

In the Footsteps of a 15 Year Old

Ostarbeiter
(*Worker from the East*)

In the Footsteps of a 15 year old *Ostarbeiter*
(worker from the east)

Memoirs of a young man, an *ostarbeiter* in Germany from
1942 - 1945, and the story of his wandering
through post-war Europe and Africa

by Mykola (Novomir) Nikiforovich Pidlysny

Translated by Fr. Bohdan Hladko

Copyright Mykola (Novomir) Nikiforovich Pidlysny, 2012

All rights reserved

Forward

These memoirs are an interesting document which illustrate the fate, so to speak, of a normal Ukrainian boy who found himself caught up in the whirlwind of the events of the Second World War. Perhaps it would be more proper to say that in certain situations he truly found himself in the middle of circumstances which were in no way dependent upon him. But at the same time he arranged certain circumstances himself, independently of anyone else. And so these, his adventures, are the best witness to his decisiveness and ability to make the best of a situation which looked hopeless.

Yes, our youth who grew up in the Soviet Union, and in their time experienced the German occupation of Ukraine and life in difficult circumstances in strange lands have much to remember and share. But, sadly, in the vast majority of cases that which they experienced was not written down. Many of the experiences which were recorded are based on the reminiscences of others, not on personal experience.

The memoirs of Mykola Pidlysny are unique in that everything he writes about he experienced himself. Other writers, without question, lived through difficult and dangerous times, but perhaps none of them had gone through the incredible number of trials that Mr. Pidlysny did. No one, perhaps, was cast by fate from one end of Europe to the other during the war and post-war years as much as Mr. Pidlysny. How many of our compatriots in the diaspora spent time, even a short time, in Africa?

The author of these memoirs experienced all his disappointment and danger thanks to several factors: his personal unbreakable will to live, his undoubted ability to extract himself from extraordinarily critical situations, his boldness, and to a great degree, his Christian faith.

Over the course of 4 years of his misery, from 1942 – 1945, it was his lot to experience more adventures and troubles than most people experience throughout their entire life. But he did not despair, didn't surrender, didn't capitulate.

This story is also interesting because the author, from his own experience, introduces the reader to the oppressive circumstances existing in the villages of Ukraine in 1967, when all of Ukraine was under the keen eye of the Communist government.

Yes, the memoirs of Mr. Pidlysny are a clear witness to the fact that a determined, energetic, and focused person can overcome many exceptional difficulties, put in their path by cruel fate. The author relates his life in a concise, laconic style. He doesn't burden the reader with an excessively detailed account of the troubles and failures which he had to deal with.

At the time when many Ukrainians in the diaspora, for understandable reasons, accepted their difficult life passively, the author of these memoirs didn't peacefully accept the conditions in which he found himself. Not letting anything stand in his way, he got out of the most difficult circumstances. Without true friends, without the knowledge of foreign languages, without money, without knowing the culture in various different from one another countries, he was able to overcome uncounted, serious obstacles and dangers.

The difficulties and distress during the war and the post-war period almost seemed to steel him for further actions. He wasn't afraid of any kind of work. This is evident from his successful activity in the Ukrainian community organizations in Canada, where he on many occasions held leadership positions.

In most circumstances he had no reason to believe he would be successful. He had, though, faith and hope that his plan would work out. Sooner or later they always did.

This book introduces the reader to a person who wouldn't for any reason peacefully accept a troubling fate and accept it's blows, and the clear autobiographical character of these memoirs acquaints the reader with the author in the best possible way.

Summing up this account, it can be said that it reflects the state of things in Europe during the war and immediate post-war years, and illustrates the unbreakable will of the narrator.

Following this somewhat prosaic introduction follows a life, a true life, full of adventure, danger, and suffering, balanced on the very razor's edge of life's abyss, when the author is faced time and again with the questions "to be or not to be?", and "will I get out of this situation, or not?".

Everyone understands the events of their own life in their own way. Before us is the story of a young man who didn't want to blindly submit to the circumstances which fate had cast before him.

Mykola Hawrysh

We were born on the 7th of February 1927 in the village of Petrivka, Horodnians'kyj county, Chernihiv province. Why WE - because we are twins. To my knowledge I was christened Novomir, and my brother Radomir. Such names were not common in our area, especially in Petrivka, and perhaps even throughout Ukraine. So at home we were known as Mykola - Kolia, and Volodymyr - Volodya.

Our parents came from the very same village of Petrivka. Yet before the 1st World War my father finished a four-grade institute, which at that time was regarded as high school. My mother was not literate, and worked as a serf. Our parents had six children. Three of them died at a young age, up till seven years of age, they were called Kyra, Barbara and Vasyl'. I don't remember them. The three of us remained, i.e. me, my brother Volodymyr and our older sister by four years Nina.

Our father was in the Czar's army in the first world war and served as a cavalryman, fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Our mother worked somewhere as a servant. After the Revolution father got work in the alcoholic spirit factory of which was in our village, and mother worked on the land, and later on the collective farm.

Our village, according to the Encyclopedic reference "Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia" of 1990 is found 22 kilometres from the county ("rayon") centre of Schors (formerly Snovs'k) and 3 kilometres from the train station at Kamka. In Petrivka there is an architectural monument, the walled church of St. Nicholas (1876).

A small settlement with finds from various periods such as the bronze age (2,000 B.C.), the Late Iron Age (1st - 2nd century A.D.) and Kyivan Rus'(10th century A.D.) was found near Petrivka. According to the "History of the Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic" (Kyiv, 1972) in the chapter "the Chernihiv Province" it is stated that the population of Petrivka encompasses 2,262 persons, 460 residents of Petrivka fought for the Homeland at the front in the Great Patriotic War (WWII), and 247 of these died a heroic death.

And here we face a question - "how many such villages and cities are there in our unfortunate Ukraine?" Not far from our village flows the river Snov. Above the bank of this river our *kolhosp* (collective farm) had a meadow and a hayfield. Workers were dispatched from the *kolhosp* every summer to cut the hay, and later to dry and gather it into haystacks then transport it to the *kolhosp*. My father worked at the *kolhosp* at that time and travelled with the workers to the meadow. I begged my father to take me with him. He did not deny me this request.

These were unforgettable days in the bosom of nature, where it was possible to swim, catch fish and sleep in the haystacks. It's necessary at this point to mention that

there was a large pond in our village, made yet during the time of the Czar's governor Yablonsky, who also built the Church. The village had an incomplete middle-school where I finished grade 6. Towards the end of the 30's several of the teachers were arrested and later the pictures of several Soviet leaders were cut out of the textbooks as "enemies of the people". And we were forced to parade with placards praising the Soviet leaders, etc. Thus began 1941. I finished 6th grade with honours in this year and impatiently awaited graduation from our village school and going on to the county high school which was in Horodnia, 12 kilometres from the village. My parents were ready to dispose of their most valuable commodity, i.e., to sell their cow so that I could further my education. But things did not work out as we thought they would.

On the 22nd of June the news was broadcast on the radio (for those in the village who had radios) that the war with Germany had begun. This news spread like lightning throughout the village. The people were disconcerted. What next? Parents were worried that their children would be conscripted into the army, whether this new occupier would be more humane, or that it would not be a repeat of 1930. For us, the youth, there was no fear, for in school they taught us that the enemy would be defeated on his own territory. We continued to go with the boys to catch fish on the Snov River.

One day I came home and my mother was crying. I asked her what happened? She said that they took my father and many other men, among them the brother of my father, Peter Pidlysny and my cousin on my mother's side Mykola Derkach. We immediately decided to go to Schors to bid them farewell. We travelled the 22 kilometres. Not far from the town in the forest they were being prepared for departure. We made our farewells and with tears in our eyes returned home.

This was the last time I saw my father, uncle Peter and cousin Mykola. Only in 1968, during my visit to Ukraine, I saw their names on the cenotaph near the club in Petrivka.

Rumours were circulating that the Germans were quickly moving east. Our leaders quickly began to move our cattle east, and dismantle the distillery for transportation into deep Russia or somewhere else. The front was coming nearer and nearer. Near our orchards we dug trenches where we hid at night from the unknown. All roads were full of military vehicles and the retreating army. Many soldiers went from house to house begging for civilian clothes to change into.

One night we heard a motorcycle drive into our yard, stop, wait, then turn and depart. Then next day there were many Germans. Some sat on benches and wrote letters, surely to their homes. Certain of them chose people to clean potatoes or wash their clothes. The Germans stayed in the village several days then moved on towards the east, leaving several Gestapo agents to organize the village administration. Following the

organization of the village administration, the county administration, obviously under the command of the German governors, formed departments of Ukrainian police, in order to have foreign hands do their dirty work. Many of these so-called police volunteered for this work so as not to be exiled to Germany. Others were simply forced to do so. For example, in our village a young man, Vasyl' Bilous, returned from the army. It was suggested to him that he volunteer for the police force. He declined. They beat him so badly that he almost died. Shortly after this they began to send people to Germany and he was on the first transport. An order came from the county administration to the villages saying how many people from each village it was necessary to send to Germany. The village elder then appointed who would be sent. The turn came for our family, as we had two 15 year old boys, i.e., me and my brother Volodymyr, and our older sister Nina.

My brother Radomir/Volodymyr found himself on the list. Volodymyr had been infirm for a long time and so the village council, in order not to take my sister, chose me to go. My mother said "go, son, out into the garden and look around, because it may be that you'll not have another chance to see it". I comforted my mother, saying that I'd escape somewhere along the road and we'd see each other again.

Our village was already in great distress and grief, because this was already the second round of forced deportations to Germany from our village. We were transported on carts with an escort of local police. Our mothers accompanied us in order to bid us farewell again on our long and unknown journey. In the evening we slept in the local jail in Horodnia, and the next day were herded to the station where boxcars were already waiting for us. In the village we were informed that after one year we would return home. We wanted to believe this. But seeing the grates on the windows of the boxcars and the military guard our illusions were dispelled.

We were transported through Belarus', Poland, and then to Germany. Along the way we saw Soviet prisoners of war working on the railroads, extending their hands to us. It was very sad to look at them in their misfortune, and this did not bode well for us as well. Our train stopped in several cities. The stronger boys and girls were chosen and the rest were transported into the heart of Germany. When we arrived in Frankfurt-on-Main ten of us youngsters were left. The oldest was about 17 years of age, and the youngest from our village was 14. His name was Ivan Iosipovich Krawchenko. He was an orphan. Most of the boys were from our village, and the rest from neighbouring villages.

We were housed in a wooden two-story building in the yard of the forestry compound. The beds were two-story bunk-beds, with straw mattresses and some type of covering. At night we were locked in, and in the morning woken up for work. The mattresses were filled with bed-bugs which literally did not permit us to sleep at night, biting us and drawing blood. We were fed as follows: Once a week we were given a loaf of black bread, and it was necessary to divide it into seven portions so that it would last for

seven days. But it didn't work this way, for hunger did its work and already by the third or fourth day we had consumed it and from then on ate only gruel made from turnips.

Not far from where we were working was a large armament factory where hundreds of our compatriots worked. The gruel was brought from there. We worked 6 days a week. I found myself working for a carpenter who made boxes for packing some type of military objects. The work was very tiring, I was always half-starved, and cold in the winter. For six months we were imprisoned, not permitted to go anywhere. After this once a week we were released under guard for a one-hour walk, and in time were permitted to go out on our own.

My "master" invited me to his home on Sundays for light work in his field. For me this was something extraordinary, in that if only once a week I was able to eat normal food. There were times in the summer when we were transported to landowners in order to collect the harvest. And so, after my six month stay at this station I corresponded with my family and received one address to a girl from my village, Uliana Tsaryk, who I visited the following year.

And so one year of our existence passed at this forced labour. We began to remind our "employer" of our one-year term of employment. The response was negative. We then decided not to report for work, feigning illness. The administration called a doctor and the Gestapo, who chased us to work with their billy-clubs. From that moment I thought about fleeing home to my native village and mother, brother and sister. It was necessary to have money for the train which I didn't have, for we were paid one mark per week, with which it was possible to buy perhaps one bottle of soda.

I planned to visit Uliana Tsaryk whom I mentioned earlier. She worked in the city of Korbach, perhaps 100 km. from Frankfurt. I went to the station, found out when the train from Frankfurt to Korbach departed and arrived. One Sunday very early I went to the station by streetcar, and bought a ticket without any trouble because it was less than 100 km. away, so it wasn't necessary to present any documents. Somewhere about halfway there the Gestapo got onto the train to check people's documents. I froze. I couldn't leave the railway car, and decided it was in God's hands. To my good fortune I was sitting between elderly passengers. The Gestapo checked their documents but didn't pay any attention to me - maybe thinking that I was their son, for I looked very small and young, and was wearing a "Hitler-youth" cap.

Having arrived at Korbach I sought out the camp for the "Ostarbeiter" and in it I found Uliana and other girls from Petrivka. The meeting was joyful to the point of tears. I told them of my plans to escape back to my home. I lamented that I didn't have enough money for the journey. Uliana and her friends gathered around 100 marks from among themselves. This was something extraordinary to me, enough to purchase tickets and

maybe something to eat at the stations. Thanking them and parting was a tearful experience. I came back to the station, bought a ticket and without any problem travelled to Frankfurt, only this time I didn't sit in the passenger car but stood in the corridor and watched out for the Gestapo.

My "buddies in bad times" were glad to see me alive and well. I told them about my adventures and meeting with those from my home village. I asked if any of them was bold enough to flee on a long and unknown journey. No one agreed, everyone was afraid.

The next day I went to work as usual. I told my "master" where I had been the previous day. He couldn't believe it. How could I, without money, make such a long journey in one day? I don't know if he told the authorities about my bold deed. No one brought it to my attention and I wasn't called in for interrogation. This meant he didn't tell anyone.

I began to prepare for a long, difficult trip. I prepared a small bag with various things and a couple of pieces of bread. I acquired a map of Germany upon which I marked my route to the Polish border, and there I would be in God's hands. I chose a route with more or less 100 km. between stations, with the intention of bypassing Berlin, because I figured that in Berlin, the capital, there would be a lot of Gestapo and this would be an unnecessary risk.

The distance between Frankfurt on Maine and the Polish border is great. At last, after a two-day, tiring journey I passed Berlin and arrived at the other Frankfurt, i.e., Frankfurt am Oder. Fast trains travelled from Berlin to Warsaw. I decided to take such a train. In the evening I caught a train. It was full of military personnel. In Frankfurt there was, and I believe still is, a large station. Many people were there. I was inconspicuous among them. I looked at the passengers who boarded and left this train. And so, just before it left, I got on inconspicuously.

The distance between Frankfurt and the Polish border was around 200 km. After a short time the train stopped. I thought I was already in Poland. I looked out the window and saw a sign in German - Schweibus. As I later learned, this was a small border town about 10 km. from the Polish town of Zbojczyn. In a short time Gestapo entered the train. I exited and hid in the rest-room. After several minutes there was knocking at the door, and calls to open it. I had no way out. The window in the rest-room was too small for me to crawl out of. And so from the train I was taken straight to the jail in Schweibus. I was detained for interrogation for a couple of days. This was in the summer of 1943. At night I heard unbelievable cries from those who were tortured and interrogated. I was afraid and decided to tell the truth, that we were brought to Germany last year and promised that after a year we would be returned to our homes, but this didn't happen, and so I decided to return myself. Perhaps because of this they didn't beat me.

Not far from the town of Schweibus was a punishment camp, in German “Shtraf lager”, named Brats. Today this territory belongs to Poland. Most of the prisoners were from Eastern Europe, with the majority from Ukraine. The camp was set up in a field and had a small workshop. It was surrounded by a high fence of barbed wire. Outside the camp were military barracks for guards, Germans and Poles (the Polish guards were not armed) who guarded us both inside and outside the camp. The Poles wore brown uniforms and abused the prisoners a lot.

At the corners over the wire were tall towers upon which sat the guards with their machine guns. No Polish guards were on the towers. The first four weeks we were not taken to work. We were simply subject to abuse. We were lined up outside, and if we did not stand up straight were beaten with a cane, from the front or from the back. Then the command to lie in the mud, and then to stand, over and over again. The older prisoners were beaten most often, because they couldn't get up so quickly. The Polish militia took care of this business. At lunch time there was usually a whistle, in the barracks were about 40 men. There were four such barracks in which the prisoners had not yet been taken for work. After the whistle we had to run to the kitchen for gruel. It wasn't permitted to walk in the camp, we had to always run with our head turned sideways towards the towers. Two policemen presided at this ceremony, standing outside near the doors and beating with a cane whoever they could wherever they could so that they would run more quickly for the gruel and give the plate to someone else.

The regime in the camp was as follows: the first four barracks were for new prisoners. Every novice went through these barracks from the first to the fourth in the course of seven days, and after this month of abuse the prisoners were then taken to other barracks from which they were then taken to work. In these barracks there was no physical abuse.

In the autumn groups were taken to dig sugar beets, and we ate them and took them to the barracks. When it got colder they took us to Schweibus to dig some trenches and carry cement. There were strong frosts and winds in addition to this, so the cold and hunger took their toll. But there was a way to deal with the cold. We cut holes in the cement bags for our hands and head and wrapped our wooden shoes and in this manner saved ourselves from the cold. The wooden shoes were made from canvas with a wooden sole.

Working in Schweibus we found that the boss for the project was an engineer from Kyiv who lived somewhere with his young son. I'll mention him later in these memoirs. After I'd been in the camp a long while a “bauer” (farmer) somehow came to the camp from a nearby village. He needed a farmhand to help on his farm. The commandant of the camp, I don't know his name, he limped, called a young man, I think from

Dnipro Petrovsk, who was about 17. Since he understood very little German I was somehow called to translate. They asked him if he knew how to drive horses, hitch and unhitch them, etc. He said he didn't. When asked if he would like to work on a farm he replied that he would like to return to the same factory from which he had escaped. They then asked me if I would like to work on the farm. My response - YES. The village was named Stench, perhaps 3 km. from the Polish border. A railroad line went through, and there was a train station there. Up to ten of our "ostarbeitors" worked in this village who were also lived in the penal camp. My farmer or his wife was called Anna Maruszka, the last name Slavic sounding. A Polish man named Zenon from the Poznan region also worked for them. The farmer, as it turns out, was no better than the Gestapo, and constantly threatened to send us back to the camp. But I didn't want to return to the camp.

I began to think about escaping. The question was where and when.

SPRING 1944.

The front from the east was approaching the border of the Reich. I feared escaping to the east because if I fell into the hands of the Gestapo again they would show no mercy. Sometime in the spring after the assassination attempt on Hitler it wasn't wise, because the Gestapo was going wild all over Germany. In June the Allies landed in Normandy. And so from that time I began to prepare my escape to the west with the hope of getting to France. I bought a ticket on a train first to Frankfurt-on-Oder and then to Berlin. My journey to Berlin was without incident. In Berlin I hoped to find my friend Vasyl' Bilous from my village who I mentioned earlier. I had corresponded with him when I was living on the farm. He lived in a camp for ostarbeitors. Their camp was located in the area of Waisensee. Having found the camp I was told that the Germans had shot him for being associated with some kind of underground organization. It was necessary to depart quickly from their so as not to be caught by the Gestapo. Having gotten to the centre of Berlin I went to get a haircut so as not to look suspicious. I was very tired from the long journey and so as soon as I sat down to wait my turn I fell asleep. The barber woke me up when no one else was left. Having gotten my haircut I went to the Aleksander square, perhaps the biggest square in Berlin. I asked where the railroad station was to get to Kassel. I quickly realized that someone was following me. I thought I should get rid of him. Luckily there was an underground toilet not far away, as is usual in big cities. Not hurrying, I entered it, and then quickly went to the other entrance and quickly exited. Thus I got rid of this character who probably was waiting for me to exit the toilet. At last I made it to the station, to the platform from which the train was to leave for Kassel. A mass of people was on the platform, especially soldiers. The train was packed with people, and I was squeezed in among them. And so I was again on a train, but this time from Berlin to Kassel. Now as earlier I had to stand in a packed corridor and watch out for the examination of documents. As I said, the train was packed with people, mainly

soldiers, and so the trip to Cassel took place without any adventures.

This long and tiring voyage led me to sit and drowse on the train from Kassel to Marburg where I was drowsily arrested and put in the Marburg jail. After several days of interrogations I was transferred to a different prison in Korbach. This is the town in which I visited the girls from my village in 1943. Sadly, I was now unable to communicate with them. I met someone from my home village in this prison together with whom we departed to Germany by the name of Mykola Haidomaka. He and another with him were imprisoned having been caught with apples in a farmer's orchard, but we were not kept there long. From there we were taken to work digging trenches in a small forest. In this prison were mostly "ostarbeitors" who had been arrested for various offenses, as well as prisoners of war who had been captured during the retreat. There were also two persons who had been able to escape from the Buchenwald concentration camp. Hunger forced them to beg something to eat from a farmer, so they were captured and sent to the prison at Korbach and in a short time were taken somewhere. In this prison inmates were not beaten, but rather tortured by hunger. At six o'clock we were awakened for breakfast. At breakfast we were given broth which we were told was made of ground-up bones, and a piece of bread to take with us to work. In the evening we had soup with turnips and something else. We went to bed hungry and woke up hungry. At night I was reminded of a worse hunger in 1932-33, when people died from hunger and I went with my brother in 1933, being six years old, to the field to gather clover flowers and sorrel. Thanks to aunt Evdokia and her husband Nikon who worked at the liquor factory and there received a bread ration, porridge and other things we were able to live through the famine. And so I comforted myself laying on the straw mattress, that as I had lived through one horrible famine in Ukraine, I would, with God's help, live through this one as well.

The end of October was approaching, as was the end of the war. On the one hand the prisoners rejoiced that we would soon see the end of our suffering. On the other hand it was awful to think what might happen to us. From our group which worked in the forest two decided to escape. Not having thought things out sufficiently they left our group and hid farther away in this forest. When the guards noticed that two were missing they called the army. They surrounded the forest and caught them.

The soldiers brought them to the place of work and told the prisoners themselves to beat them, choosing the strongest of them and giving them rods. It was sad and painful to watch this spectacle. They were immediately taken away and led somewhere. After this terrible event I sought out a partner to try my luck with, because until that time I had been alone. I found him in Anatoli from the Kursk oblast.

I don't remember Anatoli's last name. He was older than me and had already served in the army and been captured. After our work at the end of October in 1944 we fled from our group, took off our wooden bonds and ran into the forest, and for everything we were

worth had to get into the other, thicker forest across the field.

This was a desperate escape knowing what might happen to us if we made the same mistake as those who tried to escape before us. We went through fields, forests, passing by villages and hamlets. We slept on the outskirts of villages in farmer's barns. We ate what we could steal, for it was impossible to ask the Germans for a piece of bread, as we would be given over to the Gestapo as were our two fellow-prisoners who had fled from the concentration camp and fell into the hands of the police when they asked a farmer for something to eat. As was known in Germany, many of our countrymen worked on the farms. Some of them lived on the farms in barracks containing 10 – 15 people.

And so we spent about a week in one of these barracks, gathering strength. The boys went to work early and we remained alone. Only right before they left they would place us on one of the top bunks and cover us entirely with a duvet, for every morning one of the farmers would come and check the beds to make sure that everyone had gone out to work. After this we were left alone. They left us food so we didn't starve.

One time before we were in the barracks we were, as usual, hungry and we had to search for sustenance somewhere and find a barn where we might spend the night. On the edge of a large village there was a two story building. Under this building there was a cellar or storage area as was usual in Western Europe. I crawled in and my traveling companion stood guard. It was late at night, dark all around. I took several jars of meat and bread and passed them out to Anatoli by hand. I wasn't yet able to crawl through the window when a light shone and a woman's voice cried out. I wasn't able to get out and there was no trace of my companion. There was a river before me and I had to go right or left. I turned left and not far away saw a barn which I needed to spend the night in. I went in, felt a ladder, and climbed up where it was full of hay. At last I found something. I always had a small bag with me which contained a family photograph. Me, my mother, my aunt Eudokia with her daughter Pasha. This bag was left somewhere near that building. I thought that my companion had it with him

I left the barn and in the yard searched for Anatoli thinking that my bag would be with him, and that he would have something to eat as well. I had only just begun to go away from the barn when in the darkness a human form appeared. I froze. It turns out that this was Anatoli who had also been searching for some place to pass the day. We were exceptionally glad with this surprise. I then asked him where my bag was, and he said that he left it near the building and threw away our haul while fleeing. There was no way out for me – I had to get the bag and the photograph at any cost. I returned half-way along the road to the building. Anatoli was afraid to go farther. I crawled up to the building on all fours. The lights were already extinguished. To my surprise my bag was by the window. Rejoicing, I took it and crawled back. Along the road I came upon two jars with meat. We crawled into the hay in the barn, ate, and drifted off into a deep sleep

We were awakened early by a farmer who was pitching hay for the cattle with a pitchfork, and we, in the very corner of the barn, covered with hay, were afraid for our very lives. We returned to the barracks. After this it was necessary for us to go farther. My companion said he couldn't go any farther as he had wounds on his feet and he remained in the care of our compatriots. I didn't worry too much about him following our last adventure, and thought him to be a coward.

I was again left alone with the dream of getting to Frankfurt where I once worked and thinking that maybe one of the boys who might still be there would have the boldness to leave with me on a long and unknown journey. It wasn't like in 1943, when everyone was afraid. After a three day journey, if it could be called that, I was again in Frankfurt on Main, among people from my own village. There was no end to the wonderment. We sat up almost till dawn, and I told them about my experiences and listened to their woes. I suggested that perhaps some one of them would like to go with me on a long journey. One of them by the name of Mykola, I don't remember his last name nor his native village, agreed.

I had a great desire to visit my former master who was named Peter Gis, who lived in a village near the town of Keninsberg. It was Sunday, a cold December day in 1944, when I left to go there. Here I want to emphasize that my master belonged to the Nazi party. Arriving at his house he saw me and couldn't say a word – he only said "Radomir", as I was then called. He asked me where I had come from, etc. I told him everything I could. Then he said "what will happen if I hand you over to the police?" I said "that's your business". I wasn't afraid of jail or the camps following my year-long adventure. He then told me to leave and not tell anyone anything about visiting him. And so we parted and late on Sunday I left to see my compatriots in Frankfurt where they were already waiting for me, among them Mykola who had agreed to travel with me.

It wasn't the same as in 1943. We decided that it would be closer for us to go to Switzerland. It was December, 1944, at the station at Horb, not more than 100 km. from the Switzerland border town of Singen (?). At the embarkation point Mykola was stopped as a suspicious person, since he couldn't respond to the question asked of him in the German language. I watched him with sadness but inconspicuously. To this day I don't know anything about his fate. I feel responsible for his fate. I only know his name, and don't even know his last name or his native village.

Again I was left alone. In the mountains there was snow, flurries, cold, and on every side the sleepless Gestapo searching for their victims, but in order to live it was necessary to suffer and experience all these trials. I had decided to travel the distance to Switzerland by train. Having had a bitter previous experience on the trains I didn't sit in a coupe, I just stood in the corridor between the cars because it was impossible to tell from which end of

the train the Gestapo might enter and carefully check out the passengers. At one stop as I had suspected the Gestapo entered. I went to the end of the train hoping that there would be somewhere to slip by them.

The Gestapo came closer and closer. There was no choice for me but to leave the car and jump from the train. To my good fortune in bad fortune the snow was deep and I was uninjured. The road to Singen is along the “Baden-see” lake and I continued on foot.

Here it's necessary to note that “ostarbeiter” worked at most rail-stations. They slept predominantly in rail-cars and ate at the canteens. This was my salvation. They offered lodging, brought me something to eat, even clothes. At many stations I benefited from their understanding and good-heartedness. From them I learned that from the side of Singen it would be very difficult to cross the border, there was great security. On the day before I decided to go to the town of Radolfzell, a distance of about 10 km.

This town was also situated on the Baden-see. As usual I found compatriots here who worked at various jobs and lived in barracks. I told them who I was and where I was going. They just shrugged their shoulders, because the war was coming to an end and no one wanted to take risks. It was a sunny, frosty day, the day before the new year of 1945. When everyone went to work I went down to the shore of the lake. Walking along the lake I saw a building with boats, and I got the idea to take a boat and cross to the other side, to Switzerland. The shore of Switzerland was visible from this town. I broke a window and crawled in, prepared a canoe and oars, opened the door so that I'd be able to pull out the boat at night, with the thought that I would celebrate the new year in Switzerland.

And again things didn't work out as planned. I came at night, pulled out that which I had prepared, put it in the water, and hadn't gotten far from the shore when I noticed that the boat was leaking water. Quickly to the shore, and when I was not far from the shore my boat took on more water. I decided to leave it and make it to shore on my own. I ran to the barracks, woke up the boys and told them what happened. They gave me a change of clothes, and told me not to remain there. For in the morning the boat would be discovered and naturally the authorities would search there for the guilty party.

During the night I went on foot along the road to Freidrichshafen, a distance of about 10 km. Freight was shipped by train from this town to the town of Lindau at the other end of the Baden-see. A couple of small, old ships were on the lake. They surely transported tourists during the good times, and now were home to our compatriots.

Here I found lodging for several days. Our hospitable people, even though themselves in want, still helped others. They also advised me not to try to cross the border here, or to cross the lake. For my part I decided to try my luck at getting into Switzerland through Italy. After a couple of days I made it to Austria, to the town of Innsbruck.

JANUARY 1945 – AUSTRIA

The town of Innsbruck is found approximately 30 km. from Italy. The train station was right next to the tunnel in which I had the chance to hide from the wind and the cold. Coming to the station I saw that there on the platform passengers waited, primarily military and civilian Italians. Coming up to one Italian, I found out that he was going home, and that he had been a prisoner of the Nazis, that he had been a soldier in the army of Badoglio, and that because of illness the Germans had permitted him to return home.

I also told him that I too wanted to get to Italy, but didn't have papers. He told me his name was Antonio, that he lived in the village of Castelfranco near the town of Treviso. He also invited me to come to his home if I made it into Italy. Their train arrived and we parted. I waited for a freight train which would be travelling to Italy. I didn't have to wait long. I got even bolder in my desire to go to Italy, find Antonio and maybe even stay with him till the end of the war.

One of the freight trains transporting coal to Italy pulled into the station. At the station I didn't see even one living soul. And so I got to the train without problem. MILANO was written on all the cars, and that meant "to Italy". There were cabins on many of the cars, and I entered one. In a short time the train began moving. The cold was unbearable. In my clothing I had to shiver and beat my hands and dance around so as not to freeze. Finally the train stopped at the border station in Italy at dawn on January 10th, 1945. I stood in the cabin and looked all around to see what was going on in the white world of the hills of Italy.

JANUARY 10th 1945 – ITALY

Here I again had an adventure, as in all the towns and villages of my odyssey. I was sitting alone in a cold cabin, keeping myself warm as I could, and watching out on either side to listen if another train might not be going in my direction. Suddenly I hear that someone is coming along the snow-covered platform, with snow crunching under their feet. I thought "let them go" and stopped dancing in place so as not to betray my hiding place. He went, went, and then stopped directly opposite my cabin. I froze – what if he wants to enter my cabin for some reason?

There were more such cabins on this train. It happened, however, that this person stood opposite my cabin, stood on the step and opened the door. When he saw me he almost fell over from the surprise and I, in terror, looked at him. He was in uniform with a carbine and a ruck-sack on his shoulder. This soldier asked me in German "My dear boy, where are you going"? I answered simply "to Germany". He again said "close the door

and watch out”, and went somewhere. After a short pause I left that cabin and crawled onto a different train, fearing that the soldier might inform on me somewhere. No one came. I thought that he might be a deserter who was fed up with the war, and that he might have thought that I was a deserter, too.

At last the train moved and I with it. Since public transportation was almost nonexistent people used freight trains or trucks whenever they could. And so at one station a young passenger, aged 19, entered my cabin. He spoke a bit of German. He told me that he lived not far away in the town of Rovereto. I told him about myself, and said that I want to get to Treviso, to the farmer I had met in Austria. This passenger proposed that I travel together with him to his village, a distance of 10 – 15 km. from Rovereto. This was like salvation for me, to have somewhere warm to sleep and something to eat. It was already late in the evening. Along the road on the bridges stood German patrols, but no one stopped us. My travelling companion brought me to one of his relatives in a mountain village. As I mentioned, it was late on a dark night. Having knocked on the door, the proprietor opened it. A fire was burning. In the light I noted that the proprietor had a large family. I don’t know what they were talking about.

We left the house, and he told me that there wasn’t room there to sleep, he gave me his hand and said goodbye, then left. I was left alone. Where could I go now, late on a cold night, in the mountains, in a snow-covered village, in a foreign country, not knowing the language? It was enough to make you cry. Not far away I saw that in a small house a light was flickering. I decided to go the house and ask if they would let me spend the night anywhere, just not outside. I slowly ascended the hill on the snow covered road. I suddenly heard a human voice in the dark, frosty night. I stopped and listened. I heard that again someone was shouting “Nikolai, Nikolai”. I stood still as a post, and wondered if this wasn’t a hallucination – who could know me in these mountains? I carefully hid behind a rock and didn’t reply. This person ran up to my hiding place and now I recognized that it was the young man who brought me here. He began to hug me and ask forgiveness for what had happened, and led me to his house. His family still wasn’t sleeping, or perhaps he had woken them up and told them what had happened. His father yelled at him, and said if he brought someone he should bring them home and not take them to strangers. He told him to let me stay there. Here we need to emphasize that the Germans severely punished those who hid people, for there were many partisans in the mountains. For the first time in my life I slept for two days in a proper bed covered with a duvet. And for the first time I had wine with my meals. In Italy they even give the children wine.

After a couple of days I was again in the town of Rovereto, with hope of getting to the city of Treviso and later to the village of Castelfranco, to Antonio whom I had met in Innsbruck (Austria). The road to Treviso was long and tiring. At last, after many adventures which almost cost me my life due to the American soldiers who would shoot at

moving vehicles on the roads and likewise bombarded the towns like, for example, the town of Verona where a bomb fell at the very entrance of a bunker filled with people in which I had taken shelter. The city of Treviso was along the road to Trieste on the border with Yugoslavia. The distance was maybe 150 km. At last I was in Treviso. Here I have to emphasize that the Italians were good-hearted and never refused me food or a place to sleep. Having asked people how to get to the village, I got there and asked about Antonio and his address. He was very astonished at such a surprise and even frightened at my presence there with him. He gave me something to eat and said that I should leave him as soon as possible because the police would be coming soon and would arrest both of us. And so my hope to spend the winter somewhere in a warm place went up in smoke. How much time and effort I spent in trying to get to this place! Again, enough to make you cry. In order not to bring trouble either to Antonio or myself I immediately left his house and began my return to Treviso. There was no one to consult with. I had to decide for myself. Insofar as I had left Switzerland far behind me, I decided to get to Yugoslavia, and then see what God had in store for me.

And so I stand again on the same road from Treviso to Udine, about half-way to Trieste. Trucks with military personnel and civilians were stopping here. I took my place in one of these vehicles with military personnel. Suddenly one of two military policemen entered. There was no place to flee, what would be would be. They checked documents. As usual I didn't have any documents. And so they took me to the headquarters where I explained to them about my presence in Italy, a story which I had composed in advance.

Apparently, during the bombardment of a transport in Germany I went off and came upon a Cossack formation which was going to Italy and at that time said that I was 15 even though I was already 17 years old. It appeared that they believed me because they didn't put me in a cell. They sent me to the barracks to work in the kitchen, and promised to find my family. Sometime after a week had passed they said they would send me to Padua which was on the way to Germany. Apparently they had better contacts with Germany there.

Already in February the war was coming to a close. The allies had already liberated half of Italy. Along the roads the Americans were destroying everything, shooting at everything which moved along the roads. And as usual this didn't happen without casualties. The Germans returned their fallen soldiers to Germany on closed trucks. I was put in one of these trucks between the coffins. I arrived in Padua in the courtyard of the prison. There the German soldiers unloaded the coffins onto other vehicles. Cars travelled the roads only at night and without lights so as not to be seen by the fighter planes. Thus was I transported at night with the corpses. Opening the gate of the vehicle I showed myself. To their great wonder or even fear we came out of the back of the truck lamenting to the driver and his partner.

The driver then informed them about their living passengers, and so they had to take me to headquarters. And then they became peaceful. And in this headquarters I cleaned the boots of the Germans and helped in the kitchen. They told me that they couldn't seek my family in Germany and that I would soon be sent to Germany and could search for my family myself. I thought again about what I should do. They could learn about me through torture, and then I'd be in the Dachau concentration camp which I didn't want to go to at all.

In this town of Verona I wasn't kept under lock and key and in my free time I went out for a walk around town. One day at the market I came upon a group of soldiers who were speaking Russian. I began a conversation with them. They apparently came here on leave and were getting ready to return to their formation which was located near the Swiss border. This gave me the very strong urge to get there and then try to get across the border to Switzerland. I told them I had nowhere to stay, and asked if they would be able to take me with them. They readily agreed. That same evening I departed from Verona. I don't remember to which of the armies they belonged, whether to the ROA (Russian Liberation Army) headed by General Vlasov or perhaps to the free Kuban or Don Cossacks. Their formation was deployed near the town of Chatillon in some kind of castle. They set me up in a stable. This military formation was responsible for protecting bridges and military objectives.

I stayed here less than a week and asked people about the road to Switzerland, though they discouraged me from going. Again I was travelling an unknown and dangerous road. The road was winding, mountainous, and snow covered. I covered about 6 km. by evening. It began to get dark when I saw a small house. I went up to the house, knocked on the door, and a frightened man opened the door, asking who I was and what I was doing there. I explained to him how I got there, and he invited me into the house. They gave me a bit to eat and after a short time put me in the barn on straw together with the goat. When I woke in the morning the weather was beautiful, they gave me some broth and a piece of bread to eat, the man took me outside, pointed out the direction I should follow, and returned to the house. I traveled for several hours through the snow, with neither path nor footprints to follow, only snow-covered mountains.

I travelled over these mountains almost the whole day and yet saw no sign of Switzerland. Clouds started to gather, and it became dark. I made snowballs and tossed them ahead of me so as not to fall off a cliff. The snowballs made a small, black hole in the white snow, and so I knew that there was no drop-off. The worst part was that the snow was knee deep with a hard layer underneath, but this hard layer sometimes broke and many times I found myself in waist-deep snow, and had to crawl out, which was difficult. In order not to fall asleep I pinched myself, so as not to fall asleep forevermore. Here I remember that I prayed to God, because I still remembered the "Our Father" from home, and continued my journey. The clouds began to gather and I noticed some type of building

in front of me. I thought that I had finally made it to Switzerland. At all costs I had to make it to the building, otherwise I would have died in the snow.

It was like I got more strength to cover the distance. It was dark as I came up to the building. I walked around it. All the doors were locked. There was no light inside and no sign of human life. If I had a roof over my head tonight I would be able to see tomorrow. I broke a pane of glass in a window and jumped inside. I looked around and everything was clean and in order, with a bunch of wood on the pile. So I thought to start a fire, get warm, and dry out my clothes. I immediately heard a rustling sound and saw something slowly coming up the stairs. I took a big piece of wood in my hands and waited. I figured that if it was a soldier I'd get it, but if a civilian I wouldn't. I had no desire at all to fall into the hands of the enemy, especially being so close to the freedom I dreamt of. I looked, and saw an older man dressed in civilian clothes coming up. He saw me and stopped for a minute in disbelief, unexpectedly meeting a person like me in the middle of the night. Coming to himself, he asked me who I was and what I was doing there. After this unexpected introduction he took me down to the basement, where there was an older woman, perhaps his mother. I undressed, hung up my clothes to dry and sat down near an electric heater. The woman prepared a bowl of soup and sandwich for me.

Apparently this had been a hotel for tourists during the good years before the war. Tourists came up by the lift and then skied down, traversing the snow. The great and wonderful mountain known throughout Europe, the Matterhorn, was located perhaps 500 metres from the hotel. It's the 2nd highest peak in Europe, after Mount Blanc. In the hotel there was a map of clay. It showed all the neighbouring paths, the Matterhorn, and the border crossings from both the Italian and the Swiss sides. On a sunny day both the border crossings were easily visible. The next day, being strengthened by breakfast, I put on dry clothes and got ready to go farther along this road which I knew almost like the palm of my hand. My hosts told me not to go today, because the snow-storm hadn't stopped outside. Something inside whispered to me "Go, go, don't pay attention to them at all". In addition, the man had called someone on the telephone the previous evening. This made me even more anxious.

They gave me a ski-pole and an apple for the road and pointed the way I needed to go to get to the Swiss border station. I wasn't even able to leave the hotel before being surrounded and engulfed by the snow storm. I went, not being able to see God's creation. From time to time it became clear and I could orient myself as to my location. Then I suddenly saw that someone was coming down the mountain straight at me. There was nowhere to hide, just snow all around. He certainly noticed me from far off. I waited to see what would happen and who he was. He stopped about 10 feet away from me. He was dressed in white camouflage and had a carbine strapped across his back. He asked in Italian where I was going, and I replied "to Switzerland". He then asked if I was afraid and I said no. Then he indicated with his hand that I should follow his tracks and I'd get to the

Swiss border station. I was overjoyed that he wasn't Italian or German. Again the snow-storm raged and a strong wind began to blow. It began to get dark, the tracks of the border guard were being erased and I just climbed and climbed, but the Swiss border station was nowhere to be seen. I understood that I had strayed from the path.

Wind was blowing all around – nothing was visible and I couldn't orient myself as to where I was. I thought to myself that perhaps I was to freeze here in a foreign country so close to freedom after such a long and thorny path. I began to climb up a crooked mountain with the help of the ski-pole which the man in the hotel had given me. It was like my dearest friend in helping me get through the snow and the mountains like the biblical Moses with his staff through the sand. At last I reached the summit.

Here I saw some kind of building. There was no sign of life. I thought "God is not without mercy, and a kozak is not without luck". The wind was so strong I had to crawl on all fours to proceed. The building wasn't large, and had two floors. The first floor was full of snow from the broken windows. There was no snow on the second floor. There was a metal cot, bedding, a chair and a wood-stove. I settled here. I cleaned the stove, broke up the chair, and lit a fire. I found some corn meal, a bowl, melted some snow in it, washed it and began to prepare the corn meal. I had just begun to prepare the bed for sleep when I heard what sounded like a human voice. At first I thought I was imagining it. When I listened again I heard a voice saying "Hello" louder and louder. I thought "who can this be in such terrible weather". I decided to check it out, and what would be would be. I put on my shoes and went out. I saw two guards in white camouflage with carbines on their backs.

They were getting ready to leave when I got the nerve to appear. They came quickly over and frisked me to see if I had a weapon. They spoke to me in German. I then realized that they were Swiss. They said that they were searching for me. As I later learned, when their compatriot who had met me and shown me the way to the border crossing returned but I didn't show up they decided to search for me. They then told me to get dressed and put out the fire in the stove. And then we were on the road to the long-awaited Switzerland. It was necessary at first to descend, then to ascend. One descended before me and I was in the middle, with the other naturally behind me. It was not in my power to do this, with every step I got stuck in the snow. Then one of the guards gave his carbine to the other and took me on his back and deposited me on the Swiss side of the border.

Here I was in dreamed for Switzerland in March of 1945.

After a short rest a man came to me and began to ask how I had gotten here. I began to tell him. Then a Swiss man called me aside and told me not to talk to the first man, as he was German guard who had stayed at the hotel with a woman and the shepherd

during the snow storm. And so the conversation ended. The next day was beautiful and sunny, and the two border guards and I were getting ready to go into the heart of Switzerland, to the famous tourist resort of Zermat. Here my heartfelt premonition about not remaining in the hotel, when something told me not to stay there and wait for good weather and continue my journey even in bad weather, was confirmed. As I mentioned, on the 2nd day the weather was beautiful and we were getting ready to go to Zermat. At that same time the German border guards were on their side. From the Swiss side the hotel was visible clear as day. “O God”, I thought, “if I had remained in the hotel one more day I would have met the German patrol with their dogs half-way out on the white snow. It was difficult to imagine what fate would have awaited me then. It was difficult for the guards to bother with me until we got to Zermat.

From Zermat they took me to the town of Brig, about 50 kilometres away. There was a temporary camp for refugees here, especially for Italians. The Italian border was perhaps 10 kilometres away, by way of Domodossola mountain. Here I met with Italians who had prepared to return to Italy as partisans. I began to learn the Italian language and hung out with them. The commandant of the camp convinced me that I should learn the English language which would be very useful to me in my life, and not to return with them to Italy. I listened to him and stayed in Switzerland. In a short while they transferred me to a quarantine camp in the city of Lausanne, on Lake Geneva. This camp was mostly populated by Italians, with one compatriot, though I don't remember his name or what oblast he was from. The service and attitude in this camp were excellent, like at a resort. After a one month stay they sent us to the town of Interlaken. They settled us in a large building. There were about 20 of us. Mostly former prisoners-of-war and “ostarbeiter”.

Here we heard frightening things from older people, about the arrest of innocent people, about collectivization, about famine and much more. There were Bolshevik agents in Switzerland who were agitating for a return to the homeland. I found a friend. We made a deal, that before they take us we need to see more of the world, and decided to get to France. And so at the end of May or the beginning of June we came to the town of Basel which is on the border of Germany and France. This was at the invitation of a Swiss family, as guests.

Having spent several days here and asked how to get to France, they not only told us how far it was to France, but even took us and showed us the road to France itself. And so late at night, taking leave of our benefactors, we went on our way. Getting to the very border, we heard a loud voice say “stop” in German. We raised our arms and waited to see what would happen. He asked us where we were planning to go and why. We told him we wanted to see France. He told us we had to go back to the town of Basel and get a pass at the French mission or some other institution, I don't quite remember, and then he said we'd be able to cross the border. And so with his carbine he led us to the town. Walking, we discussed how best to get ourselves out of this situation. Our guard, hearing an

unknown language, stopped. He asked who we were. We said that we were from the Soviet Union and that we wanted to go home but the Swiss wouldn't let us. Our guard thought a bit and then told us to go back. We went back to the border and he opened the gate and said we could go. We couldn't believe that something like this could happen. We don't know why he did this. Perhaps out of sympathy for us "kids", or maybe out of sympathy to the Soviet Union he let us go. Thanking him we safely crossed the border from Switzerland to France sometime at the end of May 1945.

We weren't able to get even 100 metres farther when again we heard "Stop! Hands up" in French. We stopped, and two armed French border guards asked us where we were going and why, and how we crossed the border. We explained to them that we wanted to return to the "homeland" and the Swiss wouldn't let us. Regarding crossing the border we said that the Swiss border guard let us go. They didn't believe this and took us to the border to ask whether we spoke the truth. Seeing that we weren't nervous they stopped and returned to the French border station. Here they received us very courteously, wrote out a report, fed us and put us to bed. We woke early, ate, they put us in a car and together with two border guards we went on the road to Strasbourg. At that time there was a transit camp in Strasbourg for military personnel and deported civilians who were returning home. Here they registered us, gave us a repatriation card on par with the French. There were so-called repatriation missions in all the big towns which helped the refugees who had such cards. I made use of it many times. On the journey from Strasbourg to Paris, in the towns where the passenger train stopped with the military personnel and civilians being repatriated, there were exceptionally warm greetings with flowers, they treated us to tea, wine, sandwiches, and there were tears in every eye after the long separation. I thought at that time that the French had lost the war with the Germans, and look, see how they greet them. And see, when our military prisoners and ostarbeiters will return home they will be greeted like heroes in honour of their suffering and pain. But it didn't happen the way we thought it would, and I was convinced of this by my own experience.

At last we arrived in Paris. At the station a mass of people waited and the roads were jammed with busses which awaited the passengers going to their destinations. Those left were put up in hotels or movie theatres temporarily. The two of us were put up in a theatre. Little by little the theatre emptied out. Only we two were left. An official came to us and asked us who we were. We said we were Ukrainians, and he told us to wait a bit. After a while he returned, put us in a car and took us some kind of stadium which it turned out in better times had been used for dog racing.

There were people of various national backgrounds in this camp and among them not a few Ukrainians, especially young women who had married Frenchmen and Arabs and were now waiting to see who could find whom. The beds in the stadium were bunk beds and the women and men were kept under the same roof. The stadium was large and there was plenty of room for everyone. We were fed well. There was lots of time to see Paris

and meet people. Somehow an old immigration Ukrainian (a White Guard) came to the stadium, Alexander from Kyiv. After the First World War he ended up in Bulgaria and married there, and in the course of time moved to Paris where he worked as a taxi driver. I'll speak more of his family later. As I mentioned, there were quite a few Ukrainians in the stadium, and in general people from the Soviet Union. Many of them worked in France. Some had come after the war and certain young women were searching for their beaus whom they had met in Germany.

One of the girls was named Alla, from Russia. She said that before the war she lived in Ukraine, and when the war came the Germans took her and many others to Germany. In Germany she met a Frenchman of Italian heritage. She had come to France to search for him and now found herself in this stadium-camp. There was no easy way out, one had to either find a place to stay or return to the homeland. I sat and thought "what next?" I asked her if she had his address. She said yes. It was near the town of Bordeaux, a famous wine region. I looked at the map and saw that it was about 1000 kilometres from Paris to Bordeaux. I told her not to worry, we'd find him, and to get ready to travel. She was very happy with my plan and the next day we were on our way from Paris to Bordeaux.

I don't remember how far the town was from Bordeaux. As they said in our area, "you can get to Kyiv on your tongue". I remember that it was a fine, sunny day, a Sunday. Since it was Sunday everyone was either in the yard or in the house. Her acquaintance was also in the yard, and was speaking with some girl. Seeing us, he just about froze. There was no end of joy from this unexpected meeting. They gave me something to eat, and a bottle of wine, of course – this was a French custom. I didn't wait long here and immediately returned to Paris without any problems.

Our stadium-camp had become noticeably smaller. The queue had come to us "sovietchyky". One day cars arrived, we were all loaded in, and taken to a camp near the town of Versailles where the surrender of Germany to France had been signed in 1918. All the people in this camp were from the Soviet Union. There were former prisoners-of-war, families with children, single women and teenagers. Immediately upon arrival we were all "sorted". The men went to one side, and the women with children and teenagers to the other. I ended up with the women and children. We were informed that the next day the transport with the men would be departing for the homeland. The women with children and teenagers would be flying by plane to Berlin and from there would return home.

JULY 1945 - BERLIN

We flew into Berlin sometime in the afternoon. We debarked and they took us aside to some sheds. Rain began to fall. We stood and waited for them to take us to some kind of building where we could get out of the cold and get a bite to eat. But no, trucks came instead of the busses we had in France. They put us in

the trucks like sardines and took us – WHERE? To a camp surrounded by barbed wire, a one-time habitation for “ostarbeiteis”.

We set up camp as we were able. Here there were lots of people with duffle bags and carts who not long ago had fled from “their own”, and now were waiting for a return to the unknown. Later in the evening that day they fed us turnip gruel which was left over yet from Hitler’s time. Guards surrounded the camp. In the camp itself they made a “lock-up”, where they interrogated the older men and held them there, their fate unknown. During the day unarmed guards took us somewhere to a movie theatre. I began to think, and consider where I had ended up after three years of wandering. I began to consider fleeing from this hell. I had turned 18. They did a census in the camp, and were going to take into the army those who were of age.

As I have already mentioned, I had turned 18, but during the census I said that I was 16 so that they would leave me alone and I’d have more time to think about my fate. Rumours began to circulate that we would be sent back to the homeland in the near future. Sometime at the beginning of August, in the city of Potsdam which was close to Berlin, a conference of the “Big Three” - Truman, Churchill and Stalin - was to take place. The shortest path to the west went through Potsdam. There was intensive security for them, especially around Potsdam. All the same, I decided to try to get to the west through Potsdam.

I got to Potsdam as a passenger on a train. Here there was an inspection of documents, and since I didn’t have any I lied as I was able. I said that I was returning to the homeland but got on the wrong train. They believed me, and they put me on the next train to Berlin. Be that as it may, I decided to get to Potsdam no matter what. Here my experience in Hitler’s Germany and on the freight trains was useful. I got to Potsdam, having gone through the openings in the barriers, and ended up on the other side of the town. From there I travelled on towards Magdeburg, on the river Elba, on another freight train. It was difficult to get to Magdeburg, though the border was 40 kilometres away from the river. I was stopped several times in stations, or on foot along the road, but each time was able to get free. One time, at a station before Magdeburg, because the train didn’t go any farther, I saw Russian soldiers who were loading something into a truck and taking it to Magdeburg. I asked if they would take me there, they agreed, and gave me something to eat as I was very hungry.

We didn’t get very far, as they stopped us for a check. The truck was open, and the guard checked us out. The soldiers were, as usual, in uniform. I was in a French uniform, as that’s the way I had arrived from France. Seeing me, he asked me who I was and where I was going. I of course told him I was returning to the homeland. He told me to get out and took me to the inspection station. Here an officer came and began to ask me where and where from. To him, and to many before him, I said “to the homeland”. There were

epaulettes on my French uniform. Seeing them he took a knife and cut them off. After this ceremony they gave me something to eat, I spent the night, breakfasted, and they took me to the station and told me to wait here for the train to Berlin. I thanked them for their advice and their help but of course had something else in mind. Having time to wait for the train, I went to where they loaded the cars. The same soldiers were there whom I had seen yesterday. Seeing me they recognized me and asked what happened. I told them. They asked if I still wanted to go to Magdeburg. I said yes. One of them gave me a "pilotka" (military summer cap) and something else to put on.

As we were driving the same thing happened again. They stopped the truck and again looked in the back. Not seeing anything suspicious, they let us go. I thought at the time that the same thing would happen as before, when they took me to the officer and he cut off the epaulettes. But as the saying goes, "God is not without mercy, and the kozak is not without luck". After all this trouble I got to Magdeburg, and the border was maybe 40 km. farther. There was a zoo in Magdeburg, but no animals were left there. They kept the "ostarbeiter" there, and from there sent them back to the homeland, often on foot, even though transports often went in that direction empty. It was sad to look on this spectacle. It begged the question "why, and what for"? I again remembered France and those who were returning home.

The question remained – how could I get to the other side of the river? The best way would be across the bridge. I decided to cross on the bridge. There was a guard on the bridge, at that time a young, short soldier whose rifle was taller than he was. I gathered my confidence, walked past him whistling, and not paying attention I crossed the bridge. I hadn't gone a hundred metres when a jeep pulled up with two officers in it. They asked "where are you going?" The standard answer – "back to the homeland". They put me in the car and took me back across the bridge. We stopped near the guard and they asked him if I had crossed here. He said yes. Then they took me to the zoo from which they sent people back to the homeland. I went out onto the street and began to consider how I might get to the other side of the river without falling into the hands of the NKVD. To my good fortune I noticed that trucks filled with French prisoners-of-war (I could see this from their uniforms) were going there. I got it into my head to get onto one just to cross the bridge. Just at that moment trucks were going slow at the turn, so that gave me an opportunity to get onto one. I pulled myself into the back as the French began to complain, for even without me it had been a tight squeeze. I told them that I only needed to get across the bridge. I think that the French uniform helped me, as well as the little French I knew.

Having driven a ways from the river I got off, thinking how good it would be to arrive in France together with them. But in this world nothing is easy, and thanks to those soldiers I had crossed another barrier. Not far away was a station from which trains went almost to the very border, and I got on one among Germans, who also wanted to go west

to their families. There was a small station almost 5 km. away where the train stopped and everyone got off, and I with them. It was easy to hide in the crowd. It was late at night, and so we spent the night in the forest. During the night guards came and said something among themselves. I didn't make noise, and lay quiet till morning. In the morning everyone got ready to go to the border. I asked which way to the border, and then distanced myself from them. I got almost to the border, there was a thick fog, and I crossed a small ravine when I heard a stern voice say "Stop. Hands up". The same thing again – who are you, where are you going, etc. I gave my standard answer – "to the homeland". He said "Not this way" and showed me the road. I thanked him and went, and eventually turned around to go where I needed to.

The road to the border was visible, border guards were on it. The distance was perhaps half a kilometer. Bent over I went almost a hundred metres. Here the brush ended and a field of ripe rye or wheat, I'm not sure, began, and I decided to crawl as close to the border as I could and wait until it got dark, and then try to cross the border somehow. At that time clouds appeared, and rain started to fall. So as not to get soaked I decided to crawl over to some haystacks. A bunch of haystacks were very close to the unharvested rye. I hid under the haystacks. I was lying under the haystack wet to my skin and thinking "what next?" My thought was interrupted by a search in the field. The search came up to my hiding place. I thought they might pass by. But no. They stopped near my haystack and a stern voice said "come out of there". I came out, shaking from cold and fear. They took be back on the same road which divided the Soviet and English zones. The questions were the same, who am I and where am I going. The answer was the same – to the homeland. Why was I hiding? I said that a big storm came up and I was hiding from the rain, and hadn't noticed the border guards. They asked if I spoke German and I said yes. Then he said that I should tell the Germans that if they want to cross the border they should get a written pass from the commandant with a seal, because otherwise everyone is arrested. They begged but nothing helped. Then he turned to me and said that his shift was ending soon and that he would help me to get on a train to Berlin. I thanked him and said that on the English side, and I pointed out there, two of my buddies were hiding in a barn. I asked if he could send one of the guards to get them and bring them here, or if I could run over to get them, knowing full well that it wasn't permitted for them to cross the border in case someone decided to stay there. He told me to go over and bring them back, because the change of guard would happen soon. I promised to return quickly. And so I ran to the barn. As soon as I got there I ran past the barn and farther from the border, faster than I had ever run in my life. I don't think a horse could have caught me.

Not far away a jeep drove by on a narrow road with English border guards. I waved my hand, they stopped, and I explained to them in German who I was and where I wanted to go. They took me all the way to Hanover and then continued farther, and I again found myself in the west with an uncertain future. Perhaps the Russian officer who let me go to "get my friends" is still waiting for us! Or perhaps someone gave it to him if he told

anyone about what happened with me.

I now decided to get to Paris to my acquaintance Alexander Gais. I had in mind to travel by road to Frankfurt-on-Main and visit my old “master” Peter Giis. I got there as usual by freight train, and occasionally by passenger train. Along the way I spent time in the so-called “DP” – displaced persons – camps. In these camps terror reigned. Soviet agents together with American and English soldiers were forcibly repatriating the “ostarbeiter” and prisoners-of-war, in accordance with the Yalta agreement. I had no desire to remain in these camps. Much has been written about these deportations. There are still many witnesses, in the Diaspora as well as in Ukraine.

After several days with I got to Frankfurt-on-Main with some trouble, through Hokst. I wanted to visit the town of Hokst where I was incarcerated. The town was 15 km. from Frankfurt-on-Main. When I went from Frankfurt to Hokst by trolley, one of the passengers on it was a young man who once worked at a sawmill where I worked. He saw me and when he recognized me he practically jumped out of the moving trolley, as he had been a very dedicated supporter of Hitler, and for that reason was afraid of meeting me.

The next day I went to the village where my one-time “master” lived. This was very unexpected for him. It was 1944 when I first fled from prison, and now the second time. I reminded him of our first meeting, and told him that if he had reported me to the Gestapo he would regret it today. He asked me if I would intercede for him, for he had been a member of the Nazi party and was being prosecuted. I did what he asked for he had in any case treated me humanely. Again to the station, again on a train towards France. This time things went well. Not far from France a train with American soldiers was passing, near the town of Saarbrucken, and I got on it in a freight car and thus crossed the border into France.

I got out of the freight car and onto a fast passenger train to Paris. I had to watch out because I was travelling without documents or a ticket. And so by early evening I was again in Paris. I remembered well the address of Alexander from Kyiv. Again a wonder! They wanted to take me to the “Rodina” (i.e., Soviet Union) by force, and here I am again in Paris! They received me warmly, fed me well, and put me to sleep. I rested there with them for several days and thought about which path to take. I couldn’t stay in France, because they were sending people from France back to the “Rodina”, whoever they could catch. There was martial law in France at that time. They checked the list of guests in all the hotels and rounded up people in the subway. This time I decided to go to England because it wasn’t far from France and I thought I could find shelter there. But it didn’t happen the way I thought it would. I got on the train La Havre – Paris, as usual, without a ticket. While they were checking the tickets when asked where I was going I said “to England”. This was at the end of August in 1945, and at that time there were still a lot of American and English soldiers there. There was an English military detachment in La

Havre.

And so the conductor handed me over into the hands of the English military police, and they asked me where I wanted to go. I said that I wanted to go to England. They said that a visa was required to go to England, and handed me over to the French gendarmes. They kept me there 3 or 4 days. Two Polish prisoners were incarcerated with me, who were caught as stowaways on a boat from Bremenhaven to New York. They came out of hiding too early, and were put off the boat in La Havre. The next day two gendarmes took the three of us by train to Paris and then who knows where. Me for sure to the Soviet embassy or to the German border. Or maybe to the Polish embassy as well.

We arrived in Paris. It was late. There were several cells in the station and we were to spend the night there. Riding on the train I told my companions that I had to escape no matter what. I would leave them my bag and if they caught me they could give it back. So they took us to the cells for registration. A few "clients" were already there. We had to wait in line. One of our gendarmes was separated from us, perhaps he went to arrange a hotel room for himself, and I needed to make a decision or it would be too late. So I rolled a cigarette and asked the guard for a light as he stood there with his rucksack on his shoulder. He went into his pocket to search for a match. I immediately slipped through between his legs as he was tall and I was short. Before he could figure out what happened and start blowing his whistle I had run far away and he couldn't catch me, especially with the rucksack on his shoulder.

There was a subway station almost right next door to this St. Lazare train station. I only needed to get down the perhaps 30 stairs and the subway was right there. I leapt into the train. In the Paris subway, when a train comes the doors automatically close. And so if someone was following me they wouldn't be able to get on the train. I didn't need to buy a ticket, because military personnel rode for free and I was in uniform, though without epaulettes. Having got on the subway, I immediately got off at the next stop. I immediately took a taxi and went to my compatriot Alexander from Kyiv. It was late, eleven o'clock or maybe later. I woke them up and asked if they could pay for the taxi, which they did.

Again a surprise. They received me as usual, and I began to think and consider what next. Here I decided to get as far away from Paris as possible – i.e., to Marseilles, planning to stow away on a ship and depart into the world. I got to Marseilles with difficulty. As they say, "no post, no home", no where to go, no one to appeal to for help or advice. Here I decided to take on Polish identity. But how? I found out that in Marseilles there was a Polish Red Cross office. I went there. I spoke a bit of Polish, as when I was working on the farm in Germany there was a Pole named Zenon, and his last name I knew ended in – ski. So I took the name Zenon and the last name from the word "hrushka" (pear), i.e., Gruszynski. And so with this fictitious name I appealed to the Polish Red Cross as Zenon

Gruszynski, born in Czestochowa in 1926.

It happened this way: in every big city in France there were so called “repatriation homes”, as I already mentioned. I went there. They fed me, but didn’t register me because I had no documents. I said I was Polish and lost my documents. I was advised to go to the Polish Red Cross and have my documents drawn up, and they gave me the address. I went to the Polish Red Cross and said that I had lost my documents and without documents I couldn’t be registered. They told me to wait, and they would draw them up for me. After a couple of minutes they called me into an office and posed many questions, for example where was I born, where was I baptized, what was my name, how did I get to France and specifically to Marseilles and many others. After a short while they called me and gave me a document stating that I was Zenon Gruszynski, born in Poland in the city of Czestochowa in 1926 with a seal and signature. It was as if I was born anew. With this document I again appealed to the repatriation home where on the basis of this document I was registered.

I gave a big sigh of relief. What next? Life itself would show. In the meantime I had something to eat and a place to sleep. First I had to rest, gain strength, and then think. I went out to ask around and acquaint myself with these new people. I met with a Mexican, and we hit it off. I told him about my dream to go somewhere far away, across the ocean, whether legally or illegally. He told me that the easiest way would be from Casablanca, in Morocco. I also met with a French former prisoner-of-war. I asked him about everything, for example, which camp he was in in Germany, when the Russians liberated them, when they took him to Odessa more-or-less, what the camp was called, the date they sailed from Odessa, where the ship went, when did it arrive in Marseilles, who were the passengers, and much else. I didn’t tell him why I needed the information and he didn’t ask. Armed with this information I signed up for a trip back “home” to Casablanca, to “mother” and “sister”, having given my address as 14 Rue de Port. I then waited for a call from the French Repatriation Commission, for an interview.

Here it must be noted that Algiers, a French colony, was like a province of France. Morocco, though, was different, it was a protectorate with its own government. So it was no problem to go to Algiers, but getting to Morocco was a different matter. I chose the much more difficult and longer road and country. And so my turn came to go for an interview to the commission. I prepared as well as I could because I knew more or less what they would be asking me. I even wrote down when I left Poland, through which port I left Germany, when I arrived in Casablanca, and much else. I arrived at the given time. In a luxurious hall sat four individuals, smoking cigars. I was shown to a chair and sat down. They posed standard questions: what is my name, where and when was I born, etc. I answered everything. Then they asked when and how I left Poland, I replied in such-and-such year, on such-and-such a ship, I think I said the “Baturyn”, which sailed from Gdansk. I told about where we went and when we arrived at Casablanca, giving the address where

we lived and where my “mother” and “sister” still lived. I said that sometime at the beginning of 1939 I went with my father to Poland on a visit and that during the German-Polish war my father was killed. After the end of the war I, along with French prisoners-of-war and some Jewish families was taken to Odessa as foreigners. They asked what the camp was called. I told them. When did we sail from Odessa? Who was on the ship? Where did it go? How long did it take to get to Marseilles? I answered in accordance with the information given to me by the Frenchman I met. That the ship was named such-and-such, that there were about 200 people on it, primarily French prisoners-of-war and some Jewish families and others. The ship went to the port of Palermo in Sicily, then to Nice in France. Then on such-and-such day it arrived in Marseilles. These were the main questions, and there were many. All the questions were in French, which I couldn’t speak very well.

At the end they asked me if I could recognize any of the passengers on the ship, and I said yes. They then brought in the Frenchman who had told me everything. And when they asked him if he recognized me he said no. Here I froze for a minute, not knowing what would happen if they asked him about me. I thought “may God’s will be done”. They told me to wait. After about a half-hour they called me into an office and said they would give me a repatriation card and that I could go home to Morocco. My soul felt light, being done with this complicated issue. I got the card and a ticket to the port Oran in Algiers, they gave back my clothes and something else and sent me to the repatriation building, telling me to wait for notification about when the ship Oran would be departing. I didn’t have to wait long, and I didn’t need to hurry anywhere or see anyone. After about a week a notice was posted regarding who and when and where we had to go to depart. And there was the name Zenon Gruszynski. It didn’t take me long to pack, as all I had was a small bag. And so at the end of September I bid adieu to my acquaintances and the town of Marseilles and sailed into the unknown.

AFRICA

It took two days in all for our ship to reach the port of Oran, in the province of Algiers in North Africa. Here, as in all of France, they greeted the newcomers with joy and love. Not far from Oran there were army barracks, and they took us there. They organized a reception for us there, complete with shashlik and rice, wine, fruit, and all kinds of fare. It was here that I tasted shashlik with rice for the first time in my life. The next day all my fellow-travelers were taken where they needed to go. They asked me where I was going. I said back home to Casablanca. They took me to the station and said to wait there for a train. I waited a while, then boarded and departed.

I don’t remember how long we rode, but in the end there was no need to hurry, as I mentioned earlier. At last we came to the small town of Uzhda on the very border with Morocco. Here, as at all borders, there was a document check. Some passengers were

immediately let through, others were held back and taken to the army camp, me among them. In this camp it was possible to come and go wherever we pleased. Here I made the acquaintance of an Arab and a Jew. The Arab was from Algiers, and the Jew had just returned from Italy and talked about how he had been imprisoned under Mussolini's rule. Now, after the end of the war, he was returning to his relatives in Casablanca and invited me, when I arrived in Casablanca, to definitely look him up and he gave me his address, and he said that a relative of his had a Bar, called Zanzi Bar in the central part of Casablanca on the "Place de France". With these, my new acquaintances, I walked around the town. They sent me to buy wine because they wouldn't sell it to Arabs, and my Jewish friend looked Arabic.

In this camp they checked everyone out thoroughly, who, where, and why. And so my turn came. I answered all questions as in France. They didn't trust my answers, but they left me alone for a couple of days. They called me again for an interrogation and said that there was no Madame Gruszynski in Casablanca, and that the street didn't exist. They began to beat me so that I would admit to everything, but I stubbornly kept silent and argued that I wasn't a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. After the first day of interrogation they put me in the prison together with the deserters. Then next day I was again taken for interrogation. This went on for a few days. They would submerge my head in the bathtub and then tell me to confess. When I was brought back to the prison I would be black and blue, and even the deserters had pity on me. I saw that I had no other way out – I had to tell the truth, but not the whole truth. And so I told them that I had never been in Casablanca, and that I didn't know anyone there. But I didn't tell them about changing my name. They then began to treat me even worse for deserting. They brought a list of deserters and read it, and asked if this is my name, and I would say "no". "Look", I said, "at my document, which I received just recently, which proves I was in France".

After this interrogation they took me to another prison. There I spent the night on a board. In the morning they brought an Arab and said to wait. They drew up one document for the both of us and said we had to leave Morocco and go back to Algiers. The Arab kept this document, and after we crossed the border he disappeared together with the document. And so I again was left without documents, though they weren't of great importance for me personally. Going back to Oran I thought to myself "what next?", and decided to get to Algiers, go to a big port, and perhaps I'd be able to get on some ship to get away from Africa and Europe. In Algiers there was a Polish Consulate, and perhaps I could arrange something there. I sought out the repatriation building and registered.

It was necessary to rest a bit after my agony in Morocco. I spent a couple of days in this building and somehow met a young Jew who spoke Polish. He suggested I stay with him for a couple of days, during which I told him of my adventures. For some reason I met good people in Africa, Jews who tried to help me in my troubles. In any case, I decided to get to Casablanca, and perhaps because of my good friend the Jewish man, and

because there was a large port. I needed more Polish documents in order not to fall into the hands of the Soviet agents who had already shown up in Africa looking for Soviet Legionnaires. The French authorities did not forbid them from having interviews with the legionnaires, but would not force them to leave unless they wanted to return to the “homeland”, in which case they were free to leave unimpeded. And so I appealed to the Polish Embassy and said that I have family in Casablanca, but they don’t permit me to go there because I don’t have the requisite documents. They said they would take two photographs, and to return after lunch, which I did. In a half-hour I had a fresh document with a seal and signature. They even gave me a few French Francs for the road.

Parting with my good friend, he gave me a small package to pass on to his family, and likewise a letter. And so again I’m on the road to Morocco, to the town of Uzhda where not so long ago I had been tortured. The nearer I got to the border the harder my heart was beating. The train went slowly, so that there was lots of time to think. What would happen if they stopped me? Surely I’d get it across the head, and I needed to be prepared for anything. Here my previous fictional story wouldn’t help a second time. And so I decided to escape from the group, because I knew that the building where they checked out the passengers wasn’t very secure. At last we arrived, the military personnel were checked out and released, and the civilians were held back for categorization. I knew where I would end up, and so I looked around to see where I might escape. The doors of the building were locked. The windows were high up and covered. The examination of documents went slowly, people stood in line and no one paid any attention to anyone else. I inconspicuously crawled onto a table, stood on a chair and opened a window. If anyone had asked I would have said that it was hot. No one paid any attention, and this gave me more courage to execute the important step in my plan. Everything was ready, I only needed to wait for an appropriate moment for my desperate jump through the window. It needs to be said, that this was a building like a barrack, long but narrow, and so all the people waited their turn at the front and I drifted towards the back. Choosing a good moment, I slowly crawled onto the table, stood on the chair, and in a second jumped out the window, landed in the yard, and ran in the direction of the station. I knew the way to the station, because a little over a week ago I had walked it with my new friends, i.e. the Jew and the Arab.

Hurrying to the station I often looked to see if someone was running after me. It didn’t look like it, so my heart began to ease. It seemed that no one had noticed. I got to the station without incident. The station was small, with an even smaller number of people, mostly military. A military guard stood at the entrance to the station. I said that I wanted to go to the buffet to buy a sandwich. He let me go, only saying that I shouldn’t stay long. I thanked him and went straight to the platform. To my good fortune in my misfortune a train was waiting, it let off a couple and was just leaving in my direction, towards Casablanca. I went up to the coach and a military guard stood there, an Arab. As I have mentioned, I was in a French military uniform. He asked me where I was going. I

said to Casablanca. Do I have a pass? I said yes, and pulled out some kind of paper from my pocket and showed him. He looked at it from one side and the other and, saying nothing, gave me my “pass” and said “get on”. Surely he couldn’t read, like most Arabs, who were illiterate. The train departed. Glory to Thee, O God, another obstacle was overcome. We arrived in Casablanca without trouble, only hungry. It was late at night. People were leisurely exiting, and again I have to find some means of leaving, because I didn’t know if there was some kind of check point for documents up ahead or not. I didn’t want to end up in the hands of the gendarmerie or someone else after my odyssey to get to Casablanca. Somewhere far from the main entrance to the station I climbed over a fence and was on the streets of Casablanca. There was a park not far from the station.

In this park, as is usual in all parks, there were benches where it was possible to sit and rest. It was late on a cold, autumn night. I was tired and sleepy. Thus I laid down on a bench, put my bag under my head, and slept. I woke up, as someone was walking nearby, and checking out the soldier that was sleeping on the bench. Perhaps he was looking for some “booty”. After he left I hurried to the station where there was a group of people who were waiting for a train outside and gathered together, one to another, in their white caftans. And so I joined them.

Tossing and turning till morning, I asked people how to get to the Place de France. This Place de France was a little far away, but by lunchtime I had gotten there and found the bar “Zanzi Bar”, which my friend the Jew had told me about yet in the town of Uzhda. I entered the bar and asked do they know so-and-so who arrived recently from Italy. They said yes. And they quickly went to find him, and had me wait, and offered me coffee. Not much time passed when I see my friend running towards me across the square, waving his hands. I ran up to him, we hugged and kissed each other like blood brothers. And he said “come to my place”. On the way he told me that we were going to his uncle’s place, his uncle didn’t have any family, and that he would tell him that I was a Polish Jew. As for me, I was happy to be a Polish Jew in order to have a place to stay for a while.

We arrived at his uncle’s, which was a great surprise for him. He asked who I was, what I was, where I came from, where I was born and a lot of other questions, to which I replied as well as I could, as usual, with lies. Having rested a bit, we went the next day to the town and I passed on the small package from my acquaintance in Algiers to his family at the address he had given me in Casablanca. They thanked me and we departed. In Casablanca there was also a Repatriation office. As I have already mentioned such buildings could be found in all French cities and nearby colonies. I appeared there to ask for assistance. Here, on the basis of the repatriation card I had received in France, they gave me clothes, dried food and canned goods.

One time I went alone to the port to look at the ships with hope that I might be able to get work on one. A guard stood at the entrance to the port. I went by him whistling, as

if I worked there. It didn't take long before someone noticed, and a man came up to me and asked what I was doing and how I got there. I answered that I came to look at the ships, and that I had entered normally through the main gate. He said to follow him. So we went, we came to the main gate and he asked the guard if I had entered there, and he said yes, and he led me to his office which wasn't far from the gate. Here he asked who I was, where I was from, why I was at the port, and where I lived. I answered him with a trembling voice as I best I could about everything, and told him the address where I was living, which I remember till this very day. The owner was Mr. Tordzhman, at Blvd. de Bordeaux. "Oh no", I thought, "I've again gotten into trouble".

While answering I was nervous and smoked a cigarette, and he from his seat struck me in the face so that the cigarette fell from my mouth. On this note our "conversation" ended, and he said that I shouldn't show my face there anymore. I returned to my benefactors, and didn't say anything to them. And so with my friend I walked about the town, and went to the movies where I first saw a film about Tarzan. The time passed without worries.

One day an officer from the protectorate police came and said I had to show up there the next day in order to clear up a few matters. I had no choice and had to go. Having arrived, a pair of men in civilian clothes and a Polish translator were already sitting there. The usual questions - who, where, why – as well as many others were posed. The translator was surely a Ukrainian, because he chuckled at my Polish. But he didn't acknowledge this, and I didn't ask, because many thoughts were swarming in my head as to what was going to happen. Finally they let me go and said that they would be calling me again. I returned home dejected. My benefactors asked why they had summoned me. I told them partially, and kept the rest quiet. I came to the conclusion that the port police had informed the protectorate about my visit to the port.

And again in a couple of days several Jews gathered in the house of my benefactor and asked me about several matters, then left. I saw that black clouds were approaching. The question "what next", where should I go? It was dangerous to go to the port, they'd detain me, and then what? A train to Algiers was even worse. I knew that there was a Polish embassy in Casablanca, and decided to go there for advice and assistance. They advised me to come back the next day. The next day I arrived early and waited outside the embassy. I now told them as usual that I was Polish, and that I came to visit an acquaintance in Casablanca, and had in mind to remain here, but that I didn't like it here and wanted to return to Poland, but didn't have the means to do so. Again they said to come back the next day, and gave me a time. I came as was said at the given time. They said they would draw up papers as for a soldier from Anders' army, and that I was on leave in France, in Paris. When there I should go to the Polish consulate and they would help me to depart for Poland. They said the documents would be ready in two days, and that I should be ready to board the evening train to Oran, in Algeria, from where the ship to

France would depart the following day. I couldn't believe that everything had come together so quickly in my favour. As they used to say at home, God is not without mercy, and a Kozak isn't without luck.

Taking my leave of my benefactors, I thanked them, and without saying anything about going to France, I went to the embassy. Here was an officer, a major, and I thought he was the ambassador. He gave me documents and asked if I would take two suitcases of his with me, for he was returning to Paris by plane. I of course readily agreed to do so. Again on a train to my well known city of Uzhda. And again the troublesome thoughts creep in. What will happen if they stop me at the border and begin the interrogations and torture? What will happen at the Polish Embassy? Better not to think about bad consequences, and only hope that all will be well. The trip from Morocco to Algiers was much easier than the trip from Algiers to Morocco. At last I had proper documentation. And so without trouble I crossed the border and travelled to Oran. I boarded the ship and after two days was again in Marseilles. Now I wasn't afraid of the Soviet repatriation agents, because according to my documents I was a full-blooded Pole!

The trip to Paris was without incident. Arriving in Paris, I immediately went to the Polish consulate with the two suitcases for the major. The suitcases contained his clothes, a typewriter, and some canned goods which I consumed yet on the boat. Entering the consulate, I asked if I could meet with major such-and-such. They called him and after a couple of minutes I see him coming down the stairs. We greeted each other, shook hands, and then went upstairs to his office. He immediately thanked me for bringing his suitcases from Casablanca, and asked if I had had any trouble. I said no. He gave me a couple of hundred francs for tea, and told me to come the next day to see major such-and-such, I don't remember his last name, and that this major would give me demobilization papers, as if from the army of Anders. I would then be able to go to the protectorate police for scrutiny, and then either remain in France or appeal to the Polish Red Cross which was active in Paris, and that they would help me leave for Poland. This major already knew what kind of soldier I was when I returned the next day.

The demobilization papers were already prepared, and he had already been informed about what kind of soldier I was. I thanked him for his help, and he wished me a safe journey to Poland. I went to the Red Cross, and had permission to remain in France due to the force of circumstances. The end of my suffering was in sight, as was the end of my discouragement and anxiety of this year of 1945. Even remembering this year makes my heart anxious. Living in this Polish Red Cross residence I became acquainted with the Polish people who lived there. Some were going home, others were going to remain in France and when the opportunity arose to depart across the ocean, and others were going to enter the Polish detachment which was serving with the American army, which is what I decided to do.

The American army base with their machinery and other military equipment was in a suburb of Paris, in the area of St. Vincent de Bois. This was a real vacation. We stood on guard for four hours, then were free for the rest of the day. There was a place to sleep, and plenty to eat. We used our free time to walk around Paris.

During my free time I often visited my acquaintances in Paris, Alexander and Christina Gais, whom I mentioned earlier. It was a great surprise for them to see me alive and healthy and there was much to talk about. In 1946 this American base was closed and they transferred us to the town of Marmelon not far from Germany. There was a camp for German prisoners of war here, which we guarded. In the autumn we transported these prisoners of war to Germany, and the Americans took them to the town of Mannheim in Germany, then to Murnau, not far from Munich. And so I was again in Germany, with the difference that I wasn't being guarded by Germans, but vice versa.

In July I signed a contract to work in a coal mine in Belgium for two years. I left the guard company and left for Belgium on the 21st of July, 1947. If I had known how difficult the work would be I would never have signed the contract. But I signed it, so I had to work with the hope that after the end of the contract I'd leave to cross the ocean. While still in France I had gotten a Polish passport for travel to Italian Somalia (Ethiopia), which I still have, dated in Paris on January 2nd 1946. Whether fortunately or unfortunately there wasn't proper transportation at the time to go to this little known country in the post-war period, and so this plan fell through and I remained in the guard company. At time I ended up in Belgium, but the thought and dream of going to America didn't leave me.

In Belgium we were housed in barracks and on the 2nd day were given a medical examination, and then prepared ourselves for work. I was assigned to the "front line". The mines where we worked were very low and narrow, not even a full metre in height. So it was necessary to crawl in on all fours for a fair distance, pulling after you a bag with your tools and food. Simply put, it was very exhausting and dangerous work. After several weeks we little by little began to get used to the work, and our knees became calloused like the soles of a foot, because it was necessary to constantly work on our knees. The wages were very high, almost \$50 in Belgian francs. Everything could be found in the stores. I believe that the standard of living at that time was the highest in all of Europe, perhaps because they had a rich colony in Africa, the Belgian Congo. Most of the foreigners who worked in the mines were Ukrainians and Poles. We all had hope and trusted what was promised us, that after fulfilling our two year contract we would be able to go back to Germany or find other work in Belgium. But it didn't turn out this way.

It wasn't possible to return to Germany, and there was no work in Belgium better than work in the mines. So with several like-minded individuals I decided to get to Germany illegally. There were four of us. Not saying anything to anyone, we left, and went to the city of Liege, not far from the German border. We took a taxi and drove to

the agreed upon meeting place at the border. We met with our translator and went through the forest to the German border. I don't remember if we had yet crossed the border or not, when suddenly we heard someone yell STOP. Our guide was going first, my friends after him, and I was last, holding a suitcase and overcoat in my hands. The border guards set a dog loose, and he came after me, and set his teeth into my overcoat. I left the coat and took off. The dog left the coat and came after me. I fell, and he caught me and bit me. The border guards ran after him, took me, and brought me to their post.

Here they tended my wounds, bandaged them, and after a short interrogation, they took me to the town of Aachen, not far from the Belgian border. I remember that it was Saturday, and I had to wait till Monday for a hearing. On Monday morning they took me for a hearing. The judge was English, because this was the English zone in the autumn of 1949. After several questions he told me to go back and to try to come by legal means. He told the police to take me back to the Belgian border. I got out of the car and went back to the border on the same road. Two guards stood at the border, they didn't even ask who I was and where I was going. I got to Liege, took a train, and went back to Maurage where I worked. Arriving in Maurage no one knew anything the next day at work. What happened with my travel companions? Two returned to Belgium, but not Maurage, to the town of Mons.

There was already in this town a camp for the miners who had refused to work in the mines any longer after they had completed their contract. From here they were sent to Germany directly or through the IRO (International Refugee Organization). About their ongoing fate I did not learn. One was able to rejoin the guard brigade where he was before. I later learned that he fell through a window and was killed. I didn't learn the details. In this residence by the mines, as I mentioned, there were many Ukrainians. I was able to get Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian newspapers here, so there was something to read. One time the book "Not Yet Shot" by Simon Pidhainyj fell into my hands. This book made me into an even greater patriot. I learned "which end was up". Even before my attempt to go to Germany I had read in a Polish newspaper which was published in France, "Narodowiec", an advertisement which stated that farm workers were needed in Canada. I wrote a letter to this address.

Unexpectedly, before the new year, I received a letter of invitation to Canada. I was very happy for this, and began to prepare for departure. I went to the IRO, the organization I mentioned earlier, and they drew up the required documents for me, paid for passage from Liverpool (England) to Halifax (Canada) on the ship "Empress de France". I paid the way to Liverpool myself. I arrived barely alive, as I ate practically nothing for almost the entire voyage, and was confined to bed due to sea-sickness. I had to get to the province of Saskatchewan, around 3,000 kilometres away. On the way I stopped in Montreal and searched out the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. New immigrants from Belgium and Germany were already there. They told me I didn't have to go to the farm, I

could look for work in Montreal. But I didn't feel comfortable with that, and left for Saskatchewan.

I ended up in Regina, which was the biggest city in the province. Here I had to spend the night because it was late and there was no train going my way. The village where my future farmer lived was called Holdfast, 70 kilometres north of Regina. Arriving at the station in Holdfast I asked how to get to my farmer. As this was a small farming community everyone knew each other. From there I placed a telephone call to my farmer so that he would come and get me, a distance of about 6 or 7 kilometres. The farmers here lived far from one another. All of them had more than 1,500 hectares of land. They only cultivated wheat. They had party lines, so that when someone telephoned someone else everyone listened in. So by the time I arrived at the farmer's home all the neighbours already knew about it.

In Saskatchewan it was a brutal February winter. Strong, cold winds were blowing, and since there weren't any forests in almost the entire province there was no protection from the wind. My farmer was named Anton Gelsinger, of German derivation. He came to Canada from Odessa with his parents. His parents spoke Russian, but he didn't. As it was he spoke German, which was our language of communication. There were two children in his family, he himself wasn't a terribly good-natured person. My work during the winter was to look after the cattle and help in the garage. They taught me how to milk a cow and every morning I would milk them by hand because there wasn't a machine to do so. Spring and autumn I would gather rocks from the field, I'd hitch up the horses, drive to the field, gather the rocks on a cart, then gather them into a pile. The field was full of rocks. It was hot in the summer, the work was hard and sweaty. His farm was next to a big lake, which was named Long Lake. And so one time, late in the evening, on my way home I drove to the lake to bathe and wash the sweat from my body.

Arriving home I unhitched the horses and entered the house. I noticed that my sponsors were upset, and that there was no supper for me. "Good", I said, "take me to the station tomorrow. I'm leaving here". The agreement was that I didn't have to work for this same farmer for a whole year, just to work anywhere on a farm for a year. I went to my room and got ready for my departure in the morning. I didn't sleep much, and thought about which direction I should go, west to Vancouver or east to Montreal. Perhaps my sponsors didn't sleep all night. In the morning no one woke me up, as usual. I saw that breakfast was prepared, and on the table, and they asked me to eat. I ate. They asked and begged that I would remain at least one more month, because harvest was coming when the work was most intense. I said no. Then his brother came and tried to convince me to stay for a month. His brother even suggested I come to live with him. So I agreed to stay for one more month but not a day more.

Their attitude towards me after that was very good, as if nothing had happened. A

month passed. I packed up and was ready to leave. They again tried to convince me to stay, they even threatened that I wouldn't find work anywhere. But I hadn't changed my mind, and after six months work on the farm I left, again into the unknown. During those six months I hadn't met any Ukrainians and so there was no one to ask for advice. As the song goes, "I drink alone, I dance alone". My wages for work were \$45 per month, so I had a few dollars for the road. Arriving in Regina I decided to go east to Montreal through Winnipeg, where there were a lot of Ukrainians. One of my acquaintances from France and Belgium lived in Montreal, his name was Volodymyr Zakhorujko, from Halychyna, the village of Zaboletytsy, Brody county. And so at the end of 1950 I found myself in Winnipeg.

Here I applied to an employment agency to get work. I said who I was, what I did, and that I had worked as a miner in Belgium. They told me that there was no problem and that there was a gold mine in the town of Bisset named San Antonio Gold Mine, and that they needed workers. Did I want to go there? I agreed. The town of Bisset was in hilly territory about 70 kilometres from Winnipeg. The way there during the summer was by the Red River, in winter by a small plane. I got to the nearest port and went the rest of the way by bus.

There was a dormitory for single workers, and a cafeteria for contract workers. The meals were wonderful, there was plenty to eat at any time of day. The mine worked on two shifts. The lowest wage was a dollar an hour. We didn't pay for room or board, and we worked for 8 hours a day, 6 days a week. There were a lot of refugees like me working here, many Ukrainians, Poles, Yugoslavs, and many others. Whole families lived here, and their children went to school together with the native Indians, who outnumbered the whites. For recreation there was a beergarden. The miners spent their time here playing cards. I became acquainted with the Ukrainian press here, "Novyj Shliakh", "Homin Ukrainy", "Ukrainian News" and many other papers. I worked here for over six months, then decided to go to Montreal.

As I mentioned, my friend Volodymyr was in Montreal. I went to his address, and slept in one room. Volodymyr worked in a factory, and I got a job washing dishes in a restaurant. They paid us 20 dollars a week plus food. In the factory where Volodymyr worked there were Ukrainians. The foreman of the group which looked after the factory where Volodymyr worked was Fedir Boiko from Kamenets-Podilsk. We called them the old immigrants – those people who came to Canada before the First World War. Volodymyr introduced me to Him. Fedir Boiko strove to get me work at "Canadian Vickers" where they built and repaired ships, which was in a convenient place on the St. Laurence River. My work was to sharpen drills, etc. The wage was 95 cents per hour. I was often at Fedir's house. He was very interested in Ukraine, and asked me about everything.

The old immigrants came to Canada for work because there was none in Ukraine. The majority of them were from Halychyna, Volhynia, and Bukovyna. Most of them had been infected by the “virus” of Communism. They had their own hall and leadership. Fedir Boiko belonged to them. I told him about the Holodomor in Ukraine, about collectivization, about de-kulakization, about exile to Siberia, about religion being forbidden and much else which I had seen and read about. He listened attentively and asked that I would not speak about this to his wife. Ukrainian organizational life was very active in Montreal following the arrival of many refugees from Europe. They began to build churches and purchase buildings for the organizations. As usual, new organizations sprang up, the “Banderivtsi”, “Melnykivtsi”, “Ukrainian Republican Democratic Party” (URDP) founded by Ivan Pavlovich Bahrianyj, the “Village Party”, “Hetman Party”, “Union for the Freedom of Ukraine” (SVU) and many others. And every one of these organizations or parties had their own newspaper or journal

Some of these organizations fought against one another. Those from the “Union for the Freedom of Ukraine” did this dirty work. The biggest amount of dirt was heaped on the URDP party, its leader I.P. Bahryanyj, and his followers. The URDP was formed immediately after the war and a mimeographed paper called “Ukrainian News” was published, which in time was printed as a regular newspaper in New Ulm (Germany). This happened immediately after the war, when the mass immigration of Ukrainians to the American continent and Australia. In comparison to the Galicians there were many fewer immigrants from eastern Ukraine, “thanks” to the allies who helped the Bolsheviks send them back to the “*rodina*” (“homeland” – i.e., Soviet Union) by force. In any case, thanks to I.P. Bahryanyj, who authored the pamphlet which was printed in English, French, and German entitled “Why I Do Not Want to Return to the *Rodina*”, the citizens of the Soviet Union used this pamphlet almost as a passport, in all three military occupation zones. By the end of 1946 the forced mass repatriation of Soviet citizens was stopped, and people began to depart across the ocean, and to settle in the countries of Western Europe.

And so, having arrived in Montreal in 1951, I made the acquaintance of my compatriots from various provinces of Ukraine at St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At the time this was the only Ukrainian Orthodox church in Montreal and environs. Here they had organized a branch of the URDP and SUZhERO (Victims of the Russian Bolshevik Terror). In December of 1951 I joined the URDP. And in the summer of 1952 I joined SUZhERO, and in this same year the organization ODUM (Union of Ukrainian Democratic Youth). The ODUM branch was organized at the behest of the URDP. ODUM branches already existed in Toronto, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities. ODUM was organized in Montreal by three individuals, namely Fedir Fedorenko, Fedir Dotsenko, and me, Mykola Pidlysnny. The ODUM journal “Young Ukraine” was published in Toronto. I was now in a third organization. My responsibility was to look after subscriptions to the newspaper “Ukrainian News” and the journal “Young Ukraine”. I sold these publications around the Church and on other occasions.

In 1953 the SUZhERO branch in Toronto published a large collection of the testimony of Holodomor survivors, 540 pages in total, in English. The initiator and editor on the part of the URDP and SUZhERO was Semen Alexandrovich Pidhajnyj. A second volume was published in the USA in 1954. Both books were called "The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: a White Book". These books were sent to the foreign Embassies in Canada and the USA, as well as to libraries and politicians, and were, of course, sent to book stores as well.

In 1954 I made the acquaintance of a girl from Greece named Angela, to whom I was married in 1955. She arrived in Canada in 1953 from the city of Piraeus with the help of the Red Cross.

In order to receive Canadian citizenship it was necessary to live in Canada for five years. My time was getting close. I still had the foreign name of Zenon Gruszynski. I didn't want to pledge allegiance to Canada under a strange name. Likewise, I planned to marry. The question was "what to do?" A newspaper article related that a man in Chicago, I unfortunately don't remember his name, was sent back to where he came from because he arrived in America under a false name. In any case I decided to change back to my true name. I consulted with the lawyer Biega in Montreal regarding this matter. He wrote a letter to the Ministry of Immigration stating why and how I came to Canada under a false name. After several months, without any trouble, I received back my real name. It was like I had been reborn.

In 1955 I received Canadian citizenship, and in 1955 I married Angela Vasilakakis. She worked in the St. Agathe sanatorium not far from Montreal as a regular worker, and I continued to work in construction plant of Canadian Vickers. I worked at this plant almost five years, thanks to Fedir Boiko who got me the job, and where I learned the trade of tool and die maker.

A daughter was born to us in 1956. We named her Tatiana in honour of my mother. Three months after her birth I left for Windsor, Ontario. The city is located on the Detroit River, on the other side of this river from where, on the American side, the great industrial centre of Detroit is located. Since I was a Canadian citizen I drove across the bridge into Detroit almost every week to do shopping or visit friends. In Windsor there was a big Ford plant, where I found work as a millwright, a trade I had learned in Montreal. I had earned \$1 per hour in Montreal, but in Windsor I earned \$1.50 an hour, forty hours a week.

Not far from the factory I rented a building and after three months my wife and child arrived. Why did they wait three months? Because in accordance with the contract between the labour union and Ford there was a clause that new workers were on probation for three months and had to prove their competency, and then would be accepted into the

union. After this the given company couldn't dismiss the new employee without a grave cause, because the employee now belonged to the labour union which protected its members.

The city of Windsor is a pretty big industrial city, in which such large automobile manufacturing companies as Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, and other associated companies were located. There were two Ukrainian Orthodox churches in town. The one was called the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church, the other was the "Bukovynian" Church, which I think was under the Moscow Patriarchate, but was very small. Conversely, the Greek-Orthodox church was larger, and belonged to the Ukrainian Consistory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. We baptized our daughter in this church. The God-parents came from Montreal. There were several Ukrainian organizations active in this city, among them the organizations to which I belonged in Montreal – namely the URDP (Ukrainian Revolutionary Democratic Party) and SUZhERO (Victims of the Russian Bolshevik Terror). So it wasn't hard to find comrades.

The organization URDP was led by Ivan Andrijovych Vats, and SUZhERO was led by Ivan Demjanovych Pyshkalo, both from the Poltava region of Ukraine, and my acquaintances from Montreal. Insofar as Windsor was and is an industrial city many Ukrainians from various provinces of Ukraine settled here, old immigrants as well as newcomers after the Second World War. Among the newcomers was my "zemliak" (someone from the same village or area), Volodymyr Ploskyj (1923-1956). He belonged to SUZhERO. Being a dedicated patriot, while in the hospital suffering from a difficult illness, he directed in his will that after paying the funeral costs the remainder of his estate was to be donated to the publishing fund of SUZhERO. SUZhERO looked after his funeral, for he was a bachelor, and we buried him in the cemetery in Windsor, and put up a fine monument. The SUZhERO foundation published with his donation a book in English, "Mother and Child in the Modern Slave System of the USSR". The author of this book was Marta Chyz.

My activity in the organizations SUZhERO, URDP, ODUM and other constituent organizations was very intense, not because of any particular talent, but because our people had become more and more apathetic. And so from 1959 I held various positions in various organizations. I was president, secretary, and treasurer of the SUZhERO branch in Toronto, and secretary of the URDP branch in Toronto. In 1967, at the 16th convention of SUZhERO which was held in Toronto I was chosen president of the Canadian executive. And again at the 21st convention of SUZhERO which was held in Toronto in May of 1993 I was chosen again as chair of the Central Executive of SUZhERO. On the 11th of May, 1993, already after Ukrainian independence, a joint convention of SUZhERO and the URDP was held. At this convention I was again chosen president of the Central Executive of SUZhERO and president of the National Committee of the URDP. It's important to emphasize that during the 60's a Fellowship of the Supporters of the Ukrainian National

Council existed. For a certain time, on behalf of SUZhERO, I fulfilled the responsibilities of secretary, and in time was chosen as president of this Fellowship. During the 60's as well the "Block of Ukrainian Democratic Organizations" was formed. This organization was led by the engineer Evhen Pasternak from the UNDS.

I represented SUZhERO here for a certain time, and then in 1964 was elected president of this organization, which in this same year was disbanded due to a lack of interest on the part of most of the constituent organizations. All my responsibilities I fulfilled conscientiously, and to the best of my abilities. Later I'll quote the beginning of an article about me by the well-respected author Rostislav Mykolajevich Vasylenko, which was published in the newspaper "Ukrainian News" on December 25th 1994, and in the memoirs of the author "Life with and Without Make-up", which was published by the "RADA" publishing house of Kyiv in 1999. The article was under the title "God Protected Him". I quote:

"In every community organization and institution there are people whose names are followed by a long list of academic accomplishments, honours, etc. They are regarded as 'fathers' of the given institution, the 'horses', so to speak, which pull the community wagon. Let this be so... but in addition to the leading horses, a long and heavy load of community work is pulled by quiet, hardworking, grey oxen, without titles perhaps, but without them this difficult community work would stop, it wouldn't move. One of these quiet, but extraordinarily hard-working and conscientious 'oxen' is Mykola Nykyforovych Pidlysny from Toronto. At the present moment he is the president of the National Committee of the URDP, and President of the Executive of SUZhERO."

On October 20th 1963 a mass demonstration in honour of the 30th anniversary of the Holodomor, which was perpetrated by Moscow in 1932-33, was held. It was organized by the Toronto branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, with the support of all the constituent organizations, including SUZhERO. I was also on this committee. Over the course of several months there were many meetings, and even more sweaty work. Ivan Hladun was chosen as chair of the organizing committee. Mr. Hladun fulfilled his responsibilities famously. It's important to underline that Mr. Hladun was born in Canada. At one time he had belonged to the Communist Party of Canada. I think that this may have been at Canada's initiative, you'd need to talk to someone in the Canadian government to find out. After the 2nd World War, perhaps even earlier, the so-called talented Canadian communists were invited by the Moscow regime to the Soviet Union, and among them was Mr. Hladun. Spending several months in the Soviet Union, Mr. Hladun watched and listened to everything, returned to Canada, and wrote the pamphlet "They Taught Me to Betray". In Canada after World War II many Ukrainian Organizations were formed, among them the League for the Freedom of Ukraine (LFU), about which I'll speak later. Mr. Hladun either belonged to this organization, or was a supporter, perhaps for the same reason he belonged to the Communist party. But he had

no part in the mud-slinging faction within the LFU. He was thoughtful and balanced, and because of this was chosen as the chairman of the organizational committee for the demonstration in honour of the Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932-33. Flyers were printed and distributed at the Ukrainian Churches and organizations in advance. The demonstration was very successful, with a large attendance. The leader of the Canadian Social Credit Party, Mr. Robert Thompson spoke at the demonstration in English. Mr. S. O. Pidhajnyj spoke on behalf of SUZhERO in Ukrainian. Many organizations place wreaths, among them SUZhERO and ODUM.

As I mentioned earlier, I was corresponding with my family since 1946. During this entire time my relatives of course wanted to see me, and for my part I missed them, especially my mother. BUT. I didn't want to fall into the jaws of the devil. Despondent letters came from home saying that my mother wanted at least to see her grandchildren before she died. I thought that perhaps it might be OK to send my wife and children, as she was a foreign citizen with three small children. Sofijka was four months old, Vasyl' was six and Tania was eight. I thought that if they got visas they'd be sure to be OK, for what would they do to foreigners, and small children to boot? Discussing this with my wife, she agreed even though she knew what kind of a voyage this would be with three children to a strange country where, in addition, they spoke a foreign tongue. I found out that there was a man in Toronto who wrote letters to the Soviet consulate in Ottawa, and I turned to him. He was named Nikolai, but I don't remember his last name. He lived on the east side of Toronto. He had some kind of contacts with the workers at the consulate, with whom he often met, if not at home then at least in a hotel. He told me that he was from Leningrad, but his accent was in no wise from Leningrad, perhaps Belarussian, and he had a Belarussian last name. But enough of him. I'd never heard from anyone that he had at any time been an "agitator" in the homeland.

I went to see him one weekend. He wrote out as usual where I was born, where, how, when, and why. It ended up being a full page. I've kept a copy of this request with me to the present day. After some time a letter came from the embassy, saying that my wife and children were permitted to visit my mother in the village of Petrivka, Chernihiv province.

The journey was long and tiresome. Beginning from Toronto, then to Amsterdam, Vienna, and it was necessary to bring with you all the clothes for the children and especially diapers for the four-month-old child, and most importantly dry milk powder. Flying into Kyiv, they were met by my brother Volodymyr. They arrived in Petrivka sometime around midnight. A tire blew along the way, and needed to be changed. For the guests it was an added misfortune after an already long journey. Finally they arrived in the village. All the relatives were waiting for them in spite of the late hour. There was much gladness and many tears of joy. Over the next days relatives and friends constantly visited to look at the "American woman" and welcome her to Ukraine. It was great for the older children, they

played with their friends, ran around the fields, and went to bathe in the lake, to the forest for mushrooms and many other activities in the fresh air.

A funny thing happened – one day they took my wife to the theatre at the Petrivka club. All at once everyone began to shout “PAZHAR, PAZHAR” (Fire! Fire!) and started running out of the theatre. My wife thought they were shouting “Bazaar! Bazaar!, and wondered why people in the middle of the night were running to the Bazaar. Then she saw that somewhere a house was burning, and then understood what PAZHAR meant.

We all know what the roads in the village are like after a rain. And so one day she was crossing the road and got stuck in a puddle. She had to pull out her slippers with her hands, some of the neighbours saw it and later said that the “American woman” had lost her shoes in the puddle. Our village had electricity, but it hadn’t yet come to our house. Right before the arrival of my wife and children electricity was installed in the family home. No one knew why it happened right at this time, perhaps it happened just as planned, or perhaps it was necessary to show the foreigners that they had everything in the USSR. No matter what, it was a big reprieve for the wife and children.

After some time my wife travelled with my brother to Chernihiv and bought a refrigerator, and so everything went as planned. The hospitality of the family and villagers was fabulous. It was time to continue the journey to my wife’s homeland of Greece. There was no direct flight from Kyiv to Greece. My brother again drove my wife and children to the airport in Borispil’. The plane departed for Bulgaria on the 4th of August, 1964. They had to spend one night there, and then left the next day for Greece. Greece was her homeland, her sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews and many acquaintances lived in Athens. The children were able to see the capital of Greece, visited the parks and museums, etc. My wife said that when they arrived in Greece the children attempted to communicate with their relatives using the Ukrainian language, but nothing came of it.

And so, after having visited their relatives, it was time to again get ready for the long journey home to Canada. The plane departed from Athens to Frankfurt on September 5th. In Frankfurt they changed planes for Canada, and after arriving in Montreal changed planes again for Toronto. At last they were home again, arriving in Toronto after the long and tiresome journey. I heard a lot about the life and times in Petrivka, and about their tiring journey.

Organizational life in Toronto did not stop, there were many meetings of SUZhERO, URDP – UDRP and the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, to which I was a delegate from SUZhERO. In 1967, as president of the Central Executive of SUZhERO, with the cooperation of the organizations DOBRUS, ODUM, UNA, the Fellowship in Support of the Ukrainian National Council, and the Church communities, it was decided to organize a celebration in honour of the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian National

Revolution on August 5th & 6th at the “Kyiv” cultural centre close to Toronto for the Ukrainian population of Canada and the USA. The vice president of the Ukrainian National Republic in Exile, Professor Mykola Stepanenko from the USA, was invited as the keynote speaker. Due to good preparation the gathering was successful. This is the same year that Professor John Kolasky published his book (in Ukrainian) entitled “Education in Soviet Ukraine”. He appealed to the Central Executive of SUZhERO, which consisted of the following individuals: Mykola Pidlysn, president; Anton Hurskyj, vice-president; Volodymyr Korzhenivskyj, treasurer; Mykhailo Kuzmenko, secretary; Ivan Pawluk, second vice-president; Vasyl’ Shymko, ideological convenor; Anton Bilotserkivskyj, member at large. Mr. Kolasky requested our help in the publishing of this book, ordering 500 copies, which we did. This book was later translated and published in English as well. Thus we helped in the publication of this book.

A few words about Mr. Kolasky. He was born in Canada, a teacher by profession. He, like Mr. Hladun, belonged to the Communist Party of Canada. He also was invited to the Soviet Union for schooling. Living there for more than a year, Mr. Kolasky had his eyes opened, and recognized the Bolshevik propaganda for what it was. He began to gather material about the real state of education in the Soviet Union and send it through intermediaries back to Canada. And so it happened that his work opened the eyes of many Ukrainian Canadians who had been caught in the net of Communism.

As I had mentioned earlier, the thought I had from my younger years when I was wandering through Europe that I should go to Ukraine to visit my dear mother, family, and friends in my native village. And so at the end of 1967 I decided that no matter what I was going to visit Ukraine if they gave me a visa. It will become evident what happened.

I took this matter to my acquaintance Nikolai, who I mentioned earlier, so that he would write an appeal to the Soviet embassy for a visa. I was a bit scared to go there alone, because anything could happen, and so I consulted with my wife and we decided to go, taking with us our four year old daughter Sofia, and leaving the two older children with our “Kumy” (God-parents) on a farm in Quebec. We figured that if something would happen to me and they’d keep me behind or arrest me there would be someone to defend me in Canada. The plans were go to Greece on the way back to Canada, where I could make the acquaintance of my wife’s family. We began to get ready for the trip. A notice arrived stating that we had received permission to visit Petrivka for two months. We had to go to the embassy to get our visas. After a couple of days we went to the embassy. It wasn’t a big deal, for they had my biography and application form, they just didn’t have the information about my activity in Ukrainian organizations.

Returning back to Toronto we got ready, because we had to take the children with us, drop them off to the kumy Maria and Ivan Bondarenko. They had a little farm in the northern part of Quebec, near Benice, about 10 kilometres from the state of Vermont in

the USA. Ivan was from the Donbas region of Ukraine, his wife was from Bukovyna. They had two children. The son was named Peter and the daughter Helen, they were almost the same age as our children, so they had someone to play with. They were very kind people, and joyfully agreed to take care of our children. Thanking them, we then went back home to prepare for the long journey to my native land. And so there we were, at the airport in Toronto with bags in hand, waiting for the plane flight to Amsterdam (Holland).

The plane left for Amsterdam on the 6th of July. The next morning we were in Amsterdam without any problem. We waited for the plane to Vienna (Austria). When they checked the tickets we were told there wasn't room on the plane. I asked why? They said that it was necessary to confirm the ticket in advance. How could we know about this as this was the first time I'd traveled by plane? So they put my wife and child in the plane where they should have been, and put me in first class. So I made out on the deal. They served us champagne and various luxury foods.

And so we were in Vienna. The plane to Kyiv departed early on the next day. We went to a hotel not far from the airport which had been arranged in advance. The next day we were at the airport. I changed dollars for rubles, and we checked out the stores. There were a number of Ukrainians at this airport who also were waiting for the plane to Kyiv. Somehow I met a Ukrainian, I don't exactly remember his name, it ended with "skyj", like Kowalskyj, or something like that. He told me he lived in Cleveland, USA, and that he was going to visit his family, who lived in Poland. I don't know why he flew through Kyiv, and not through Poland. It's an interesting thing with our people. You don't even get on to the plane and they begin to "chtokat' & kakat" (i.e., speak Russian), but enough of them. Arriving in Kyiv it was necessary to wait for the document check and baggage. The weather was brutally hot. There was no air conditioning, we had to suffer. At the customs desk where they checked out all the documents there stood two men in uniform and they checked out the passengers. It's very probable that they were KGB agents. I noticed that one of them moved his head in my direction. Our turn came. We showed our passports. They examined them, stamped them and examined our baggage. It was evident that outside the doors people were standing, waiting for their family and friends. I recognized my brother and my brother-in-law Alexander Savost in the crowd.

Greeting my brother and brother-in-law we cried after our 25 year separation. We immediately sat down not far away from the exit on the grass and had a bite to eat. We got into a car, a "Volga", and got on the road.

The journey to the village was long (more than 200 kilometres), and it took a fair amount of time to get to Petrivka. We stopped once to get some cold water, for as I said it was very hot, and there was no air conditioning in the car. We finally arrived at the long awaited Petrivka late at night. Even though it was late the family waited up for us, and everyone was watching to road to see if some car wasn't coming. The meeting with my

mother and relatives was very emotional, simply indescribable. How many tears of joy were shed, that after a 25 year separation at last the prodigal son had returned home, as they sing in the song “prodigal son, prodigal son, you risked your soul in a foreign land”. But I wasn’t a prodigal son in freedom, rather in bondage. We talked till dawn. We had barely managed to sleep a bit when the relatives and friends came by to see the “Americans”, and ask about life and times in Canada.

They had already told us in Toronto that within three days of arrival we had to register at the county centre and give up our passports, and that we would receive them back before our departure. I had made plans with my brother to go to the county centre of Shchors on the 2nd day. Looking over my passport before we left for Shchors I noticed that in my passport there was a strange visa stuck in there from the man who was going to Poland who I met in Vienna. I was very surprised by this. How did this visa get into my passport? I consulted with my wife – what should we do? I was of the mind that we should throw it away and not pay any attention. My wife said that maybe it was better to take it with me to Shchors to the passport department where we would be registered. She said that maybe it wasn’t a mistake, that maybe it was put there on purpose, for some end. I listened to my wife and took the visa with me.

It was necessary to travel by train, because there were only one or two cars in Petrivka. The rail station was about 3 kilometres from the village. The train ran twice a day, I think, from Gomel’ in Belarus to Bakhmach in the Chernihiv province, and stopped at all the smaller stations including Kamka. The distance was 15 kilometres. Arriving in Shchors we saw beggars at the exit from the train begging, among them veterans of the 2nd World War, invalids. The poverty of the population hit you in the eyes – even handicapped veterans had to beg to live.

We went to the passport desk, and said who we were and what we were there for. There were many people there, but they didn’t make us stand in line. A superior from the passport division had come up from Chernihiv especially for this, I believe his name was Marchenko or something like that. He invited me into his office and began to question me about how I had ended up in Canada, where I worked, which organizations I belonged to, and much else. He questioned me in Russian, and I answered him in Ukrainian. He then told me that he also spoke Ukrainian. I told him that there were many Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in Canada, and I belonged to one in Toronto. I said that there were several Ukrainian newspapers there, among them the non-partisan “Free Word” which I subscribed to. I didn’t mention “Ukrainian News”, the journal “New Day” or “Young Ukraine”. I obviously didn’t mention the URDP, SUZhERO or ODUM, nor did I tell him why I didn’t return to the “*rodina*”. I said that I wanted to see the world. I told him that there was a large Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and the USA, that in addition to the churches there were Ukrainian banks, heritage and Sunday schools, art clubs, and that we had our own members of Parliament and much else about the diaspora.

Now it was time to talk about the visa that had appeared in my passport. He came down on me, asking why the visa was in my passport, how long I knew the man, how I had met him, where he lived. Then he said that the other man couldn't go to Poland, for his visa was with me. He asked a lot of other "provocative" kinds of questions. I said that I met him in Vienna, that I didn't know him before that. As to how his visa got into my passport, it would be best to ask the people who examined the passports at the airport. As to his not being able to get to Poland I said the matter was easy to fix – he had only to go to the Polish embassy, and for a few dollars they would issue him a new visa. I said this because I knew that there was a Polish embassy in Kyiv. He kept me for a long time because of this visa, so long that my brother had to get me out, knocking on the door of the office and saying that it was time to catch the train or we would be late. The passport officer was angry, but said to go, only to leave the passports, and in closing said we'd be speaking again. And so, for the time being, I took my leave of him.

I told all this to my brother, he said such a thing couldn't happen, but ultimately couldn't really say anything. We arrived in Petrivka, and the relatives naturally were curious about everything that happened. I told them what happened. Every day either someone visited us, or we went to visit someone. The people were very sincere and good-hearted, they offered the best possible hospitality. Everyone was primarily interested in where I worked, how much I worked, was it necessary to pay for school, or the doctor, etc. They also asked if it were possible to correspond, and about various daily matters. I told them about everything without exaggeration.

One day a man came to the house, and introduced himself as the head of the *kolhosp* (collective farm) from the village of Khrypivka, that he was named such-and-such, but I don't remember his name. Here I was on my guard, for the village he mentioned, Khrypivka, was about 9 kilometres from our village. Levko Lukianenko had been born in that village. He asked about everything, then asked if I knew about Lukianenko. I answered that I knew about Lukianenko only from the press, and that he had been sentenced to 25 years of forced labour and had been exiled to Siberia. That I had once sent a letter to Lukianenko's father I didn't mention. He didn't remain with us long, and quickly departed.

In Soviet times the leaders simply were afraid to meet with foreigners, even in our Petrivka. There was a distillery in our village, and my brother worked there. The director of the factory was a former pilot from the neighbouring county. I had somehow met with him at my brother-in-law, Alexander Savosta's, place. Savosta had served in the second World War, was wounded at the front and after arriving home had been decorated. He was an invalid, and got about on crutches. The Soviet authorities had given him a car as an invalid from the Great Patriotic War and a dedicated communist. Ranking leaders from the county and area often visited him. He wasn't only the director of the factory but at the

same time the leader of the Labour Union of the workers of the factory. During a conversation he invited me to a meeting of the labour union. I asked him if it would be OK to talk about the labour unions in Canada. The answer was no. But in any case he invited me to his house afterwards, late at night.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, my brother and I visited him in his luxurious house. He told me how he had served in Vienna for two years, we talked about life and living in Ukraine and the western countries, he understood things, and I would say that he was a Ukrainian patriot. Another time, while visiting my brother-in-law, there was a pond not far away from his place and I decided to go catch some fish. At that very time some higher-ups were visiting him from the county seat. Finding out who I was they quickly disappeared, so as not to meet with me.

My *zemliak* (someone from the same area), Vitalij Jarovyj, who was from Shchors, lived in Toronto. Vitalij had given me the address of his cousin and asked me to visit him. I had arranged this by correspondence. His cousin was named Fedia. He served in the militia and, having a motorcycle, came to visit us late at night so that no one would hear or see that he was visiting us. The government had so frightened the people that they were terrified of meeting foreigners, so that they wouldn't fall under suspicion.

One time my brother-in-law said that someone had come from Chernihiv, asking him to follow me around. He didn't agree to do this, and told me to watch out. So I didn't find out who was supposed to be watching me. I would guess that it was the same one who said that he was from Khrypivka. Who knew who he was and where he was from?

My travelling in Ukraine was limited. I was only permitted to go to the county seat of Shchors. I wanted to visit family in Horodnia, this was in the Petrivka county, as well as the city of Chernihiv which I had never seen. They told me to write a request, which I did. After a short time they informed me that I could go to Chernihiv, but not to Horodnia. Near Horodnia there was a village called Zhuravok, where a military airport was located where they trained pilots from all over Eastern Europe to fly the MIG fighters. The planes flew day and night over the village and the surrounding area. In the village I met several friends, one-time schoolmates as well as former "ostarbeitors", among them Uliana Tsaruk, who had been in the city of Korbach. I had gone to their camp, at great risk, somewhere at the beginning of 1943. I had also been imprisoned there in 1944 during my escape from the farmer with the hope of getting to France where the allies had landed and opened the western front, or to Switzerland, which I mentioned earlier. Several former "ostarbeitors" privately told me, that they regretted that they had not remained in the west. One time I was invited to the home of the Hajdamaky family as a guest. Their son Mykola Hajdamaka had also been taken to Germany, and I had been imprisoned with him in Korbach. His father was also a prisoner-of-war in Germany. Mykola wasn't home, he was somewhere in Russia. We talked about this and that, and his father publicly stated that he, too, regretted

that he returned home. Because of this his son very disrespectfully kicked him out on the street. Thus it was in our poor Ukraine. As it's written in the Bible, "brother will be against brother".

The time was passing quickly, and there wasn't enough opportunity to visit as much as we would have liked. We still had to go to Chernihiv to see the city, and to visit a friend from the village, Luba Simakova. There was one bus a day from Petrivka to Chernihiv, so it wasn't a problem to get there. We left together, my, my wife, the child, and my brother Volodya. Arriving in Chernihiv, we went first to a hotel to get a room for the night. They told us that all the rooms were taken, perhaps they were holding rooms for some higher-ups, but there were none for the peasants. For my part I didn't say I was from Canada, in which case I think they would have definitely found room for us. But the devil take them. We found Luba, and she was surprised by her unexpected guests from the village. She received us warmly as dear guests and suggested that we stay overnight at her place. She had a two-room apartment. Even though it was tight, we stayed with our own. Luba was an educated woman. It was pleasant to converse with her on various topics. In the morning we went out to see the city.

Chernihiv looked very lovely, everything was green. We stood on the walls where the cannons were placed, from which vantage we took in a beautiful panorama of the valley of the Desna river. We visited the hill with the memorial to Kotsiubinskyj, as well as several monasteries and much else. The time came to get the bus back home. They were selling melons not far from the bus station. The weather was very hot, and we bought a melon. Soon a heavy rain began to fall. In order not to get wet I stood somewhere under the overhang of a roof. There were several people here, and to my amazement my acquaintance, the head of the *kolkhoz* from Khrypivka ran over. I asked what he was doing in Chernihiv, he said he was there on business, and at that we parted. I wondered at the coincidence. Maybe he was one of those who was supposed to be following me. Anyway, we got on the bus and arrived back home without trouble.

And again we go out visiting. The time flew by so quickly that it was already time to get ready to return home to the children we had left in Quebec with our *kumy*, who we were missing. After a short time we were informed that we could visit our relatives in Horodnia, which we did. There was one week left of my visit to the village. Today my cousin on my mother's side, Sashko Derkach, invited us for dinner. The very same day my brother-in-law, Alexander Savosta, came to see me, which I mentioned earlier. He asked me to go to a concert with him.

This concert was performed by some ensemble from Chernihiv. I told him that my wife and I had already agreed to go to Sashko's place for dinner. He tried to convince me to go to the concert, and said that my wife could go to dinner, and that I could join her later. Finally I agreed. Evening having come, we went to the club. I noticed that few

people had gathered at the club. I asked why there were so few people. He answered that it appeared that one of the artists had become ill on the way, and so the concert wouldn't take place. It was hard to believe such an answer. He said that in place of the concert there would be a presentation about education in the Chernihiv province, and for this some minister of education of the Chernihiv province whose name I don't remember had made a special trip out, and they asked me to remain and listen to the talk. Out of respect I agreed. The speaker began his speech from the revolution, he compared the number of students and schools there were before the revolution and after the revolution, and said that only in the regions of Ukrainian bordering Russia was the education conducted in the Russian language, as well as in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine, due to mixed marriages. To my mind his speech was based on a reaction to John Kolasky's book "Education in Soviet Ukraine", otherwise I don't know why he would have chosen this theme. The speech went on for more than an hour and people began to be bored. At the end he asked if there were any questions.

There were almost 30 people present, and no one had any questions. Those present gave a sigh of relief and began to return to their homes. The head of the *kolhosp*, Doroshenko, then invited guests to his house, among them there were the two from Chernihiv, two from Shchors, and my brother and me. Seeing that it was already too late to go visit my cousin, I decided to go to the house of the head of the *kolhosp*. His wife had everything ready, there were many appetizers, as well as something to drink with the appetizers. Conversation began. They asked me to say something. I told them that I had several questions, could I ask them? "Yes", they said, "please do". I told them that their press wasn't objective. I asked the speaker "tell me please, how many Russians live in Ukraine and how many Ukrainians live in Russia?" He said that there were more or less 9 million Russians living in Ukraine, and about 5 million Ukrainians living in Russia. "Good", I said, "the statistics are more or less correct".

Next question. "Tell me, please, how many Russian schools and newspapers there are in Ukraine, and how many Ukrainian schools and newspapers there are in Russia?" This question was like a blunt scythe over his fingers in the presence of his buddies. Here he began to worm his way out, saying that because of mixed marriages it was the wish of the parents that there be Russian schools, but he didn't say how many, and many Russian newspapers as well. Regarding Ukrainian schools and newspapers he couldn't answer anything. He "mewed" as he was able, and began to change the subject. But then his colleague who he had come with addressed him by his patronymic and said that he hadn't answered my question. The speaker gave him an angry look and said that he didn't have the statistics with him, and that I should come to see him in Chernihiv and he'd show me the statistics. It was well known to everyone that in all of Russia there was not even one Ukrainian school or Ukrainian newspaper. People were even afraid to check Ukrainian books out of the library, so as not to end up on a list of suspicious individuals. Even in Ukraine government workers were afraid to speak their native Ukrainian language because

everyone still remembered the times of the *Yezhovshchyna* and *Beria* (i.e. the mass executions in the Soviet Union during the 30's, 40's, and 50's).

I drew their attention to the fact that not all of the works of Shevchenko were published in full. For example, the poem "The Desecrated Grave" wasn't included. I didn't know at the time that it had been forbidden sometime after 1956. At this, Mr. Doroshenko brought me a copy of the Kobzar and showed me that the poem had been included. I spoke to them about the Soviet censors, even about the late notice about the earthquake in Tashkent. There was also lots of talk about life and society in Canada and much else. At the end I told them that in a couple of days I would be in Kyiv and would try to meet with O. Honchar.

O. Honchar was the head of the writer's union of Ukraine. He wrote the book "Sobor". This book didn't please the authorities, because it was written out of love for Ukraine, and it was burned in Kharkiv. If I met with Mr. Honchar I was going to tell him not to worry, because his book had been re-published in New York (USA), and Toronto (Canada). It was late when we returned home, everyone was asleep. The next day all the relatives were getting together for the fare-well supper. Suddenly a messenger from the village council showed up with a note, that on our way to Kyiv we had to go to Chernihiv to the passport office. I froze at this news, and said to some of those present that they don't even give a person the chance to finish up their stay in peace. But there was no way around it, and as they say at home, "throughout the world it's the same for a grandmother's son". The farewell party ended very late, with people coming and going the entire time. There were many tears and hugs; many sad songs were sung, and sung so loud that they could be heard on the next street.

Early the next day a car came for us, we said goodbye to our closest relatives, got in the car and went to Chernihiv. At home they had prepared a whole basket of various foods, because the plan was to be in Kyiv together as well. Mother had decided to accompany us to Kyiv and return home in the same car with Volodya. Driving to Kyiv I noticed that a car was following us. Arriving in Chernihiv, this car pulled up beside us and I recognized the man who had given the speech in Petrivka. I waved to him, but he only looked at me and quickly took off.

We arrived at the address of the passport office. We entered, asked if we could see the supervisor, and told them our name. I didn't even have time to take a look around when I saw the supervisor quickly coming down the stairs. Without any ceremony he asked whose car it was. I told him. He went out onto the street and said that my mother and brother should remain there, and he drove me, my wife, and the child in the *kolkosp* automobile somewhere, but didn't tell us where we were going. We arrived at a grey two or three story building, I don't remember for sure. Then he said that my wife and child should remain in the car, and told me to follow him. We entered the building, and walked

down a grey corridor on the second floor to some doors where a guard stood, and he practically pushed the guard out of the way when entering the room. I looked around. The room was large, with a table set up in the form of a “T”, behind it sat two men in military uniforms with gold or red epaulettes, next to them some kind of secretaries, and on the sides some people sat on benches. Photographers and journalists were present. Later I learned that the people sitting on the benches were some kind of witnesses, who didn’t even look me in the eye.

They asked me to sit. Photographs were taken. Then one of those presiding pulled out a folder of documents and began to read a list of accusations in the Russian language. It sounded more or less like this: “I, Mykola Pidlysny, born in the village of Petrivka, Shchors county, Chernihiv province, a citizen of Canada who came to visit relatives in Petrivka, was engaged in anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and my fellow-villagers were upset with my words and so appealed to the authorities to cause me to cease and desist”. After he finished reading this document he asked that I sign the document, where it was also noted that I must leave the Soviet Union immediately. They brought the document for my signature, and the cameras again began to flash. I stood, raised my hand, and asked if I could have a word. They said yes. I then said that I didn’t understand anything of what they had read. They then pulled out another document, this time in Ukrainian, and read me the same thing. Again they brought the document for my signature, and again I stood and asked to speak. The answer was yes, but this time given in an angry tone.

I wanted to explain to them that I had not engaged in any propaganda, that I answered the questions of my fellow villagers about Canada as sincerely as they had asked them of me. I then told them that the flight to Romania was departing in two days. Then one of the judges, or whatever he was, said “sign, and then we’ll talk about the flight”. Seeing that I couldn’t win, I signed. Then he told me that at 10 PM the very same evening a train was leaving for Romania and that I would be on it. Did I understand? I said “yes”. Returning to the car, I told my wife what happened. She couldn’t believe it, and asked what next? I said that we would leave for Romania that night, and then by plane go to Turkey, and from there to her homeland of Greece. Later I told my brother about my meeting with the authorities. His face went pale – pale, because he surely knew that he would be interrogated about me. I told my elderly mother that we wouldn’t be remaining in Kyiv, but that we would be returning home to Canada, to the children we had left there. “Good, son”, she said, “don’t forget about your children”, and she wished us a safe journey.

And so we were in Kyiv, “Golden-domed” Kyiv, which I had never visited. We set ourselves up in the waiting room of the station, ate something, and rested. We still had to wait 5 hours for the train. And so I asked my brother to go on the subway to the Khreshchatyk. We left my wife and child with the driver. We arrived at the square, there were many people there, everyone was dressed nicely, especially the girls, the most beautiful

in the whole world.

I looked for a place to change money, but it was late and the banks were closed. We went back. Our passengers had rested a bit. We had to buy tickets for the train. There were a lot of people. I began to worry that we wouldn't make it to the wicket. People said that international tickets had to be purchased at another place. Here there was almost no one. After about a half-hour we went to the platform. I had a bag over one shoulder, on the other a camera, and suitcases in both hands. I was standing back about 5 metres from the train, when some good-looking girl looks me in the eyes and asks in Ukrainian if she can help me with the bags. I thanked her and said no, we were close to the train. I placed the bags on the ground and looked around to see the girl, but she was gone without a trace. She was there and then disappeared. I began to think about this – a girl comes up to me, a stranger, looks me in the eye, and speaks to me in Ukrainian – and in Kyiv to boot! I understood that they had assigned a “guardian angel” from the KGB to me in Chernihiv, who was to follow me till I departed, and that there would be another one on the train.

And so it was. I again said goodbye to my mother and brother, gave my mother the basket with the food, saying that I would buy something to eat on the train. The train departed, I looked out the window and waved. My mother stood motionless, like a statue, without tears in her eyes, for they were already cried-out, or perhaps she was glad that I was returning home to my children. This was the last time I saw my mother.

The train departed, but for some unknown reason it made many station stops. In the morning, after the sun came up, we saw various echelons of military equipment and soldiers, who were going west. We didn't know anything about what was happening in the world. There were no newspapers nor radio, and it wasn't possible to learn from anyone what was going on. I came to the conclusion that military maneuvers were taking place somewhere. At last we arrived in Mukachev, and our half-empty train, comprised of about 15 cars, stopped for a while. There were perhaps 8 coupes in each car. To our surprise, a character entered our coupe, apparently a fellow-traveler. We talked along the way. I asked where he was going. He said to Bulgaria, that he apparently had lived there and was going back for a visit. I asked where he worked, and he said he was a taxi driver in Odessa.

The town of Ungheni is at the Romanian border with Moldavia. It took us almost a day to get there. We were hungry, because I had left the food in Kyiv with my mother, saying that we would buy something on the train. But it didn't work out as planned – there was nothing to buy on the train, only tea, and that for rubles which I didn't have, as I had given all my rubles to my brother. We had to suffer. So when we arrived in Ungheni I ran out quickly to change money and buy something to eat. To my surprise, when I entered the office there was my traveling companion! I said to him “faster, because the train is leaving”. But he lamented that he forgot his visa in Mukachev and so was going back for his visa. I remembered the warning of my wife, who said “be careful, Mykola, and don't

say much, because you don't know who he is". And she had a point.

Yet on the train I threw away the letters which my *zemliaky* had given to me to pass on to their relatives. The train was waiting when I returned with my purchases. Then a conductor entered our coupe. He asked where we were going. I said to Romania. I showed him my passport. He took it, and asked if I had rubles. I said yes, I had just changed money, and he said that it was illegal to take rubles out of the Soviet Union. He took them with him, took my camera, and then asked what I had in my shirt pocket. I said I took some heads of wheat as a memento, and some earth to sprinkle on my grave when I die. He didn't say anything, and not inspecting anything else, left. After a short time he brought everything back and gave me a receipt for the rubles, and that when I came back to Ukraine I could go to a bank and they would return the rubles. At this the customs inspection was ended. The train departed, near the station there was a little stream, and crossing the bridge, we were in Romania.

Yet before the bridge the border guards who were in every car began jumping around, making sure that no one climbed on during the border crossing. Not far from the border on the Romanian side at a small station the train stopped and there was a document inspection. When they came to us I showed them my passport, and they asked "Where's the visa?" I said that we didn't have one. The officer took our passports and after a while the train began to move. After a short time they brought our passports, to which a seal had been affixed, and said we had to pay, I don't remember how much. I said that we didn't have Romanian money. The Romanian waved his hand and said "OK", and "bon voyage" in French.

We arrived in Bucharest late at night. The city greeted us with a driving rain, and we had to find shelter somewhere and rest after the tiring journey. Me took a taxi and drove to a hotel located almost right next to the station. If we had known this we could have gone on foot. We didn't have either Romanian money or smaller denomination dollars, and so I gave the taxi driver ten dollars. He didn't have any change, and so we parted. While registering at the hotel it was necessary to leave our passports, and upon departure they would be returned. We had a good rest, and the next day we had breakfast and went to look at the city.

Then again to the airport. We waited for a plane to Turkey. A plane load of tourists from France arrived at this time, and among them was a group of French students. They unfurled a French flag in the waiting room and began to sing La Marseillaise. They were quickly surrounded and led somewhere, perhaps back to the plane and sent back to France. We got on our plane and were on our way to Turkey, to Constantinople (Istanbul), a city well-known from the history of Ukraine in the Kozak era. Of course no one was waiting for us here. We took a taxi and told the drive to take us to the hotel. Arriving at the hotel, we had to register. We didn't have a room reserved in advance. The clerk shook his head

and said to wait. A room was found after a while, and we rested with satisfaction. After a short while a couple of tourists arrived, he and Englishman and she a Turk. They asked about a room and were told that all the rooms were taken. The man then raised such a fuss, threatening to sue the hotel because they didn't keep the room which he had reserved yet from England for him. I don't know how the matter ended. I think that the room we got was actually the one he had reserved. We had two days to sight-see in Constantinople.

We visited the Church of St. Sophia, a unique architectural monument; were on the shore of the Bosphorus which divides Europe from Asia; we visited the bazaar, perhaps the largest covered bazaar in the world; and many historical places in the city. And again it was time to depart. Waiting for the plane at the airport, I heard my name through the loudspeakers, asking that I appear at such-and-such place. They asked if a young boy who was flying to Greece could sit next to my wife, and I would be moved to first class. I said "why not? I had expected some kind of trouble. Arriving in Greece we were met by my wife's family. We got into a taxi and drove to Athens, to my wife's sister's place.

Here again were the hugs, the tears of joy at meeting their sister after many years of separation from the family. Here, as in Ukraine, we went to visit all the relatives. Now my wife was the translator and I was the one who didn't know the language. In Athens there's a lot to see if you have the time and the inclination. We went to many historical places such as the Acropolis, Parthenon, museums parks, and many other places. We went swimming in the sea – in short, we relaxed in both body and soul, because there was nothing unpleasant waiting for us, as had been in Ukraine – occupied, poor Ukraine.

The day of our departure arrived, and we bade farewell to my wife's relatives. We were again on a plane, changed planes in Frankfurt, Germany, and on to Montreal in Canada. Canada at last! Our *kum* (children's God-father) met us at the airport, Tania's God-father, Jakiv Momot. It was a greatly desired assistance to us for him to take us to the farm, to our children. Again hugs and tears of joy when meeting the children, after an almost two-month separation. We sat for a long time and talked about the news, the *kumy* told us about what the children had done, we talked about our odyssey, and Glory to God that all had ended well. The *kumy* took us to the airport in Montreal, we again thanked them, for their kindness and we departed, getting on the plane for the last leg of our journey. Home at last! As they say in Canada, "Home, sweet home!" There's no place like home. At home everything was fine, only the garden was overgrown, and we had to cut the grass.

The next day the children were playing outside, for they had missed their friends. We sat on the telephone and found out what had happened in our community and in Toronto. We rested a couple of days and then had to get ready to return to work. One of our *zemliachky* (woman from the same region) who lived in Toronto had gone to visit the relatives of her husband in Chernihiv. While there, she had picked up for me a copy of the Chernihiv newspaper "Desnianska Pravda" of August 22nd 1968, which included an article

about me entitled “Who Are You, Mister Pidlysny”, as well as “An instructive story about how her erstwhile son, Mykola Pidlysny, came to Ukraine and how he left”. I forwarded this article for inclusion in the newspaper “The Free Word” which was published in Toronto, along with ”Ukrainian News”, which was published in Germany, as well as “The New Day”, which was published in Toronto and edited by Petro Volyniak, and which he published in November of 1968. For myself, I included an article written by Mr. Volyniak entitled “In the Backwaters of an Unchanged Republic. . .”.

These articles struck our “hurrah” – patriots in a painful place. There was more gall and hatred in the community of the “League for the Freedom of Ukraine” (SVU) than any other organization, with the exception, perhaps, of the Communists. They crawled out of their skin in order to blacken the name of the URDP and SUZhERO, and their leadership Iv. Pav. Bahryanyj, Petro Volyniak, and many others, among them me. One day my friend Mykola Savur called me, and said that in the newspaper “Canadian Farmer” an unflattering article had appeared about me. I thanked him for the information and went to get a copy of this paper. In the weekly “Canadian Farmer” of February 13th, 1971, during the plenary session of the SVU, slanderous comments had appeared against all the organizations which did not share their views, among them URDP, SUZhERO, DOBRUS, etc., and they mentioned me. I quote: “For example, Pidlysny, the head of SUZhERO/Victims of the Russian Terror, and a member of the URDP in Canada (in Toronto), at the Plenary session of the Central Committee of the SVU, was shown to be active as a Soviet agent within the Ukrainian immigrant community. This head of the “victims of the Russian Terror: together with his wife went to visit his relatives in Ukraine. He was banqueted for a whole month, then returned to Canada and spreads the lie that he was “expelled” from Ukraine for “anti-Soviet agitation”. He even displays an excerpt from a Chernihiv newspaper, where an article about him was published. Among other things this excerpt was brought to him from Ukraine by another “tourist”. One “nationalistic” newspaper in Toronto, to whom Pidlysny passed on the aforementioned excerpt, published this falsification by the agent. Strange that the thought didn’t somehow come into the head of the editor the following “idea”: How did it happen, that the head of an anti-communist organization had the boldness, together with his wife, to go right into the jaws of his enemy?” (end of quote).

In order to guard my own honour, and the honour of the organizations where I was actively involved, I took the slanderers to court. The absence of any effective reaction on the part of the wider community had formed in the directors of the “Canadian Farmer” a feeling of “untouchability”, that they couldn’t be punished for their slander and provocations. And so I consulted with the law firm Fasken and Calvin, where a notice to the owner of the Canadian Farmer – Mr. Charles E. Doyasek in Winnipeg – was prepared, regarding the moral and financial damage which had been done to me, in the amount of ninety thousand dollars. This notice was sent in March of 1971, with the condition that the trial would take place in Toronto. The law firm representing the Canadian Farmer, Pitblado, Hoskin and Company, contacted my lawyer, P. Y. Hrin on May 27th 1971 with a

proposition to settle out of court. They proposed their conditions, which my lawyer informed me of, specifically: a) The Canadian Farmer would prepare an apology for the article in the Canadian Farmer, b) The Canadian Farmer would publish the two articles which had been published about me in the paper “The New Day”, specifically “In the Backwaters of an Unchanged Republic” and the article from “Desnianska Pravda” – “Who are you, Mr. Pidlysny”, c) the Canadian Farmer would cover the \$600 cost for my lawyer, and d) the Canadian Farmer would pay me \$100 for what I had suffered. Thinking over this court matter from the time it had been submitted to the judiciary, I didn’t see any reason to continue with the case against the Canadian Farmer, and told my lawyer to stop the court case against the Canadian Farmer after they had apologized and published the two articles.

Insofar as the articles were long, the Canadian Farmer asked if it would be OK to publish them in two parts, to which I agreed. On the 30th of August, 1971, the apology was published as follows: “From the Publishers and Editors of the Canadian Farmer. In the published article, which appeared in the February 13th, 1971 issue of the Canadian Farmer, there were certain statements from which it was possible to come to the conclusion that Mykola Pidlysny, the former president of the SUZhERO (Union of Ukrainians/Victims of the Russian Occupation) was an agent of Moscow or a Communist sympathizer. It was not the intention of the Canadian Farmer, its publishers, or the editor to accuse anyone of something of this nature. The Canadian Farmer, its publisher and editor apologize for all the trouble which this article caused for Mr. Pidlysny. After this the article “Who are you, Mr. Pidlysny” appeared from the “Desnianska Pravda”, Chernihiv Province newspaper of 22 August 1968. A second article from the journal “The New Day” of November, 1968, written by Petro Volyniak, was published in the next issue of the Canadian Farmer.

At this the matter of the Canadian Farmer was finished to my great satisfaction, and to the even greater chagrin of the SVU adherents. They were simply rabid in their vengefulness towards me and our organizations, but now didn’t have the opportunity to make use of the large subscription base of the Canadian Farmer, which in time stopped publication, and which, I think, was sold to the Ukrainian weekly “Ukrainian Voice”, which also was published out of Winnipeg.

The campaign against me did not stop. And so, in the Information Bulletin of the SVU number 1/32 published in New York in 1972 again vile slander was published against all of us, and especially against me, on five typewritten pages above the signature of the “Central Administration of the League for the Freedom of Ukraine, New York, March, 1972”. These slanders I simply ignored. As they say, “don’t beat the dead, the grave mound will become level”. When I.P. Bahryanyj wrote the dogs howled, in other words, we were moving forward.

The Matter of Levko Hryhorievich Lukianenko

Regarding Lukianenko I had read in the press yet during the 60's. In the Ukrainian News of the 8 – 15 of January 1978 an article by L. Lukianenko entitled "A Christmas Appeal to the Dedicated Atheists" appeared, as well as another article in the Russian newspaper from New York, the "New Russian Word" on January 12th, 1979, entitled "The Fate of Levko Lukianenko", written by Nadia Lukianenko. These articles, as well as many others, drove me to help the Lukianenko family in some way. To find out his family situation I wrote letters to his father Gregory, his brother Alexander, his wife Nadia, to General Grigorenko, to Oksana Meshka, but didn't receive even one reply. Without concern for this, I founded the "Committee for the Assistance of the Lukianenko Family" in 1978. Members of this committee included Mykola Pidlysny, Ivan Kucheriavenko, Mykola Valer, Volodymyr Yakovyshchenko, Vasyl' Zhurakivskyj, and Hryhoryj Moroz. The hope that we would someday meet the Lukianenko's didn't leave me.

During the course of the next 10 years I organized and planned the "Chernihiv Embroidered Evening Party". For the last three years the entire income from this event was earmarked for the help of the Lukianenko family. In addition to this there were collections during various occasions, and we circulated appeals for support of the Lukianenko family. No matter how much we tried, during this entire time we weren't successful in making contact with the Lukianenko family. The money was kept in the bank until such a time as we would have direct contact with the family or with Mr. Lukianenko himself.

1988 came. News came about Mr. Lukianenko have been freed from exile. And so at the beginning of 1989 we heard that Lukianenko was in Paris (France) as a delegate from the Helsinki group, and was staying with Leonid Pliushch, who had come to France much earlier. Having the telephone to Mr. Pliushch, I immediately contacted Mr. Lukianenko. And so on the 29th of January 1989 Mr. Mykola Moroz and I sent the money which had been sitting in the Ukrainian Credit Union Soyuz in the amount of \$3097.50 to him, for who knew if there would be another opportunity to be in such close contact with him again.

I waited a long time for a reply regarding the reception of the money order. I sent a letter about this to an address I knew in the town of Sednev, Chernihiv province. I received a letter from Mr. Lukianenko dated September 12th, 1989. He wrote this:

"My dearest benefactor Mykola! Please accept my sincere greeting from Sednev. Yesterday I returned from Kyiv from an organizing conference of RUKh (National Movement of Ukraine) regarding *perestroika*. Here I found your letter waiting for me. Truly, I am somewhat surprised. Following our telephone conversation, after a short time I received your very generous gift. I then travelled to England. From England I sent you a card of thanks. They assured me that the card wouldn't be lost in the mail, and I had

thought that you already knew that the gift had been delivered to the addressee. I see now that this wasn't the case. Well, what has happened has happened. I thank you again. I used the money in ways which were beneficial and for me, and for the movement. What the result will be, I will write to you when everything happens. During the organizational conference of RUKh a journalist from Canada was present, Chrystia F(last name unclear), a Ukrainian. She undoubtedly will inform the Ukrainians in Canada about the great celebration of the re-awakening of the Ukrainian people in Kyiv on September 8 – 10th. I have not known a more joyful day in my entire life. It's too bad that you weren't present at this celebration. Obviously not all of Ukraine, but only her more nationally conscious citizens took part, but what a clear witness to the unified feeling of the need to stand on our own two feet!! At the end we sang a wonderful song: 'And we will raise that red kalyna. . .', and then the hymn 'Ukraine Has Not Yet Died'. Openly, loudly, in full voice, sung by 1,500 people. On this day we experienced a great uplifting of the national spirit. It's waves must flow out from Kyiv to the entire Ukrainian land and lift up our entire nation. May God so grant! Good health to you. I greet your family. 'Let us be!' L. Lukianenko".

On the 5th anniversary of the Chornobyl' disaster in Ukraine which was held in the largest hall in Toronto, Maple Leaf Gardens, in April of 1991, the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC) invited Levko Lukianenko to be the keynote speaker. There were approximately 15,000 people present. Toronto had never seen such a mass of Ukrainian people together, and then next day, at one of the receptions, I had the opportunity to make a closer acquaintanceship with Mr. Lukianenko. After the declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1991 Levko Lukianenko was named the first Ukrainian ambassador to Canada by president L. Kravchuk. In 1992 the Ukrainian embassy celebrated the first anniversary of the independence of Ukraine on a Ukrainian tourist vessel, the "Gruzia", which at this time was docked in the port of Montreal. I had the great honour of being invited together with my wife to this great solemnity, which we attended and which I will never forget. In 1992 the UCC organized a gigantic banquet in honour of the first ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, Levko Lukianenko, which was attended by many Canadian politicians. I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Lukianenko at this time. In this same year of 1992 I decided to visit my native village and relatives, in a free and independent Ukrainian state, this time without any "adventures". A journalist came from the county seat of Shchors at one point, and interviewed me. This interview was published in the county newspaper "The Ray of October" on June 24th, 1992, under the title "I Ask My Sister for an Embroidered Towel". While in the town of Horodnia, Chernihiv province, I made the acquaintanceship of Levko Lukianenko's closest friend, Mr. Janchenko, the head of the county centre of the Ukrainian Association "The Green World". I received several tens of books by Mr. Lukianenko entitled "Confession in the Death Chamber", for distribution in Canada.

The village of Khrypivka where Lukianenko was born is only three kilometres from Horodnia. We went by car to the village and met some woman there, and asked "where is

Lukianenko's house?" She said if we took her she'd show us. We of course agreed. As it turned out, she was a relative of Mr. Lukianenko. She brought the keys to the house, entered, and said "take a look around". After looking around we thanked her for everything. I took several photographs of the house and we departed for Horodnia. The house was in good repair both inside and out, notwithstanding the fact that it was empty. I met with many people in both Petrivka and Horodnia, some of them had kept the article from the Chernihiv newspaper "Desnianska Pravda" from 1968 where the article "Who Are You, Mr. Pidlysny" had been published.

I returned from Ukraine without incident. My community obligations didn't end, and in addition I had to distribute Mr. Lukianenko's books whose publication had been paid for in Horodnia. In July of 1993 an employee of the Ukrainian Consulate in Toronto, Mr. Roman Lun', brought me even more books from Ukraine which were given him by Mr. Volodymyr Janchenko, specifically 76 copies of "I Believe in God and in Ukraine", 122 copies of "Confession in the Death Chamber", and 57 copies of "For Ukraine and for Her Freedom". In September of 1993 Ambassador Levko Lukianenko invited the members of the URDP to share their thoughts with him, which was a great honour for our organization. We accepted his invitation with great satisfaction. And so the following group drove to Ottawa: Mykola Pidlysny, Marian Dal'nyj, and Victor Koszarny. We were well received and over the course of two hours we shared various thoughts on various topics, and with satisfaction returned to Toronto. This is a 5 hour drive. After our meeting Mr. Lukianenko wrote me a letter.

The second anniversary of the Independence of Ukraine was celebrated with great success at the "Kyiv" cultural centre not far from Toronto, with the participation of the local artistic ensembles and greetings from the honourable representatives of the province of Ontario. The main speaker for the occasion was Levko Lukianenko. I sold all the books which still remained at this well-attended gathering.

On the 7th of October, 1993, after the conclusion of the solemnities celebrating the 2nd anniversary of Ukrainian Independence, I forwarded one thousand dollars, which had been realized from the sale of the books, to Mrs. Nadia Ivanivna Lukianenko. The rest of the money, at the request of Mr. Lukianenko, was forwarded for the needs of the democratic movement in Ukraine.

... The years have swiftly passed. The time has come to summarize my experiences. I am no longer young – life is more stable, I have grandchildren. It seemed about time to turn my thoughts to the past. Still, from time to time the vision of a different time passes before my eyes I hear an angry voice yelling "Arbeiten! Los, los! Arbeiten!", and the click-clacking of boxcars, on which I wandered through Europe.

P.S.

The following material is an addendum to the basic narrative of Mykola Pidlysny. It is especially interesting to see in the light of two differing perspectives what happened to him in his natal village.

This material will permit the reader to acquaint him/herself with the description of the author himself in Petrivtsi given in his own words, in the reaction of the editor P. Volyniak, and from the tendentious column of the soviet journalist in the Chernihiv newspaper "Desnianska Pravda".

"The New Day", November, 1968, Petro Volyniak

In the Backwaters of an Unchanged Republic . . .

One of our readers, Mykola Nikiforovich Pidlysny, went to visit his relatives in Ukraine this past summer. He went with his wife and daughter.

This is nothing extraordinary, many people, even the so-called "nationalists", visit Ukraine. Many people from Ukraine visit Canada, the USA, and other countries. This is not only not a bad thing, but actually a very good thing.

No one warned Mr. Pidlysny about what he could say and what he couldn't say in Ukraine, and so he thought it absolutely normal that it would be acceptable to say anything. And so, when his family and their neighbours asked him anything about Canada he told them how things truly were in Canada. The truth about Canada, in the opinion of the local communist party lackeys, appeared to be . . . anti-soviet propaganda. Accusations were hurled at Mr. Pidlysny, he was called to Chernihiv, invited to the KGB (security police) headquarters, and told that he had to immediately leave Ukraine. When he said that the plane would be departing in several days they told him not to wait for his plane, even though his fare was paid, but to travel by train the very next day from Kyiv to Bucharest, in Romania, and then, they said, you can do what you want.

They accused him of overstepping the bounds of soviet hospitality. The people in Petrivka, the village which he was visiting, posed hundreds of questions to him. Without any evil intent, he answered them as openly and honestly as they had inquired of him. They first of all asked about salaries and prices, if people had vacations in Canada, etc. Finally they asked:

- Are there strikes in Canada?
- Yes, many, and often.
- What do the strikers get?

- A higher wage and better working conditions
- Do the police punish them excessively?
- On the contrary, they protect them. . . If the strikers began to be violent the police would protect those whom they were trying to injure. This almost never happens, even though the strikes sometimes last for months.

The authorities greatly disliked such accounts, for they assure the Ukrainian citizens that the Canadian police exist only to keep the workers under control. So when Mr. Pidlysny explained that today only two countries in the entire world have colonies – the USSR (factually speaking, Russia) and Portugal, they immediately sent him off to Chernihiv, and produced a document stating that he had to depart immediately. Behold, what is most feared in Ukraine!

An article about Mr. Pidlysny was published in the Chernihiv Oblast newspaper “Desnianska Pravda” (22 August 1968), in which the author, a Mr. Likhachov, strives to correct the account of Mr. Pidlysny. The “correction” was, of course, a lie concocted in the Stalinist manner, which only served to authenticate Mr. Pidlysny’s words. When Mr. Pidlysny said that he had three children and it would be necessary in the future to pay for their university education (the eldest child was at this time only 12 years old!), Mr. Likhachov twisted his words, so that it came out that in Canada it is necessary to pay for even primary school: he has three children, and has to look after their education himself. And that in glorious Canada this takes money. The annual cost for one student is \$1,000. All the villagers in Petrivka heard the account of Mr. Pidlysny, that if anyone doesn’t send their children to school without exception, they are responsible before the civil courts. They also heard that university tuition costs not \$1,000, but only half as much if that, that there are scholarships, etc. Later, after the “number one enemy of the people” Mykola Pidlysny was deported, they all read what Mr. Likhachov, in the Fatherland, wrote, and saw for themselves the falsehood of the soviet propaganda. This raises a question: who is agitating against the Fatherland – Mr. Pidlysny, or Mr. Likhachov, a real Stalinist propagandist?

The same happened with the publication of the works of Taras Shevchenko. All the inhabitants of the village of Petrivka, like all the citizens of Ukraine, know that only since the 150th anniversary of the birth of Shevchenko were his works beginning to be published in a non-bowdlerized and unabridged form. It was absolutely unnecessary for their native son to come from Canada and explain this to them. This also calls forth laughter in people, and in fact Mr. Likhachov again is agitating against the authorities. It would have been better to write: Yes, during the time of the personality cult there were unacceptable practices, but now they no longer exist. But as we see, in the backwaters of the republic the local communist party lackeys simply long for Stalin (for now they don’t have the opportunity to torture anyone), in spite of the fact that his crown has been taken away: Mr. Khrushev himself stated publicly that “No matter how much you wash a black dog you can’t make him white. . .”

When I read Mr. Likhachov's article "Who are you, Mr. Pidlysny" I went to Mr. Pidlysny and asked him to show me the film he made in his natal village. I saw a village, the Snov river, a new, three-story village school, large new stores, a renovated Church in which services are held (the church is currently being painted), wide streets, people, etc. I asked him: "Did you cut out the pictures of girls with yokes (for carrying goods)?" "Of course not! I didn't see any there. And if I had filmed something like that how would it be bad or insulting, anyway?" And truly, we ask with Mr. Pidlysny of Mr. Likhachov: "and what is insulting in this? . . . and why do you lie? To make it more convincing? You have truly all of us (and all the inhabitants of the Chernihiv Oblast) that in the backwaters of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Stalinist order doesn't quickly get replaced, and it's not worth going there. Till this very day life there continues to be characterized by the dirty accusations of dullard Stalinist lackeys. We invite Mr. Likhachov as well as all of the 15 people (among them two with general's epaulettes) who gathered in Chernihiv at the Stalinist court and there pronounced their sentence against Mykola Pidlysny to come to Toronto. You can photograph Canadian girls with cigarettes in their mouths instead of a yoke, and wear such short skirts that if not for their underwear you would see their livers! Among them will be those who are very clean, as well as very dirty and undesirable.

You can also stand on the corners of the largest streets in the largest cities of Canada and cry out that Canada is the only colonial power left in the world till you're hoarse. And no one will pay attention to you, except, perhaps, for a kind hearted soul who sees you and with sorrow says: "poor guy, he's gone completely insane".

And if anyone tries to accuse you of overstepping the bounds of Canadian hospitality I'll go to Ottawa to the Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (be assured that he will receive me) and protest before him that democracy has been violated in Canada. This question will surely be discussed not only in the government, but in the parliament of Canada as well. Then you will all be convinced of where true democracy exists – in Canada, or in suppressed Ukraine.

And, so as to give full force to my words, I am republishing here Mr. Likhachov's article. Let the reader convince himself that it's not worth travelling into the backwaters of the Ukrainian SSR.

To the point – Mr. Likhachov writes that Mykola Pidlysny has almost forgotten his native language.

Excuse me, Mr. Likhachov, but you lie. Mr. Pidlysny knows the language, for he is Pidlysny. But you still don't know the language, haven't yet learned it, for you still write in the Stalinist manner, using the occupiers lingo: for example *Panu* in place of the Ukrainian *Panovi*. His homeland is real, it is called Ukraine. For you it is only an abstract and unclear

Fatherland. . . the word “Ukraine” still doesn’t make its way out of your throat? I feel sorry for you that you are suffering in Chernihiv. Why don’t you go back to your Russia: she is also soviet, and you can build communism there as well. Why did you come to Ukraine? Isn’t it possible to find a more honest and intelligent journalist to write for a provincial paper in Ukraine, rather than keep this talentless occupant, who in fact works against his government?

But scrutinise, dear readers, the writing of Mr. Likhachov.

I am publishing his article with no changes or abbreviations, I have even maintained the Stalinist-russified occupiers language rules. I only add that in the original there is a sub-heading: “An Educational Story About How Mykola Pidlysnny, Her Erstwhile Son, Arrived in Ukraine, and How He Left.”

The following article, "Who are you Mr» Pidlysnny?" was published in the Ukrainian newspaper "Desnianska Pravda" on August 22, 1968 in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv It was published after I was expelled from the country, accused of Anti-Soviet Propaganda and Agitation» This article was loosely translated into English in Toronto, Ontario, Canada by Helen Pedenko in the fall of 1968.*

Desnianska Pravda August 22, 1968

WHO ARE YOU MR. PIDLYSNY?

He was born in the village Petrivka. Here he spent a happy and unclouded childhood. Here he went to school. Everything was near and dear to him.

It was not his fault that during the war when he was 15 years old, he was thrown into a train and taken to a labour camp in the Fascist Germany. This same fate happened to many Ukrainian boys and girls. Many of them died without seeing the happy day of victory. Many survived and the homeland welcomed them with open arms and did everything possible to make them happy.

There are also those who didn't come back for different reasons. We are not going to - guess why Mychola Pidlysnny did not come back and why he ended up in Canada. Anyway its his business and his conscience.

Probably he was hypnotized by tales of luxury and the powerful dollar overseas. Even this can be understood to a certain extent in his case.

He was young and inexperienced. There was probably no one there to advise him and to remind him of his homeland.

Back home awaited his mother and his twin brother Wolodymir. As soon as the soviet army liberated Chernihivshchina from the Nazis, Wolodymir became a voluntary soldier and went to finish off the enemy. He swore to avenge his land plundered by Nazis, the blood of his comrades and his mother's tears.

Wolodymir carried out his vows honorably. He was encouraged by the conviction that it was his duty to gain freedom for millions of people and for his brother. He returned to his village with many decorations on his chest, declaring his devotion to his homeland.

Many years passed and the collective village of Petrivka became richer and more beautiful than ever before. Wolodymir is working at a starch factory. He is a communist respected by fellow villagers and father of 3 children. His old mother lives with them. She lives well and lacks nothing. She has only one unhappy thought, her son Mychola is not with her. She wonders how he is and she longs to see him. He would then see how his country prospers and how well his countrymen live.

Finally after an absence of 25 years Mychola Pidlysny, Canadian citizen and real estate agent, decided to visit his homeland.

He and his wife were joyfully welcomed by his mother and brother. The villagers also welcomed him. They seemed to say look and see how well we live and enjoy ourselves. Enter any home, we have nothing to hide. Ask any question. If you wish you wish tell us about yourself and your life over there.

Unfortunately, even from the first day, this guest from Canada began to malign the hospitality of his hosts. Everyone became convinced that he did not come to see his relatives and homeland, but to malign his homeland with anti-soviet propaganda and stupid inventions.

This shyster from Toronto who sees happiness only in his house and car, began to tell all kinds of nonsense to the collective farm workers. Usually you can ignore such a conversationalist. But if he stubbornly insists to keep on maligning everything that is near and dear to us, then we lose all patience.

Many letters of complaints about his behavior and conversations began to pour to officials. These letters demanded that he be removed from Ukraine because of his vile propaganda about life overseas.

Commune director Alexander Myutrofanovich Sovosta angrily reported that Mr. Pidlysny 'proved' to him that there are only 2 nations in the world and colonies - USSR and Portugal?!

So that's where this man from Canada was leading! Naturally A.M. Sovosta who was a communist for 15 years and is politically mature, know how to answer this nonsense. However, he is right in asking who this Mr. Pidlysny is and why types like him visit our country? In order to cause trouble? Well they're wasting their time. You can't find any simpleminded among us.

Everyone who had come in contact with Mr. Pidlysny never did understand what ideas and ideals this man upheld. It seemed that he has forgotten all that was taught to him in the 6 years of schooling in Ukraine. He continued his education in Canada. This education still reeks of individualism, multicoloured nationalists and other such dirt.

Mr. Pidlysny has no ideas. How can you get ideas from a man who claims he is for communism, except he wants it without Leninism and Marxism This is a senseless and familiar tune the Pidlysny sings with a false voice. Vicious hate toward anything soviet has blinded this guest from overseas. He sees nothing around him. For him white is black.

Mr. Pidlysny brought a movie camera with him in order to take movies of friends in the village. What did he film? He walked around the village but he saw none of its youthfulness, new buildings and beauty. He found no subject for his camera.

The foreman of the commune proposed to take him to see the fields in order to film the wonderful machinery, technology and people working there. He wanted to show him the marvelous farms, new schools and club, so that Pidlysny could in turn show them to Ukrainians in Canada. Pidlysny answered he had no film.

However he had films to take movies of a woman pulling soup out of an outdoor oven. He also had film to take pictures of a girl carrying water from a well. He also filmed an old barn that the commune not had a chance to pull down. Pidlysny has no love or understanding for his homeland. Perhaps he feels this love for that land overseas. He has no sense of good behavior towards his hosts. His main thought each morning was to find something new to attack and criticize.

One evening after Pidlysny had had a few drinks, he disclosed that all was not•so marvelous in Canada. He has 3 children and of course he must educate them. However in that marvelous Canada, people have to pay for their children's education. The cost per year is \$ 1000 per child.

After this disclosure Pidlysny listened to a lecture about education in the village. Later that evening the lecturers and educators gathered to discuss the lecture. Pidlysny was invited to join in the discussion. In his typical manner he began to talk nonsense. He demanded whether the Ukrainian language was used in schools. If he had been listening to the lecturer he would have known that the Ukrainian language was used in 1107 of

the 1221 schools.

Then he wanted to know whether in the works of Taras Shevchenko printed for USSR was the famous anti-Russian poem 'The Desecrated Grave'. One of the members calmly showed him this poem in the volume of Shevchenko's works. Pidlysny didn't even have the grace to blush or apologize. Everyone around him was disgusted with his belligerent behavior. This shyster kept on criticizing our way of life. He stated that our news media were not objective and that we did not report everything that happened. We invited to view films and documents of certain events. He refused stating that these were probably falsified.

What is the point of continuing? In his months stay, he managed to criticize almost everything around him. The hard working villagers began to hate this arrogant guest. They no longer wished him welcome. The government listened to their complaints and asked Pidlysny to leave the USSR.

The author of this article was present when Pidlysny was asked to leave. There was no remorse in Pidlysny's eyes, there was only vicious hate to those around him. Later I saw the pain and shame in the eyes of his brother and mother. They blushed for him because he had lost all sense of love and respect for his homeland and for them.

Well, we don't 'Au revoir' to such as Pidlysny. We never want to see him again.

Lykhachov

