Giovanni Germanetto, etc. (These were not their real names. In exile, they adopted pseudonyms, aping their Bolshevik counterparts. Djhugashvili, during exile in tsarist times, adopted the name Stalin, derived from the word STEEL. Palmiro Togliatti, the chief of the Italian section of the communist party chose Ercoli, meaning HERCULES.)

At the time, Carmelo, a frail, young man about thirty, walked with the aid of a cane. He suffered an ailment of the spine, the result of wounds inflicted during his imprisonment in fascist, Italian prisons. In Moscow he married Ornella, the daughter of Arturo Labriola, the famous Italian Socialist leader. The couple lived in the Hotel Lux, where only the higher echelon of the Communist International resided.

In Taganka prison, Carmelo was in anguish. The die-hard professional communists suffered most. They who had devoted their lives to the cause with such fervor, were now branded, "enemies of the people."

Carmelo had already been in Cell 69 several months. The severe beatings he received during interrogation aggravated his malady. He was unable to walk alone and had to be supported by two comrades. Mica was the only one in our cell allowed to lie on one-fifth of two cots days and night.

I understood Italian and spoke it well enough to make myself comprehensible. We had hardly spoken our first words to each other, when a bond united us. Here was someone for him to speak Italian to. I was drawn by his sincerity and had compassion for his infirm, physical condition. He asked me if I had heard any news of his wife. I answered I knew nothing. Carmelo had never heard of the Sgovios. I told him the whole story, how we had come to the Soviet Union, the separation of our family, my father's affair with Franka Taube — the Polish Bolshevik. After listening to the details of my arrest, he shook his head, muttering to himself. After a while, he said, *"Che imbroglio!"* (What a mess!) He wanted to add more, but didn't. I realized that in an interrogation cell one must be careful in his conversations because of the stoolies. We whispered or talked in low tones.

One morning I arose and noticed a few inmates around his cot talking worriedly. Carmelo wasn't sitting at his usual place — waiting for bread, sugar, and water. Instead, he lay on his stomach groaning and weeping, rubbing his face on his folded jacket which served as a pillow. He had been beaten mercilessly during interrogation that night. I stood and watched, helpless. Someone muttered, "Those god-damned bastards!"

Later, while sitting next to him, he asked me if I knew any Italian songs. I replied, "I know three, *O Solo Mio, O Mari,* and *Turna Surriento."*

"Please, lie down next to me and hum them to me." he implored.

I felt embarrassed but did as he asked, very softly so the others could not hear. Carmelo then said, "If only I were back in Mussolini's prisons. Better to spend the rest of my days there than to be here."

We were cell mates for two months. When I was called to leave cell 69 with my belongings, Carmelo was sure I would be freed. I went over to his cot. He was so excited and happy for me. I can still see his blue eyes, the bony face covered with red, curly stubble, his shirt which once could have been called blue. He begged me to memorize Ornella's telephone number and tell her where he was.

I repeated the number many times to myself in order not to forget. Ten years passed. I had forgotten the number. Even if I had remembered it would be of no use. Ornella had been evicted from the Hotel Lux shortly after Mica's arrest. I kept my promise to Carmelo by finding her through friends. Clandestinely in Moscow, I visited Ornella in her apartment. She worked as a translator for a Soviet publishing house. I recounted all I remembered, the beatings, his anguish, how often he mentioned her, how much he loved her. Ornella was sad, but ten years had passed. What went through her mind, I could not tell. She had not remarried. I learned that only a short while before, after many requests to the State Security Organs as to the whereabouts of her husband, she finally received a reply. The form, a half sheet of paper, read, "CARMELO MICA, WHILE SERVING HIS SENTENCE OF PUNISHMENT, DIED AS A RESULT OF FAILURE OF THE HEART."

After I finally succeeded in wriggling out of the USSR, I heard from an Italian survivor of Soviet prisons that Carmelo had somehow managed to commit suicide in Butirki prison.

Ornella Labriola (she kept her maiden name) left Russia in 1953 for Naples where she established herself as a teacher of Russian. Whatever her reasons may be, she refused to divulge the truth about her short-lived marriage. When Italian journalists attempted to interview her, she replied, "I have nothing to say."

There was one other in cell 69 who was arrested under the same circumstances as I, i.e., after leaving an embassy. Lubimov, a knife and scissors grinder, slept next to me during the day. Tradesmen such as he were a common sight in those days. Belonging to a government *artel,* they carried large grindstone wheels on their back as they went from house to house, sharpening knifes, scissors, etc.

Lubimov, a plain, simple Russian in his forties, had serviced the Japanese Embassy regularly over a number of years, performing his work in the backyard during the summer and in the kitchen's entrance when the weather was inclement.

Lubimov was arrested in March a few days before I was, after leaving the premises of the Japanese Embassy.

So now, besides myself, we have the fifty or so detained in the 50th militia precinct, Ina, and Lubimov. I believe it is appropriate at this point to list all the others I met later on, who were arrested in broad daylight after visiting foreign embassies in Moscow.

Marvin V. was born in Buffalo. I cannot recall a communist meeting where his blind father, accompanied by Marvin's mother, were not present.

In 1931, a Jewish charity organization financed Marvin's trip to Moscow so that he could study violin in the Moscow Conservatory.

Marvin's parents visited our home a few days before we were to leave for the Soviet Union. They were so proud of their son! He had written such glowing letters of life in the Workers' Fatherland. They hoped and waited for his return as a famous violinist.

Shortly after our arrival in Moscow, Marvin began taking me around the capital, acquainting me with his Russian friends. I was surprised upon learning he no longer studied at the Conservatory. His parents did not know this. He never told me why he had chosen to work as a proof-reader for the Foreign-Workers' Publishing House.

Most of his friends were of the Soviet elite. I met the son of the Soviet ambassador to Iran. Marvin took me to his girl-friend's apartment on Lubyanka Square. Sara Berman was a nineteen year old red-head at the time, a student at the Foreign Language Institute. She spoke English. I remember, while riding the tram to her apartment, Marvin excitedly said, "Just think! Her father is the Chief of all the Concentration Camps in Russia. He knows Stalin real well!"

How were we to know that Matvei Berman was to be shot by the orders of his good friend Stalin two years later, that Sara was to be arrested as a "CH-S" (member of the family), and that Marvin and I were to be dragged off to Berman's own GULAG.

I was a guest at the Bermans twice. Many young people gathered there, children of government and party leaders, Soviet athletes, a few very young Chekists with blue insignias on their collars. I never met the father, Matvei.

Marvin broke up with Sara and married an American girl. We saw each other from time to time, mostly at social evenings at the Foreign-Workers' Club.

One evening in 1937, Ann and I went to the National Cafe for a cup of coffee and apple pie. (It was the only place in Moscow where it was served. The chef had lived in America. Apple pie was featured, as the cafe catered mostly to foreigners.) A jazz orchestra was playing, when suddenly we heard an American voice crooning, *"Little man you're crying, I know why you're blue. Someone took your kitty-car away . . ."*

It was Marvin. A member of the Svasman jazz band, he played the fiddle and sang American songs. During the intermission he came to our table and sat with us. A very happy-go-lucky sort of person, he laughed and joked. We talked of every day matters and the trivial things of life.

The last time I saw Marvin was in mid-January. We met by coincidence on a very cold night in a Moscow tram. I remember all the windows were frosted. He already knew I had applied for an exit visa and confided that he was on the verge of doing the same. Disillusioned with all that was happening — the arrests, the distrust towards foreigners, Marvin became homesick and decided to go to the American Embassy, apply for an American passport and renounce his Soviet citizenship. I heard through

the grapevine in the early part of March, that Marvin had been arrested. I did not know that it occurred after his visit to the embassy. I learned the details later in Taganka from his cell-mates.

As told to me, "The American fiddler who played in the Svasman jazz band left the embassy, walked towards Manezhni Square past the old Moscow State University, and stood at the corner of Gertsena Street waiting for a streetcar. As the tram approached, two men took Marvin aside, asked for his documents, and took him away in a sedan."

In 1939, while serving in Camp Expeditsionni in Kolyma, I met a fellow-prisoner, Alex Shopyk, an American engineer of Polish descent from Pittsburgh who had met Marvin V. in the Magadan transit camp. Alex's story of Marvin's arrest tallied with those of the others I heard in Taganka.

That was the last I heard of Marvin. Ten years later in Moscow I looked up his sister-in-law, Natasha, and her husband, Leonard. They knew nothing, never having received any news from or of him.

When I arrived in Buffalo in 1960, I talked to his relatives. The last letter they received from Marvin was in 1938. Many times they had written to the Soviet Embassy in Washington for information as to his whereabouts. The replies — when they did bother to reply were: "The Soviet Government has no record of any citizen, Soviet or foreign, by that name."

Deep in my heart, I am certain that Marvin, like millions of others, lies buried somewhere in the hills of Kolyma.

We shall go on and take the case of George — ian, (I do not remember the full last name) born in New York City of Armenian parents.

In 1928-29 a world-wide campaign, organized by the communists, swept the Armenian immigrant communities. "Return to Soviet Armenia!" "Let us all help in building Socialism in our beloved Fatherland!" There would be FREEDOM and green pastures! Those who returned would free themselves from the yoke of capitalism — and there were those who believed — and returned. Among them were George's parents. A lad of fourteen at the time, the family arrived in the land of their ancestors in 1930. The first thing they did was to all lie down and kiss the soil.

The family settled in Yerevan, the capital of the Soviet Armenian Republic. Shortly they discovered it was not the promised land pictured by the communists. Things went from bad to worse. When the purges started in 1937, the first ones to "go" were those who had lived abroad. It had to be that way. "Why did you come back? No one in his right mind would leave the comforts of America or France to come and live in this hell-hole! The imperialists sent all of you to spy upon us!"

These statements were actually hurled at George by his interrogator in Taganka. George hurried to defend himself, "What do you mean, hell-hole? How can a Soviet Chekist refer to Armenia as such?" (even though George agreed with him). "How could I be a spy? I was only fourteen when I left the United States?"

A young man of twenty-four, he arrived in Moscow from Yerevan one early morning in March 1938 carrying an empty suitcase full of empty bags. George hurried to the American Embassy, was interviewed by an American official, and filed for an American passport to leave the Soviet Union. After leaving the embassy, George spent the rest of the day shopping, mostly at the GUM, the largest shopping arcade in Moscow. He bought things which could not be found in Yerevan, filling his suitcase and one burlap bag with

articles, another bag full of foodstuffs. The train back to Yerevan was to leave in the evening. George arrived at the railroad station about a half hour before parting time and was arrested just as he was about to board the train.

I met George in Taganka after I was transfered from cell 69. We were on the same transport in cattle cars to Vladivostok, in the hold of the same ship to Kolyma, and assigned to the same camp. He is another of those who cannot return. George lies frozen in the permafrost of Kolyma.

I still see him in Taganka, tall, handsome, sad-eyed. Despite the stubble, he proudly groomed his long, black, moustaches, wetting two fingers and twirling the tips.

To continue, next is the young school-boy, Ovchinnikov. I do not remember his first name. I spoke very little with him as he was Russian and spoke no English. He was the youngest of our transport. I met him also in a cell in Taganka. For convenience's sake, I shall call him Vanya.

Ovchinnikov lived in an apartment house with his parents, brothers, and sisters near Mayakovsky Square. They shared a communal apartment with a Greek family. There were many such Greeks in the Soviet Union who, although born in Russia, still retained their Greek citizenship.

The Greek neighbors had a son the same age as Vanya. The boys grew up together and attended the same class in school. From time to time, the Greek lad visited the Greek Embassy for various reasons. Vanya liked to accompany him. He enjoyed sitting in the waiting room, fingering the foreign magazines, looking at pictures of another world and probably wondering why the quality of paper was so much better than that of the magazines published in the Soviet Union.

One morning in March 1938, Vanya accompanied his pal to the Greek Embassy. They had glorious plans for the day. After the embassy they hoped to take in a movie before going to school. (The Moscow schools had two shifts, morning and afternoon.) The two boys were detained after leaving the embassy and taken to the militia, which was crowded with detainees. After a couple of hours, the Greek boy was released. Vanya was imprisoned.

Upon arriving in Camp Razvedchik in Kolyma in August 1938, Ovchinnikov, probably because he was a mere lad, was appointed to work as an accountant in the mining administration offices for a short while. I learned, in the spring of 1939, that Vanya died during the winter time, after a few months assignment to general work in the gold mines.

I vividly remember Dreishbull, a Russian Jew in his late-twenties. He was elected cell-elder by the inmates in a cell in Taganka. A born leader, he impressed everyone with his stately manners, air of authority, command of words, and striking appearance. Tall and strikingly handsome, (this in spite of his incarceration in Taganka) his dark eyes glistened when he talked. The raven black stubble enhanced his masculinity. His blue suit was of the best quality. He wore 400 ruble shoes without laces. His unwashed shirt was silk.

I remember how he admonished those who ate their whole bread portions in the morning and how he divided his own into three parts. Dreishbull claimed it was because he had will-power, while the others had not. (And I was among those who had not the power to fondle my bread portion all day, so I felt ashamed of myself.) He never mentioned what his profession had been before his arrest. No one knew who he was. However,

the cell-elder did talk of his arrest. It happened after leaving the American embassy in March. Why he had gone there, no one knew. Dreishbull did not speak English.

I met him in Camp Expeditsionni during the winter of 1939-40. Dreishbull was a *dokhodyaga* (a last-legger), — of which I shall write many more pages later on. He hung around the camp canteen looking for crumbs or leavings, anything to stuff into his mouth. He was pounced upon by others and beaten for begging for remains. Before Dreishbull died in Camp Ekspeditsionni, I asked him why he had gone to the United States Embassy. He refused to tell me.

Then there is the case of the young cook. I do not remember his first or last name. Let it be Kolya.

Kolya graduated from a vocational school with a diploma of master chef. He read in the *Vechernaia Moskva,* (a Moscow evening newspaper in which ads appeared) that a chef was needed at a certain address on Arbat Street. Kolya went there with newspaper in hand, looking for the street number. He finally found it. It looked like a very stately mansion and Kolya wondered who lived there. "It must be some very important people," Kolya thought to himself.

As he stood there, a militiaman (there is one in front of every embassy, usually standing in a tiny booth) approached Kolya and asked, "Why have you stopped here, what's your business?"

The young cook pointed to the ad, "See, they need a cook. Do you know who lives there?"

"Can't you see the insignia on the gate? And the flag? It's the German Embassy, you fool. You'd better move on. I don't advise you ever to go in."

Kolya, a simple peasant boy, meekly turned away and headed for a tram stop. Before arriving at the street corner, a black sedan pulled up to the curb . . . and by now you can guess the rest. We were cell-mates together in Taganka. Kolya ended up in Kolyma. The last time I saw him was in the Magadan transit camp. We were assigned to different camps. I do not know whether Kolya survived.

I recorded these cases in my memory and vowed to remember the names and details that, if ever I returned to Freedom, I would document them in this book. (May God forgive me for forgetting some names.)

Now it is time to draw some conclusions.

First, it is obvious the NKVD set up dragnets at each foreign embassy in Moscow during the month of March 1938. (How many others were set before and after this period? Perhaps this very day?)

Second, all Soviet citizens who visited these embassies were arrested in broad daylight, imprisoned, and sent off to the labor camps in remote areas.

WHY?

Mass terror, arrests, executions, and exile of human beings began immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia with one basic purpose. The only way it could survive and maintain power was by degrading and dehumanizing the people. Only in this manner could the system feel safe. Nothing suits a dictatorship except the complete destruction of self-respect.

The Soviets invented the concentration labor camps. Why let the captives sit in comfortable prisons? (There weren't enough Tsarist jails anyway.) Why should parasites suck the blood of the proletariat? Let them

work! Let them produce! Hundreds of projects were completed by slave labor.

Along came the year 1934. Stalin, not satisfied with the power he already wielded, craved more. He had one more fort to storm before becoming The Supreme. HE COULD NOT ORDER THE ARREST OF A POLITBURO MEMBER WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE OTHERS!

Stalin masterminded the assasination of Sergei Mironovitch Kirov, his close associate and Secretary of the Leningrad Communist Party organization. The murder was blamed on the Trotzkyites and triggered a wave of mass reprisals. One by one the Old Bolshevik leaders were liquidated. The "trees" were tried in court. They CONFESSED to their CRIMES and were shot. And the whole world knew about them. Nothing was said about the "CHIPS" who were swallowed up in the middle of the night and lugged off to the labor camps. All the while, the Soviet propaganda machine trumpeted the dastardly deeds of the "enemies of the people," supposedly agents of the imperialist war-mongers who were about to pounce on the Workers' Fatherland.

The industrialization of the country was in full swing. Communism's ultimate goal was and still is world domination. In order to enslave the remaining five-sixths of the earth, the USSR had to become a world power. The five-year plans had no end. As new socialist projects were gloriously heralded, food and everyday necessities of life became scarcer. This, a result of the bankruptcy of the economic and collective-farm system, was also blamed on the enemies.

There was gold in Kolyma, coal in Vorkuta, lumber in the vast Krassnoyarsk and Novosibirk regions. There were railroads and canals to be built. What about the manpower? Who was to do the logging, the mining? Who was to build the roads? Leave it to the State Security Organs!

And so the arrests continued and we come to 1937. Genrikh Yagoda, the Peoples' Commissar of Internal Affairs, was deposed the year before and shot after a show trial. Nikolai Yezhov became his successor. Millions were arrested in 1937-38. A fraction of them were executed. The bulk was dragged off to perform the mining, the logging, the road building. Arrest quotas were assigned to each NKVD unit throughout the land. Now we come to my particular case. The Moscow unit had not fulfilled its norm. Perhaps it had — and strived for an overfulfillment. 100% is not enough! Let's give 120%! And when that is reached, on to 150%! And then even higher — 200%! That's the way it is in the Soviet Union!

The *Yezhovchina* (purges of 1937-38) removed Stalin's last barrier to the top. He became the Almighty. The Politburo itself conceded the last vestige of power it held. Stalin no longer had to account to them for his actions.

A word should be said about the foreign diplomatic corps in Moscow. Did they know their missions were being used as traps to corral slave labor? Surely they had to be aware of what was going on. Wittingly or unwittingly, they actually helped by employing and harboring Soviet secret police officials in their buildings. (Remember the blue-eyed Chekist and the bearded cloak room attendant in the American Embassy on March 21, 1938?)

I have been forced to jump ahead of my story. Let us now return to cell 69.

The strictest of measures were taken to keep the prisoners from receiving any news from the outside. No newspapers, no food parcels, no visits. Relatives who had somehow managed to find out the whereabouts of a lost soul could leave money at the prison office; a receipt for the same was then given to the prisoner. Those who had money to their credit could order food and tobacco from the prison commissary once a month. (During "normal" times, according to prison regulations — every ten days.)

Laryek (when food could be bought) in our cell was something to look forward to, a change in our routine. There is a tradition in Russian prisons, handed down from Tsarist times, that when the fortunate ones receive *laryek,* they allot a portion of their food and smokes to a common store which is then divided among the less fortunate — the penniless ones. It took all day to receive what was ordered — sausage, bread, biscuits, cigarettes and *makhorka.* (Brown packets of coarse tobacco resembling sawdust.) The Russian cigarettes had long, hollow tips. These were snipped off by the guards, lest messages be smuggled in them.

For several days everyone had a little more to eat and something to smoke. My receipt for twelve rubles was spent the first *laryek.* There was not enough money for sausage, so I ordered black bread and *makhorka.* I learned to roll my own.

I anticipated our first *laryek,* imagining the moment when I would fill my stomach with all the black bread it could hold. We were surely and quickly falling into an animal state. It took hours to divide the goodies. There were a few who refused to allot a portion to the common store. Arguments and hassles followed. At times it seemed fights were about to break out. The two criminals looked on and seemed to be enjoying it all.

Fedor overate after the sordid prison fare, and had an attack of diarrhea. He had to use the latrine bucket to move his bowels. Several of us stood before him to hide his embarrassment from the others. We asked the cell elder to allay the protests. What else could Fedor do? The utterly crushed look of this man of refinement left an imprint on my memory. I recall this event vividly, more than many others even more degrading, because it was the first time I saw the agony of a cultivated man forced into a situation over which he had no control. A guard opened the door to find out what the commotion was all about. We implored him to allow us to take the latrine bucket to the toilet and empty it. He answered, "I don't have the authority!" and shut the door.

The cell grew noisier. The guard returned. We asked to be allowed to speak to the head guard. After a long time, an officer with blue and red insignias on his lapels entered the cell and listened to our complaints. He muttered something about what pigs we were, but allowed Fedor and another man to carry the offensive bucket to the toilet.

The regular food we received was far from enough. The 600 grams of black bread sufficed only in the morning, so I had to have dinner and supper without bread. At noon they gave us watery cabbage soup and a couple of spoonfuls of mush. Supper consisted of a plate of cabbage soup. There were a few of the older inmates who ate about half of their soup and gave the rest away to the younger, hungry ones. This was the first time in my life I really learned what hunger meant. Hunger — Soviet style! In Taganka, one does not complain of the quality. We could have eaten anything!

During the day I often thought of the good meals I had enjoyed in the

past. I made believe I was again eating such food. Then I began to imagine I was set free from prison. The first thing I would do when I arrived home — set up the double boiler and make a kettle of semolina mush. I would cook it so thick that I could cut it with a knife. Then I'd place a large piece of butter in it and watch it melt. Lastly, I'd pour sugar and milk on top! Others talked aloud of things they had eaten. Braisen would tell how he'd bake a cake, until those listening told us to shut up.

Discourses sometimes took place after "dinner." The lecturers were volunteers. There were doctors of medicine, professors of history and literature. Regrettably, I understood very little, as my knowledge of Russian was limited. I remember most of all an air pilot who told of his trips to the Far North. I remember him, not because of the lectures he delivered; it was for the following incident:

I do not recall his name. Let's call him Ivan.

Although of an unimposing, almost dwarfish appearance, men listened when he talked. He spoke with an air of authority. Ivan seemed to be a highly educated intellectual. At one time I believe he was our cell-elder. One day Ivan became involved in an argument and lost his temper. He shouted at the others, "If you're here, there's a reason for it! The NKVD does not make mistakes! As for me, I am not guilty. You'll rot here and I'll be freed and my Party ticket restored to me!"

A Latvian, formerly of the famed Riflemen's Division, grabbed Ivan by the throat and started to strangle him. Others intervened and separated the two. The Latvian shouted, "I'll bash your fucking head, you intellectual bastard! I was giving my blood to the Bolshevik Revolution while you were still sucking your mother's tits! If they don't make mistakes, how come you're in here with us?"

The guard, who had heard the commotion and seen everything through the peep-hole, called a squad of officials who entered the cell. Ivan showed them his torn collar and red neck. The Latvian Rifleman was taken away to the penal cell. None of us talked to Ivan. We completely ignored him.

During my two months in cell 69, we were taken to the bathhouse twice. These occasions were ordeals which lasted the whole day. We had to leave all our belonging in the cell. During our absence a thorough search and inspection took place. My first whiff of the fresh, spring air made me giddy, almost drunk. I breathed deep and often, gulping it in during the walk through the prison yard to and from the bath.

I remembered the morning of March 21st, when I left my apartment for the last time. There had been snow on the ground. Now, walking in the yard, I saw puddles like on Trenton Avenue in Buffalo when I was a kid. It was springtime and I was in prison!

The guards leading us clanged keys on their belt buckles or clucked their tongues. These were signals to other guards who might inadvertently be leading other prisoners our way. If two guards found themselves on collision course, one of them forced his prisoners to face the wall while the others passed on. The prisoner who dared turn his head to look earned a shower of blows on the head and a few days of solitary confinement in a penal cell. (And in those days there were up to seventeen men crammed in the solitary cells.)

Crossing the prison yard to the bathhouse, I did manage to steal a forbidden glance or two in spite of the blows. The windows of all the buildings

but one were securely visored with muzzles. As we passed that building, I took a quick look. On the second floor there was a large barred window. The cell was full of Chinese (or perhaps Koreans) sitting on the floor almost naked, watching us as we passed. To this day, I do not know who they were. Politicals they had to be! But why the absence of metal shields over their windows?

The bath was a huge unlit room in which long, wooden benches lined the crumbling, sweating walls. It was almost impossible to breathe in this twilight of steam and stench. We were packed in, body against oily body, a sea of bobbing, cropped heads in a murky underworld. Squeezing through to clutch an unclaimed, sleazy wooden bucket on the nearest bench, one got in line for the two crooked faucets at one end of the room, filled the bucket with alternate splashes of nearly boiling and freezing cold water, adjusting the temperature as well as the jostling from behind permitted, and staggered off ankle-deep in soapy slop to a relatively quiet spot where one could at least unbend enough to squat and wash. Each of us had been given a small, black piece of soap that had a particular stench of its own. Before the bath our heads had been cropped and bodies shaven again — at the crotch and arm-pits. For this, we stood in packed lines of bony humans, more than half of them covered with blue, blood-crusted welts from beatings received during interrogations.

Chapter 4

FAREWELL CELL 69

The interrogations took place mostly during the night. Often, after the ordeal, the prisoner was carried back to the cell and dumped unconscious into the arms of those nearest the door.

There was a certain, persistant rumor which was repeated time and time again: "It mattered not whether we signed a confession of guilt or not. We were all to be sent off to the camps. So why resist? Best to sign whatever they concocted . . . SIGN!" This rumor was prevalent, not only in Taganka, it was spread through all interrogation cells in all Soviet prisons during those years. Certainly it must have been started by the NKVD itself, through its stoolies.

There were those (I remember two cases in cell 69) whose imagination ran wild. They bested the interrogators at their own game; they invented their own stories! One "confessed" he was a member of a counter-revolutionary group, named many of his innocent friends (and enemies) as accomplices — they had been recruited by a foreign intelligence service. Their task, supposedly, to assassinate all the members of the *Politburo!*

Another invented the fabulous fairy tale that he was a White Guard agent. His task was to build a submarine somewhere on the outskirts of Moscow and wait for a signal from Paris to launch it in the Moscow River!

So here we see classic examples of man's ingenuity. How true the saying: "A drowning man clutches at a straw." They hoped their fantastic confessions might be read by some INTELLIGENT higher-up who would dismiss their cases and they would be freed, or if worse came to worse, eventually (in the near future) their cases would be reviewed. The lucridity of their confessions would be so obvious, and again they would be free men.

Their miscalculations were (and I must add they were mine and almost all the others): WE DID NOT REALIZE THEN THAT THE INVESTIGATIONS AND INTERROGATIONS WERE A FARCE! We could not realize it! There would be no trials and reviews of our cases. There was only ONE reason for our being incarcerated: TO BE SENT OFF AS SLAVE LABORERS TO THE CONCENTRATION LABOR CAMPS!

There were two more sophisms that diffused in the prisons of the Workers' Fatherland in 1937 and 1938:

1) There were indeed many enemies and spies in the Soviet Union. Because of the havoc created by the scroundels, the NKVD was arresting the innocents merely to check us out. It would take at the most — three or four months. Then the really guilty ones would receive their due reward — a prison term, and we the innocent would be freed!

EPILOGUE

Here this book should have ended. Alas, it did not. That which followed should be written in a second volume. God willing, perhaps some day I will write it. At present I have not the strength to do so. At least, my main purpose has been accomplished. I hope I have succeeded in revealing a tiny bit of what it is like to live under communism. And finally . . . the reader must surely be aware that there was and is a *Kolyma.*

It would be unfair to the reader to abruptly stop at this point. That which follows are mere highlights of how it all ended.

Alexandrov, a small, industrial town in Vladimirskii District, was to be my next home for nine months. With the help of Tina Parodi, a tiny, fiery ex-prisoner in her late fifties, I was registered at the militia as an Alexandrov resident. Then I found a job painting fences and signs for the Municipal Maintenance Section.

The town was full of wolves like myself. We were easily recognizable by our furtive looks and crushed mien. We avoided socializing in large groups. We distrusted each other. Each had two or three close friends at the most. Some had none at all.

On Saturday nights we stood in line at the railroad station for tickets to Moscow even though the place swarmed with militiamen. They did not stop us in Alexandrov. In Moscow . . . that was a different matter . . . if we were caught there, then good-bye.

I let the first Saturday pass — but on the next, I just had to. I was dying to see my family.

After supper Grace said, "Lucy F. knows you're back. She wants to see you."

"Lucy! How's she been?"

"She's fine — her husband Jack never returned from abroad. He's some kind of a big-shot TASS journalist in London."

"Does Lu still work for *Sovietland?*" I asked.

"No — she evacuated during the war. After she returned to Moscow in 1944 we saw a lot of each other . . . she mingled with Americans and British, then along came the Cold War and she broke off completely — she's such a fraidy-cat, you know."

Lucy and I renewed our friendship. She came over to Grace's apartment on the week-ends when I was there. That was in the beginning. Shortly after my arrival in Alexandrov the militia completely suspended the registration of liberated prisoners. And rumors began to spread . . . we

learned that in the camps, the z/k's no longer were liberated when their sentences expired . . . no more release affidavits (meaning they were not even worthy of becoming wolves). Instead, they were transported directly to remote places . . . in exile.

Another rumor . . . there was to be a clean-up in Alexandrov and other such towns where wolves resided. We were all going to be sent out. There were too many of us! We had formed an iron ring around Moscow! Stalin was in danger! The population would learn of the ghastly camp conditions!

And we put two and two together . . . the government had recently announced a ten-fold increase in the price of lumber — due to a serious shortage. The Central Committee of the Communist Party had decreed a mobilization of forces for a heavier output of lumber. And *there* was the answer . . . they were going to send the wolves to the timberlands!

We dropped our tails and hid our snouts. Rarer were our visits to Moscow. And our relatives began to visit us in Alexandrov.

During the summer Mom and Ella lived with me for one month. Grace and Lucy visited us on Sundays. (Saturday was then a full work-day in the USSR.) I rented a larger room for the occasion on Staraia Konoplannaia Street. After Kolyma, the summer in Alexandrov was a beautiful one — no mosquitoes — in the company of loved ones. It passed too quickly . . . and with it, my temporary sense of tranquility. I had been absorbed with my family. After they left I was again with my fellow-wolves and all we talked about . . . the rumors . . . we were going to be arrested again!

Lucy came to see me every week-end. What had started as a casual romance soon turned into something more serious. We talked of marriage . . . but how? Lucy lived in Moscow — I was a wolf. There was an unbridgeable, vast gap between us.

Lucy's parents, enthusiastic communists, came to the USSR from California in the early twenties. Lucy was a child then. Untouched by the purges, the family enjoyed a comfortable life in Moscow. Lucy visited the United States in 1930 as secretary and interpreter for a Soviet delegation of electrical engineers. Upon returning to Moscow she married Jack C., a rising star in the select, new, Soviet elite.

During World War II, Lucy evacuated to the City of Kuibishev and worked as a translator for the Soviet press. Her position allowed her to mingle freely with American and British correspondents. And why not? They were then considered allies. Lucy kept up her relations with foreigners when she returned to Moscow . . . until relations with America deteriorated . . . then Lucy severed her ties.

One crisp, Sunday afternoon in early autumn, Lucy and I took a walk in a pine grove, on the outskirts of Alexandrov. I loved to go there. The trees were so tall. The air smelled so good . . . and we were alone. It was there, in the pine grove, I always opened up . . . talked about Kolyma . . . about America. Once I asked Lucy, "Wouldn't you like to go back?"

She seemed troubled . . . no answer. I asked, "What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"Please Tom, don't ever talk to me about camp and prison life . . . and don't reminisce about America."

I was taken aback. "Why?"

"You never can tell . . . I'm really very weak . . . if ever they arrest me and interrogate me about you — I'd honestly be able to answer I know nothing."

I felt a warning buzz in my brain. Hm m . . . Turning over, I looked into Lucy's eyes — and she could not return my stare. She pulled my head to hers and kissed me. Then her eyes twinkled, her mouth broke into a wide smile, "Do you know the latest joke going around Moscow?"

"No, let's hear it."

Lucy said in Russian, "When you find yourself in a company of three, be careful of what you say! One of you is certainly a *seksot*[33] . . . if not two . . . possibly all three of you!"

Lucy laughed. I didn't. "Do you know that you can get ten years for telling that joke?"

"Aw, come on!" protested Lucy.

"I'm not kidding — you know how many persons I've met in the camps who were sent there for jokes like that? They'll pin KRA on you — do you know what that means?"

"But I've heard so many jokes — and I've told them before. How come I was never arrested? Don't make up stories."

"So far you've been lucky. No one has reported you — someday the law of averages will catch up with you. Do you still think I'm lying?"

"I don't know — I believe you're obsessed — you're exaggerating."

"Okay . . . 'when it happens to you, you'll know it's true.' "

The black, ominous, rumbling rumors hung heavily over us. And the wolves, unable to find shelter, began to mingle. During times like those, who else could we turn to? Our own kind. The distrust vanished. Upon meeting, we asked each other, "What's the word? Any news?"

The trains swarmed with agents. Documents were checked. No one traveled to Moscow. And then it happened . . .

One morning I dressed for work and left my room. News certainly travels fast in a small town. Despite all the precautions for secrecy, everyone knew . . . even the exact amount . . . eighty wolves had been arrested during the night. The Purge of the Repeaters had begun.

At work everyone looked at me. The foreman sat at a desk. He was a wolf too, as yet untouched. By evening I already knew who had been arrested. Rita the Hungarian, a friend of Tina's, was one of the first to go. There were others I knew.

After work I went to the bazaar and bought a few kilograms of dried, black bread and thirty packages of tobacco . . . enough to last several weeks . . . wherever I was going . . .

That night I lay awake until one in the morning. They did not come. I had another day before me . . . I said to myself. A few days passed — each morning I heard of two-three more arrests. Then Saturday finally came and I was still untouched — and Lucy was to arrive that evening.

As we walked back to my room, I told Lucy what had happened. It seemed strange that she was not in the least disturbed. That night I gave her instructions to break the news gently to Mom and Grace. We arranged with the landlady that if I were to be arrested she was to wire Lucy one word . . . "Come."

And Lucy was her usual self — merry, joking, unperturbed. I tossed until one in the morning . . . "Well Lu, if they haven't come by now . . . they won't come anymore tonight."

---

[33]SEKSOT — Abbreviation for secret agent.

"Oh stop worrying Tom! I have a pretty good feeling they won't touch you at all."

My suspicions were thoroughly aroused. When I looked steadily into Lucy's eyes, I knew she could not lie. I yanked the blanket off the bed, stood up, and turned on the light. Then I grasped her chin firmly and demanded, "All right, why?"

"It's just a feeling . . ."

"I don't believe you, Lu. You know something . . . I also have pretty good intuitions . . . and I'll bet you anything in the world this is the last time we'll be together in this bed."

I persisted, coaxed, and then threatened . . . then Lucy broke into tears. "All right I'll tell you," she whispered, "promise you'll never tell . . . they'll give me twenty-five years . . ."

And this is how it happened . . .

Two years before, Lucy had applied to the Ministry of External Affairs for an exit visa to the United States. About a year later she received notice to appear at the OVIR office. There, Lucy was told that her request had been refused. As she was leaving the building, a man in civilian dress approached her, showed his KGB identity card, and politely asked her to accompany him. Lucy's knees trembled when she entered the waiting limousine . . . inside the agent reassured her, "It's only for a few minutes — everything is going to be all right."

After stopping on a side street off Dzherzinsky Square, Lucy was escorted into a building. Inside, Lucy thought . . . this is the end. She would never see her mother, father, loved ones, her comfortable two-room apartment again. Lucy sat upstairs in a long corridor waiting . . . That's their method — waiting arouses anxiety — you become more fearful.

Finally she was called into an office. The first interrogator was very polite — her autobiography — that always comes first — when and why she came to the Soviet Union — what she did and did not do — who her friends were. And Lucy knew not what he was getting at — why she was there — whether they had anything on her. The questioning went on for hours.

When a woman guard accompanied her to the toilet, Lucy felt even more uneasy . . . she surely must be under arrest. After another long wait in the corridor, she was called into another office. The second interrogator was not as nice as the first. There were threats and swearing — but no accusations. What he harped on most was — why, after frequenting the U.S. embassy so often — had she suddenly severed all ties with foreigners. Lucy answered that she had done so because relations with America had deteriorated. The interrogator always kept coming back to . . . why she had stopped socializing with Americans.

By then Lucy pictured herslef in a labor camp with a twenty-five year sentence. She was exhausted when the first interrogator entered and said, "All right . . . you claim you are a loyal, Soviet subject?"

"Of course!"

"Then we'll give you a chance to prove it . . . are you willing to cooperate with us?"

Lucy instantly realized what that meant . . . she told me that she argued, resisted — gave all kinds of reasons why she could never become a spy. Finally, Lucy succombed . . . better to become a *seksot* than to go on a long journey into the unknown.

She signed a document agreeing to become a KGB secret agent — Lucy

vowed never to tell anyone of her assignment. Breach of oath meant prosecution under the 58th article of the criminal code, Section IA — high treason. Lucy was given a code name — Nora. She was ordered never to appear at Lubyanka. She memorized a telephone number which she called for her first appointment. After that she met her superior regularly, once a week, in the Moscow Hotel and various, private apartments. The meeting places and telephone numbers were constantly changed. Lucy's assignments were to spy on Americans living in Moscow.

I listened to her story in dismay and felt that old ton of lead in my stomach. When Lucy started to relate the whole dirty business I had turned the light off. She could not see the expression on my face in the dark. However, she sensed my revulsion and frigidity. Lucy embraced me and asked for compassion and understanding. After a long silence I asked, "How many persons have you sent to Sochi[34]?"

"None! . . . I swear it . . ."

"And what about my family — have *they* ever asked about them?" I asked.

"No . . . they're not interested in Grace —"

"What about me?"

"You see, that's why I'm so sure you won't be arrested! They never asked me if you're loyal . . . what you say . . . I always praised you and told them all about our relationship . . . they even approved."

"Of course!" I retorted, "did you tell them you love me? They'll never believe what you say about the man you're living with."

I accompanied Lucy to the station the next evening and returned alone to my room. God, what a dirty mess! How could I warn Grace that Lucy was a spy? A letter . . . what about the censorship? If only I could see my sister . . .

Two or three days passed. After supper I tucked myself into bed with a book. It must have been 10 p.m. when I dozed off. Suddenly I awoke. I heard a man's voice in the kitchen . . . then there was a knock on the door. I said to myself, this is it . . .

A plain-clothes KGB agent lunged towards me. I was in my underclothes. First he placed one hand on my crotch — then felt the rest of my body . . . "Where's your pistol? I know you have one!"

A uniformed militiaman guarded the doorway. For a moment I had a glimpse of Dasha Stepanovna, my landlady. Then the door was shut and there were only the three of us. My legs shook uncontrollably. Only twice in my life have I experienced such a sensation. The other time was when Fedor C. was arrested on March 15, 1938.

I answered I had no pistol — never in my life had I ever held one in my hand. Then they ordered me to dress and sit in the far corner while they ransacked the room. Although I had one small room and very few possessions, the search lasted about four hours. They gathered all letters, photographs, books — every single scrap of paper with writing, and fashioned a parcel. "You can take as much food and clothing as you want . . . you'll be needing it," said the arresting officer when it was all over.

I filled a duffle-bag — an American one. It had the name E. MILLER printed on it — a gift from one of Grace's Embassy friends. First I stuffed in

[34]SOCHI — A resort city in the Crimea — In Alexandrov, we used the word to imply the labor camps.

all my clothes, then the dried bread and tobacco. In the kitchen I was allowed to bid farewell to the landlady and her children. They had all risen and stood there frightened, crying. The oldest, a flaxen-haired, eighteen year old girl, threw her arms around my neck and kissed my cheek.

Seven years later I made a special trip to Alexandrov and went directly to Staraia Konoplannaia Street. I could not forget the friendliness of Dasha Stepanovna and her children, that they had not been afraid to show affection for an enemy of the people in the presence of a KGB man. The girl who embraced me was no longer there — she had married and moved to another town. The children had all grown up. I did not recognize them. Dasha Stepanovna was overjoyed at seeing me. We drank many cups of tea and talked. And she confessed that during those days of 1948, she and other landladies were "requested" to sign affidavits in the Alexandrov KGB office — "Everytime you went to Moscow, we had to report to them — when you came back — who your visitors were — they wanted to know everything you did . . ."

Three days in Alexandrov Prison, in the center of town . . . a few months ago I painted the iron fences surrounding the park in the Square . . . I often looked at the wooden tower and wondered . . . would I someday "sit" there? . . . Wooden sleeping platforms . . . one interrogation . . . no beatings . . . so far . . . convoy guards . . . an open truck in the middle of the night . . . the town was asleep . . . down the main street to the railroad station . . . no, a sudden veer to the right . . . a couple of kilometers . . . on a siding and into a *Stolypin* car, waiting for us on the tracks.

What's a *Stolypin* car? Another camouflage. From the outside an innocent observer would mistake it for a baggage car. Inside? One side is divided into compartments. How many? I cannot say . . . I was never given the time to count them. An aisle runs down the whole length of the car for the guards to pace back and forth, and watch us in compartments behind a grated barrier. (The wolves had turned into monkeys.) In each compartment, three decks — supposedly bunks. Nine men could lie there, almost comfortably . . . but when you squeeze eighteen . . . or twenty . . . and each has possessions? Stay put . . . half-sit . . . half-lie . . . half-stand. And when you're pushed into the car, down the aisle . . . you hear women's voices from the first compartment, next to the toilet . . . toilet? Inside the compartment you beg pitifully to open the grated door . . . you've got diarrhea . . . How? There's more than a hundred of you . . . and only one toilet.

So much for the bad part. In the beginning of this book I wrote that if you want to survive — forget how bad it is — think of how much worse it could be. There were no *blatniye* among us . . . and we were not bound for Vladivostok . . . a month's journey. *Stolypin* cars were for short journeys . . . only three days to Vladimir! (Normally it takes six hours.)

They say Vladimir is a beautiful city — so many foreign tourists go there to marvel at the ancient churches and monasteries . . . I saw only the insides of Black Ravens and the insides of two prisons. (Unlike my Moscow experience in 1938, there were no bread signs on the Vladimir Black Ravens.)

Interrogations . . . only at night . . . the cold and hot treatment . . . one week of yelling, cursing, threatening . . . then a week of gentle, coaxing talk

. . . Major Yershov, "We know you are guilty of high treason, espionage, counter-revolutionary activities! Admit your guilt and we'll let you off easier . . ."

One month in solitary . . . four of us . . . Nikolai Nikolaevitch Leonhart . . . is he a stoolie? Transfer to a general cell . . . thirty of us . . . not as crowded as Taganka . . . most repeaters are called once to interrogation and then leave . . . why am I held here so long? They must have something on me . . . I'm going to be shot . . . at best twenty-five years, if I'm lucky . . . my letter to Ambassador Smith . . . my application for an American passport . . . do they know? Good thing I never told Lucy . . . Lucy? Did she snitch? My girl . . . after nine months I find out she's a *seksot!* . . . What about Grace? Maybe she's one too . . . only she'd never snitch on me . . . and Ma? Maybe she's one too . . . Pa can't be . . . he's dead. They're calling me to interrogation . . . I'm not going to admit anything . . . and now they just called another to gather his possessions and leave the cell . . . and he hasn't been here a week yet . . .

Four months have gone by . . . at least three hundred men have passed through this cell . . . repeaters from Vorkuta, Karaganda, Krasslag, etc., etc., you name the camp . . . not a single one from Kolyma . . . also Russian prisoners-of-war . . . thrown into our midst . . . they passed through the 1945 filters . . . spent a couple of years at home . . . now they're re-arresting them too . . . I'm not the only one who's been here so long . . . Fadeyev, the ex-prosecutor . . . Voskovitch, the former Red Army Commander . . . Yakubov, the Uzbek, ex-Air Force Commander . . . they're calling my name! In the daytime? "Yes . . . Tomas . . . nineteen sixteen . . ."

In the courtyard . . . the gray Black Raven . . . all alone in the blackness . . . good-bye Vladimir Internal Interrogation Prison . . . never saw you from the outside . . . someday . . . when Russia is free . . . half an hour's ride . . . or an hour . . . another courtyard . . . never been here before . . . strange . . . high, stone walls . . . must be ancient . . . bath-house . . . delousing . . . in a small cell . . . three others sit on two bunks. Quiet . . . then questions, "Where are you from?"

"Kolyma. And you?"

"Vorkuta."

"Where am I?"

"Valdimir Central Prison — built in the eighteenth century by Catherine the Great!

Days pass . . . the hatch opens — we sign up for books! We read all day . . . Shakespeare, Byron, Dickens . . . A Tale of Two Cities — I read that in high school . . . good old Tech . . . how long ago that was . . . night time . . . the hatch opens . . . "Hey you!" Don't cover your face and keep your hands out where I can see them!"

Fifteen minutes a day outside in the kennels . . . for a walk, hands behind our backs . . . in a circle . . . then back inside. No more books. Relive your life . . . a hundred times . . . am sick of looking at that guy's face across from me . . . all day he sits and slowly plucks a hair at a time from his beard . . . must be two weeks already . . . he has a bald spot . . . the size of a half-dollar on his lower cheek . . . think I'll try it . . . on my chest . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . where'll I put the hairs? I pluck hairs all day . . . the hatch opens . . . "Hey you! Why are you pulling hair from your chest?"

"Is it against the regulations, Citizen Guard?"

"Yes! If you have nothing to do — kill flies. Look how many there are flying around?"

"And with what shall we kill them, Citizen Guard?"

"With your hands!"

We're walking in a circle in the kennels . . . hear voices in the adjoining compartment . . . one of the boards seems to be loose . . . should I take a peep? Wait till the guard's eye appears at the peep-hole . . . there it is . . . now the metal lid on the other side is closed . . . he's gone . . . I push the board . . . but the guard opens the kennel door . . . I'm caught . . . three days in the dungeon . . . undressed . . . in my underdrawers . . . four hundred grams of bread and a cup of water . . . it's cold and damp . . . pace back and forth to keep warm . . . all day. Night . . . they give me a board to sleep on . . . I lay down . . . it's too cold . . . I hug my sides . . . no use. Get up Tommy . . . walk back and forth . . . re-live your life again.

Back in the old cell with my comrades . . . seems like heaven now . . . a parcel from Grace and Lucy . . . bread, tobacco, onions, garlic.

At night we hear music . . . far away . . . from a loudspeaker . . . radio. On one occasion a familiar voice sings in English! Paul Robeson! In concert . . . yes . . . they love him here . . . he knows nothing about Vladimir . . . wolves . . . Kolyma . . .

July 1949 . . . into the transit hall . . . two hundred men . . . transport . . . where? My turn . . . Sgovio! . . . in an office . . . an officer . . . Sentenced to eternal exile! . . . For what? . . . *Suspicion of Espionage!*

Before the Bolshevik Revolution a road from Vladimir led to Siberia. In the old days Vladimir was a gathering point for prisoners being sent to exile. Songs were sung about those prisoners of Tsarist times.

". . . Ah, thou road to far Siberia . . .

Drenched with blood from human shackles made . . ."

Russian writers such as Tolstoi and Chekhov wrote about it! Paintings depicting it hang in Russian galleries. The whole world knew about it! Friends and relatives travelled to Vladimir with food and clothing to bid the prisoners farewell . . . but the Soviet Regime hides its dirty work. We were taken to the railroad tracks in Black Ravens; we squatted on our haunches — waiting for a *Stolypin* car to be tugged. And who saw us? A few railroad employees sworn to secrecy, the guards, and a KGB Colonel silently walking up and down the tracks . . . making sure the loading of prisoners went on smoothly . . . and that the population would not see us.

The City of Gorky . . . hot, summer day . . . What, no secrecy? . . . they're unloading us in the daytime . . . near the station . . . we can see streets . . . people going about their business . . . only for a moment. Run! . . . Faster! And that old man can't run fast enough . . . his trousers are falling . . . he fell . . . the wolf-hounds are tearing his clothing. Gorky Prison . . . in a big hall . . . hundreds of repeaters . . . and Russian prisoners-of-war . . . twenty-five year prison sentences!

I did not believe it — I could not believe when I first heard of the forced repatriation of Soviet subjects. That the Americans and British would send a million men to their death? Why? But when I heard it over and over from countless others — then I had to believe it. (And to this day I cringe with shame!) Before being turned over to Stalin for extermination, the men

cried and implored on bended knees to the allied soldiers, "Please do not send us back!"

Many committed suicide rather than return to the Workers' Paradise. The Soviet authorities promised all would be forgiven. Posters were displayed showing women with outstretched arms . . . YOUR MOTHERS AND WIVES WAIT FOR YOUR RETURN. The prisoners-of-war were placed in box-cars. As soon as the echelons entered the Soviet zone, the doors were padlocked . . . and to Siberia . . . the filter camps.

Two weeks in Gorky prison . . . *Stolypin* car to Kirov Transit Prison. Why do they call it prison? Looks more like a camp . . . so huge . . . barbed wire fences . . . wooden barracks . . . three story sleeping decks . . . packed like herring in a cask. So hot! Naked, perspiring men . . . thousands here . . . Lithuanian, Estonian, Polish teenagers . . . all with twenty-five year sentences . . .

August . . . dusk . . . two thousand of us . . . march! Armed convoy guards . . . wolf-hounds . . . through fields, ditches . . . Hurry! What do I see there? Long line of old, familiar, cattle-cars! Hope it's not back to Kolyma . . . Stinking, dirty cattle-cars . . . seventy men per car . . . rain . . . rain . . . all the way to Krassnoyarsk. I've got a bad cold . . . must be bronchitis . . . sleeping on the floor. Hey! What's this? We've arrived and no Black Ravens . . . march to the prison in broad daylight?

Krassnoyarsk Prison . . . wow, what cells! Two hundred men in each . . . lie down . . . I've got lice again . . . there's a Chinese z/k next to me . . . I think he's a philosopher . . . he says, "Chinese lice — they better than Russian lice. In China they eat a little, play a little, then go to sleep. But in Russia they eat and play, eat and play — never sleep!"

I must have a fever and it's time to go . . . they're calling us . . . we march through the city in columns . . . the population doesn't even look at us. We're at a wharf . . . the Yenissei River . . . Representatives from *Krassdrev,* the Lumber Trust inspect us . . . seems like they're buying slaves . . . there are women too . . . eight hundred of us . . . they divide us into parties . . . up the Yenissei in boats . . . north to Kazachinsk . . . five hundred are left there . . . further north to Stryelka . . . to the right is the Angara River . . . three hundred men and women in barges . . . a caravan . . . I'm very sick . . . stop at Artugan, logging settlement . . . a dozen huts . . . I'm in an infirmary . . . two weeks, then to Boguchani, the district center.

The local MGB officer notified us of our status. We were not considered prisoners. However we could not leave the Boguchani District. Any attempt to escape would result in a twenty-five year prison sentence. Each of us was given an identity card. We were to report to the MGB headquarters for registration twice a month.

It was stressed that we were exiled for life . . . no hope of return . . . to make the best of the situation, call for our families, and settle down on the Angara. Their aim was obvious — acquire labor power for the rich timberlands.

The local inhabitants were originally exiled by the Tsar in the eighteenth century — mostly Ukrainians and Don Cossacks. Before the Revolution they lived a quiet and peaceful life . . . their main occupation — fishing and hunting. Hundreds of miles from civilization, they became very

backward. The Soviet regime changed their way of life . . . lumber-jacking and collective farms.

The rest of the population was made up of former kulaks, exiled in the early thirties from various parts of Russia and the Ukraine. There were also very many Lithuanians, Esthonians, and Latvians — a segment of the mass which was exiled from the Baltic countries to Siberia in 1947. And in 1949 . . . the Repeaters.

My first assignment was statistician in the District Lumber Administration. Then Lucy arrived in Boguchani for a six month stay. She attracted too much attention. Her Moscow apparel was a sore in the eyes of the wives of the Boguchani hierarchy. We bickered throughout Lucy's six month visit. I could not hide my true feelings when I learned she was actually enjoying her work as a secret agent. Her last assignment in Moscow had been to spy on an English journalist living in Tartu, Esthonia. Lucy had known him when the Englishman worked in a Moscow publishing house. And for that assignment the KGB had paid her four hundred rubles. "Why did you come here if you like your dirty work so much? Go back and continue your spying!" I exploded, one evening.

Lucy returns to Moscow . . . sign-painting . . . then painting walls in the school-house . . . firing the class-room stoves. A Palace of Culture has been built . . . a log structure . . . maintenance man . . . chopping fire-wood . . . painting signs . . . sets for the amateur dramatic performances. Forest fires in the taiga . . . all summer they burn . . . mobilization to extinguish them.

American movies! they call them trophy films . . . confiscated by the Soviet Army in Berlin . . . Jimmy Cagney speaks in German with Russian titles on the bottom of the screen . . . Humphrey Bogart . . . Nelson Eddy and Jeannette MacDonald . . . Henry Fonda . . . The Grapes of Wrath . . . and when the local inhabitants see Johnny Weismuller . . . Tarzan . . . they really go crazy! All over Boguchani you hear the kids . . . the Tarzan cry . . .

Listen to the Voice of America clandestinely at night . . . liberated prisoners keep coming in barges . . . who's that striking young lady on the wharf? Nadya, from Leningrad . . . am drawn to her . . . in the forest . . . lumber-jacking . . . wintertime . . . not as cold as Kolyma . . . only -50°C . . . in summer on river bank . . . there go the logs down in the water . . . building floats . . . the mosquitoes are horrible . . . again mosquito nets over our faces . . .

I shall never forget that day in March 1953. My Lithuanian partner and I fell trees as usual in the forest. Spring was near. By noon the snow became damp and soft from the sun's rays. Our padded trousers and felt boots were soggy and heavy.

There was something very unusual about Nadya when I returned home that evening. Excitedly, she closed the door behind me and whispered, "There's a rumor going round that Stalin is dying."

For a moment I felt numb — then I wanted to cry out for joy! Nadya placed a hand on my mouth. Her eyes glistened and we hugged each other, both sensing there was to be a change in our lives. Was it possible? The tyrant really was to be no more? Hope mounted in our breasts.

I was famished but could not eat, "Why don't you go to the commissary and buy a bottle of wine," said Nadya, "let's celebrate!"

The night was black. I looked at the stars . . . and remembered Kolyma, my comrades who lie buried there in the permafrost . . . if only they could have lived to see the day . . .

There were others walking about. All were going to the commissary. I talked to them. It was no longer a rumor. There had been a TASS announcement on the radio. Stalin had a stroke and was still unconscious. One by one we entered the small store. We bought bottles of vodka, trying our best to be casual, like buying vodka was an everyday occurrence. We averted each others' glances, trying to look as sad as possible.

Nadya and I drank a toast, then walked outside in the night. The inhabitants had closed their shutters. Probably everyone else was celebrating in secret.

Later in the afternoon of the next day someone brought the news that Stalin had died. The Lithuanians did not conceal their joy. Finding new strength, we sawed with zest.

Meetings are held . . . days of mourning . . . eulogies by the Party leaders. We wait for news . . . Malenkov takes Stalin's post . . . changes in the Politburo . . .

End of March . . . an amnesty law . . . most of the criminals are freed. Politicals? Those with five year sentences . . . Nadya is one of them . . . receives release affidavit . . . internal passport . . . returns to Leningrad. Good-bye Nadya . . . we had a year together . . .

We write petitions . . . negative answers . . . resign ourselves to our fate . . . one year passes . . . again rumors . . . we are going to be freed . . . six more months pass . . . rumors become reality . . . July 1954 . . . Amnesty! We are forgiven for our *crimes!*

River boat to Krassnoyarsk . . . after five years, again city streets . . . autobuses . . . stores . . . railroad station . . . have patience, Tommy, wait in line. You'll get a ticket someday . . .

My tiny mother held a bunch of flowers in one hand and clutched Grace's arm with the other. I could see them standing on the platform as my train pulled into the Yaroslavsky Station. I ran to them and again we were re-united. I was no longer a wolf. I carried a "clean," internal passport; therefore I had the right to reside in Moscow. However, there was a big BUT.

A few months before my arrival a new regulation had been issued by the Moscow Soviet. Its intent was to stop the influx of new residents to the capital, who swarmed there because there were less shortages of food products and clothing in Moscow. To stop the flow, it was decreed that an applicant for Moscow residence had to have nine square meters of living space. (approximately — one hundred sq. ft.)

Grace's apartment measured only twenty square meters — with three inhabitants, Mom, Grace, and Ella. The apartment had to be at least thirty-six square meters in order that I receive permission for registration.

After a year of petitioning and hassling, I was finally allowed to become an official resident of my mother's apartment. In the meantime, I paid fifty rubles per month for registration in another apartment in which I did not live.

I found work as a commercial artist in the Kombinat of Graphic Arts on Gorky Street. It was the liberalization period — I was amazed at the

warmth and sympathy of the ordinary Russian people I came in contact with. When they learned I had been ten years in Kolyma and five years in exile, I was bestowed with an unusual amount of attention. I was greatly touched by the reverence. Everyone I spoke to had lost someone in the 1937-38 Purges — if not a relative, a close friend. . . . whereas in 1938 hardly anyone knew it existed, by 1954 Kolyma had become an awesome, household word, signifying the worst of horrors.

Lucy was arrested one night in March of 1953 — about the time of Stalin's death. Poor Lucy! She felt safe in their secret, dirty employ. The KGB used her until it had no more use for her — then she was dumped in the meat-grinder. Grace once told me she had met Lucy's mother on the street. "Yep," said Grace, "her mother told me that Lucy is in the camps already. They gave her twenty-five years. I don't know, it seems things are getting a little better — they freed you — do you think she'll have to sit all those years?"

"I don't know Grace — yeh, things are a little better . . . but for how long? Sooner or later they're going to crack down again. This is the time to get out! We've got to try now . . . who knows how long this liberalization period is going to last."

Several old Italian women had received permission and were about to leave for Italy with their grown-up children. Tina Parodi and Elodia Manserviggi had returned to Moscow from exile before me. After two refusals, they received *affidavits of exoneration* — "That's to discourage you." they said, "But don't give up . . . keep on writing! It'll take a long time, but we'll get out!"

The Soviet Union's relations with Italy were much better than those with the United States. Would it not be wiser to apply for exit visas to Italy? Our American friends who applied for permission to leave for America had all been refused. Grace was pessimistic. She no longer worked at the British Embassy. Shortly after my second arrest, Grace had been called to the KGB and warned to quit . . . or else. She had applied so many times for permission to return to America, and always . . . refusals. Mother had already received an Italian passport in 1947. We figured they would never let all four of us go together. It would be wiser for Mom and I to apply for exit visas . . . if we got out, then we would call for Grace and Ella.

The first step was — obtaining *exoneration affidavits* for my father and myself. Without them our applications would not be accepted. I bombarded the Military Collegium with petitions and stood hours in line at the Chancellery on Kirov Street. Hundreds of others also stood there in line . . . many of them hoping to receive official, posthumous exonerations for their relatives — those who were swallowed up in 1937-38.

My first and second attempts were futile. The refusals were brief and terse: My father and I had been *"justly convicted by the OSO."* I gave in a third petition and in 1956 I received my father's exoneration affidavit and mine. The last paragraphs read: *"The decision of the OSO in regard to Sgovio is rescinded and his file is closed due to lack of facts constituting or proving a crime."*[35]

Meanwhile my uncle in Italy had sent us an affidavit of support. Mother and I had all the necessary documents.

[35]The exoneration affidavits were issued in 1956. And so, after eighteen years, they officially admitted my father and I were innocent.

The MOPR had been disbanded after the arrests of the polit-emigrants in 1937-38. Its functions, on a much lesser scale, were taken over by the Soviet Red Cross. As members of the family of a posthumously exonerated *polit-emigrant,* the Red Cross accepted our applications for exit visas after lengthy interrogations.

Anticipating that we would be questioned separately, Mom and I rehearsed our parts. When asked why we wanted to go to Italy — our answer was to be: Mother was already seventy-two years old. After an absence of forty-five years, she desired to visit her parents' graves and spend her last few years in her native land. As for myself, I was to reply that since my mother was old, I had to accompany her and care for her. And that was the truth. We had to be careful though, that not one word slipped out about America. I warned my mother, "Don't show that you're dissatisfied with the Soviet Union — and not one word about the United States."

"That's going to be so hard to do, but I'll try," she said.

As soon as I saw the Director of the Red Cross, hunched behind a huge desk, my intuitions told me he was a KGB man. He tried in every which way to dissuade us. At first he was polite, but when he realized it was useless, he became bitter and dismissed us, "Go about your business and wait for a reply . . . and by the way, there's one more document I need, a letter of recommendation from your place of work. I'll write to the Party Committee there. Wonder how they'll feel when they learn you want to leave the Soviet Union."

I expected that. As the days passed I felt my nerves were going to break. I noticed a change in my supervisor's attitude — contempt and scorn. In public, some of my fellow-artists avoided me. However, when I did get my visa, they shook hands and warmly congratulated me, wishing me the best.

Mother and I waited almost a year . . . for a refusal. We re-applied after a six-month waiting period. Another interrogation, anxious days of waiting . . . and a second refusal.

In 1959 we received an affirmative reply to our third request. I will not attempt to describe the joy , how many years we had waited for this! And Grace was so happy for us. We made plans . . . as soon as Mom and I arrived in Italy we would talk to the Italian and American authorities . . . tell them everything . . . then we would begin the long negotiations to get Grace and Ella out!

They say that the last mile home is the longest . . . Mother and I arrived at the Red Cross at the appointed time. It was almost over . . . I thought. In a few minutes we would receive all our documents . . . I felt that old ton of lead in my stomach when a female case-worker said, "I'm sorry. It was all a mistake. Your applications have not been approved yet."

My mother and I looked at each other in disbelief, then at the lady, "Then why were we told that they had been approved?"

"You see," the lady explained, "in Odessa there are other Sgovios — also mother and son from Italy who applied. *Their* applications were approved, not *yours.* It was our error."

Mother, unable to hold herself, exploded. In her very poor Russian she retorted, "I don't believe you! I lived in Italy and America and never met any other Sgovios excepting our very close of kin!"

"Yes," I added, "it's hard to believe there are other Sgovios in Odessa. Our name isn't even Italian — it's Spanish. I'd like to meet those other Sgovios."

The case-worker turned red. "I'm sorry . . . you'll just have to wait some more."

We waited six more months . . . and then the approval came.

On a cold January evening in 1960, the eve of our departure for Rome, I visited Minaevskii Cemetery for the last time. I barely found my father's grave. Other deceased had been interred over the remains. I stood a few minutes in silence, then said, "Good-bye Pa. I wish you could have lived to come with us . . . and I won't forget your dying wishes."

The next morning Grace, Ella, and a score of friends accompanied us to the Moscow Airport. During the plane trip, Mother and I sat hands clasped, overwhelmed, unable to believe we were actually flying to Italy. But our cup of joy was only half-full. We could not forget the tear-stained faces of Grace and Ella . . . back there in Moscow.

That same evening we arrived in Rome. After a quarter of a century, Mom and I found ourselves in Freedom . . . at last!

My sister Angela visited us. It was a very memorable reunion — there was so much to talk about. Angela learned of Father's arrest and my arrest several years after they occurred — through friends who had been able to return to the United States. I asked Angela, "Did you ever get a letter from Ann C.?"

She replied, "No . . . who is Ann C.?"

"So, she never wrote you . . . Who is she? . . . Oh, just a communist girl who chose to remain silent . . . Wonder if she ever learned how her father died . . . Wonder if she's still a communist . . . Communists? Are there still communists in the United States . . . ?

Although I received a United States passport in Italy, I waited three years until Grace and Ella were allowed to leave the USSR — through the help of the Italian and American authorities. All my bridges were destroyed! My dreams of returning to Buffalo, walking the west side streets, revisiting the scenes of my childhood, telling the world of Kolyma . . . came true!

And since I have devoted most of these pages to that far, north-east section of the Soviet Union, I believe it is fitting that I end this book with a few more words about *Kolyma.*

A year or two before I left Russia, I went to a cinema theatre after learning a Kolyma documentary was being shown there. I sat in the darkness not more then ten minutes. I became physically sick; my stomach was unable to take it anymore. I was about to scream to the audience . . . "It's all lies — on the screen there . . . the beautiful hills covered with dog-pine! Do you know how many corpses lie buried there? . . . The well-dressed people . . . the Yakuts and their reindeer . . . the heroic deeds of the Communist Party and the Komsomol! Where are the NKVD officials? The convoy guards? The watch-towers? The OLP's? The wolf-hounds? The *dokhodyagas* clawing at barley grains in the frozen urinals?

I ran out of the theatre.

I believe the present Soviet rulers will never admit that which was perpetrated and is still being perpetrated in Kolyma. How can they? They were accomplices and have now inherited the horror. Someday they will

have to answer for their deeds to future Russian generations. And future American generations will also ask us, *"Why is it you knew about Auschwitz and Buchenwald . . . and knew nothing of KOLYMA?*

This book, anastatically reprinted, joins in the project called "*A life's Memories: Thomas Sgovio*", carried out by the founds of the Institutional Communication Department Apulia Regional Council's (Italy).
The partnership (undersigned in Bari and in Buffalo on April 2008) includes: Apulia Regional Council's Presidence (President: Pietro Pepe), the Multimedial Library and Documentation Centre of Apulia Regional Council called "Teca del Mediterraneo" (mainpartner), the IPSAIC, the Honorary Vice-Consulate of Italy in Buffalo (USA), the Buffalo State University College – Department of History and Social Studies Education, Mrs Joanne Sgovio (Thomas Sgovio's widow), the publishing house called Edizioni dal Sud.
This project concerned the Italian translation, with critical essayes, of "*Dear America!*", a documentary exhibition about apulian emigration to USA and about apulian people in sovietic Gulags, the publication of a book-catalogue about the exhibition above with essayes of American, Italian and Russian learned men, this book, anastatical reprinting of the 1979' english edition, (Edizioni dal Sud publishing house), two workshops-event in Bari and in Buffalo.

Questo libro, in ristampa anastatica, si colloca nell'ambito del progetto "*Memorie di una vita: Thomas Sgovio*", realizzato con i fondi della comunicazione istituzionale del Consiglio Regionale della Puglia. Il partenariato di sostegno (sottoscritto in Bari e in Buffalo nell'aprile 2008) ha annoverato: la Presidenza del Consiglio Regionale della Puglia (Presidente: prof. Pietro Pepe), la Biblioteca Multimediale e Centro di Documentazione del CR della Puglia "Teca del Mediterraneo" (capofila), l'Istituto Pugliese per la Storia dell'Antifascismo e dell'Italia Contemporanea, il Vice Consolato Onorario d'Italia in Buffalo (USA), il Buffalo State University College - Department of History and Social Studies Education, la signora Joanne Sgovio (vedova di Thomas), la casa editrice Edizioni dal Sud.
Il progetto ha riguardato la traduzione in lingua italiana di "Dear America!" con apparati critici, l'allestimento di una mostra documentaria sull'emigrazione pugliese in USA e sui pugliesi nei Gulag sovietici, la pubblicazione di un libro-catalogo della mostra con saggi introduttivi di studiosi statunitensi, italiani e russi, la presente ristampa anastatica dell'edizione in lingua inglese del 1979, sempre per i tipi delle Edizioni dal Sud, lo svolgimento di due seminari-eventi in Bari e in Buffalo.