

The History of the People in a Biography

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History is not only global social changes but also private lives of people who are the ones making the history. For a thoughtful contemporary, that is why one man's destiny is not unimportant. It is evidence of a witness and participant of an event that becomes a source of historical information.

Due to my professional activities I often deal with archival records including memoirs. I am convinced that people do not choose their biography. Circumstances beyond their control have great influence on their lives thus making personal lives part of the history of the whole country.

The majority of memoirs are written by people of advanced age as they try to document names of loved ones and friends they knew when they were young. My father, Alexander Yuliusovich Flehmann, belongs to this generation. He was born in 1918 and lives in a city of Chelyabinsk. When he started the work on his notes he had doubts about going public with his personal reflections. His reasoning was as follows: "I have not been acquainted with famous writers, and I am not a writer, outstanding scientist, or a well-known public figure. I was not standing at the wheel of my country's history steering at sharp turns. But those sharp turning points left imprints on my life, and in this way my biography belongs to the history of my people."

My father taught history at one of Chelyabinsk schools for almost 40 years, and was respected by his colleagues and students. He started writing his notes when he retired. It took a long time but the final results were several notebooks. My father wrote on the title page of each of the notebooks: "To my children and grandchildren."

Though the notes describe family and personal events, they reflect the time when my father lived. He worried that he did not mention all the people he was close to when he was young, and so he included the following at the very end of his notes: "The best friends of my young age were Dietrich Klassen, Jacob Albrecht, Ewald Penner, Heinrich Riesen, Vasiliy Agapov, and Robert Resch."

This publication, for which I have the author's permission, is based on the part of the notes describing life in the former German colony and events that took place in the 1940s. While editing the notes for publication I made insignificant changes limited mostly to stylistic nuances.

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According to the family legends our ancestors came from the town of Lodz in the Kingdom of Poland. This was the part of Poland that at the time of the Napoleonic Wars was annexed to the Russian Empire following the settlement of the Congress of Vienna of 1814-1815.

It was from the town of Lodz and its surroundings that German resettlement to Samara gubernia started in 1863. That was the year of the uprising against Russian oppression which also had anti-German sentiment. The reason for that was that Lodz textile districts, as well as other industrial areas in western Poland, were predominantly populated by Germans. Russian Emperors Alexander I and Nikolai I played the key role in establishing a developed textile industry in Lodz when they invited highly qualified workers from Germany to settle on these territories. Thanks to these German weavers, clothiers, and entrepreneurs Lodz became known as "Eastern Manchester."

But emerging Polish bourgeoisie wanted to create their own economy that did not depend on German or Russian authorities. In 1864 Alexander II had to introduce unpopular agrarian reforms that negatively affected the situation for the Germans not only in agriculture but also in the textile industry.

Due to these changes some Germans came to the conclusion that conditions for productive labor in the Polish Kingdom were not good and they were not likely to improve in the near future. A larger group of "Polish" Germans went to Volhynia; a much smaller group resettled into Samara gubernia. They were allowed to choose what they wanted to do and were granted cultural and religious independence.

Lutheran, Catholic, and Baptist settlements of Germans from the Polish Kingdom started to appear in 1864. They spread next to Alt-Samara and other colonies that had been founded by German Mennonites from West Prussia a few years before. One of these new colonies was named Konstantinov. I am sure that it was named after a German town in the textile area near Lodz.

My great-grandfather Gotlieb Flehmann was among the founders of Konstantinov. According to family records he claimed that he and his family had come to Samara gubernia "from near Lodz," however the name of this place remains unknown.

It was my son Evgeny, a professional historian, who helped to solve this mystery. He turned for help to his colleagues in Germany. Irmgard Muller did research in Polish archives and found a lot of fascinating information on my ancestors. According to the records, Gotlieb Flehmann and his wife Rosalie Schmidt and their children Ferdinand (1849), Iohann August (1847), and Emilia (1851) resided in the German weavers' colony of Lutka near Lodz that is now close to Lodz downtown. Gotlieb was born in 1819, not in Lutka, but in the colony of Steinersdorf in Silesia. He and his parents, Friedrich Flehmann and Anna Greisler, moved to Lodz area to work in the growing textile industry.

Two territorial-administrative units were formed in Samara gubernia as a result of the new German migration: Konstantinovskaya volost where Germans from the Polish Kingdom settled and Alexandertalskaya volost where Western Prussia Germans lived.

Germans from Poland founded the following colonies: Konstantinov, Romanov, Hofental, Rosental, Fuerstenstein, Bergtal, Reinsfeld, Peterhof, Keisersgnade, Schtrasburg, Retungstal, Vladimirov, Nikolaev, and Georgiev and also several khutors and daughter colonies, for example khutor Kitsman or Friedental colony.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Flehmans moved from the colony of Bolshoi¹ Konstantinov (a colony of Malyi² Konstantinov was nearby) to Liebental. This was the most recently founded (1867) German colony in Alexandertalskaya volost. Other German colonies nearby were Neu-Hoffnung, Orlov, Grottsfeld, Muravyev, Mariental. The oldest German colony in this area was Alexandertal. All of these villages were founded by German Mennonites from Western Prussia. Liebental was a small settlement of 8-10 households, and all of them, except Lutheran Flehmans, were Mennonites. Among our neighbors were Penners, Frants, Riesens, and Bergmanns. There were twelve of us including families of my father, Julius, grandfather, August, and Uncle Rudolf.

Liebental was a very well kept village with a straight main street and neat flower and vegetable gardens. Colonists were successfully planting and harvesting cereals, potatoes and other vegetables, and growing fruit and berries. They used the three-field crops rotation system. They also raised cattle and poultry.

My son suggested as a source of information a book "Samara Gubernia Economy of Households and Khutors"³ published in Samara in 1909 by the local zemstvo⁴. The book has tables for the year 1909 where every individual household of Alexandertalskaya volost is analyzed. It includes statistical data for Liebental where I was born in 1918, and the Flehmans'

household is analyzed with three other households from this colony.

There is close correlation between information in this publication and my own calculations and perception. Our family had more than 50 treasury desiatins of arable land (1 desiatina is approximately 2.5 square acres), more than 10 desiatins of pasture, and about 10 horses and cows. In 1909 there were nine members in the Flehmann family, and they did all the work themselves. Only at harvest time seasonal help was hired, and they received decent wages.

A few families in Liebental were doing even better. For example the Bergmanns owned 136 desiatins of arable land and more cattle. They employed people all year long. As for farming machinery (plows, seeders, harvesters, binders, etc.), it was still not there in 1909. To set in motion a seeder or a binder imported from America, five horses were to be harnessed. We had a hay mower, a horse drawn seeder, a horse drawn thrasher, harrows, and plows with two shares. But this was in the 1920s.

Our family lived in a big house but it burned at the beginning of the 1920s. While a new house was being built, the children had to live with relatives in the nearby German colonies. My parents, with my baby brother Heinrich and siblings Theodor and Emilia, stayed with Grandfather August in Liebental.

The newly built house was quite spacious. There was a sitting room, a dining room, a bedroom, a nursery, and a kitchen. Our living quarters and space where farm animals were housed were under the same roof. Outside buildings included a threshing barn, a granary, a bath house, and a summer kitchen. We also had an orchard, a vegetable garden, and a smoke house where different kinds of sausage were smoked.

In the part of the house for farm animals there was space for chickens including sand and grass areas for grazing. The chickens must have enjoyed this comfortable life style as they laid about two buckets of eggs every day. I remember it very well since collecting eggs was my chore.

All the children in the family had to help at the farm on a daily basis, but especially during school summer break. At a large farm like ours it was really a necessity, and every member of the family had to contribute. We always harvested ourselves, and only for threshing grain and harvesting potatoes my father hired Tartars. My father paid them good wages, and they returned to us year after year. They were hard working and honest people.

In winter father was repairing farm tools, storing fire wood, and mending shoes. He knew many trades: he worked with wood, raised farm animals, and was a mechanic and a farmer. He was highly respected by his neighbors and well known in

the nearby German colonies. People often turned to him for help, and for a while he was the Elder of Liebental.

Of course there was leisure time too. We had a pair of horses for visiting relatives during holidays and driving to the church. According to the Lutheran tradition, every Sunday all the family went to a service at a Lutheran Kirche in the colony of Hofental that was about three kilometers from Liebental.

The first school that I attended was a junior school in Muravyev (Russian name was Muravyevka), and I still have vivid memories of it. It was built with money collected by colonists from the nearby villages. The school had several classrooms with 10-12 desks in each one. A big fruit orchard occupied part of the school grounds. Our mentors were Martyn Martynovich Fast who knew by heart Schiller, Lessing, and Goethe, and his two daughters Anna and Elisaveta. They lived in the teachers' house next to the school building. The following subjects were taught at the school: German Grammar, Arithmetic, Calligraphy, Geography, Drawing, Basic Sketching, Natural History, and the History of Religion. We also had singing lessons where we sang mostly Christian hymns to piano accompaniment. We celebrated Christmas and sang songs like "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" and "O Tannenbaum." There were also New Year and Easter celebrations at school. Up to 1930 all the subjects were taught in German. Visual aids for the geography and natural history curriculum were ordered and students themselves made herbaria and collected insects. At the arithmetic classes we solved problems; for example we calculated areas of different shapes. We had wonderful teachers who helped us to learn a great deal at this junior school. We graduated with versatile knowledge in many subjects.

We had the School Board (Schulrat) that oversaw the upkeep of the school building, equipment repairs, fire wood storage, etc. There was a money fund for purchasing textbooks, notebooks and school supplies and also presents. All the students received presents for Christmas, Easter, New Year, Trinity and also for his or her birthday. Only those families who did well made contributions to this fund. I remember that among the donor families were the Bergmanns, Riesens, Klassens, Driedgers, Flehmanns, Martens, and some others.

The start of a school year depended on the farming calendar and was in October. Children started school when they were nine years old. All my brothers from the oldest, Theodor, to the youngest, Heinrich, graduated from the Muravyev Junior School.

Everything changed when the campaign for collectivization was launched. Repressions against "kulaks" started in Lie-

bental and other German colonies. Many of the successful farmers left their homes and families and fled to towns trying to escape their destiny. The colony of Orlov just outside Liebental had a steam mill owned by Dridger. The owner abandoned everything and fled with his family to Samara where he found a job at a factory. The mill was expropriated by the state, and someone without any experience was appointed as a director. Soon the mill stopped working and later was destroyed by a fire.

Those changes affected the school and the teachers' lives. German teachers were fired and replaced by Russian teachers. For the last years of his life a talented educator Martyn Fast worked as a shepherd in Neu-Hoffnung colony. One of his daughters, Anna, moved to Samara and went to teaching German at the Samara Pedagogical Institute. Elisaveta, the other daughter, left Liebental and moved to Alexandertal. Her husband Neldner was arrested in 1929, and they never returned to Muravyev.

Our neighbors from Liebental, Frantz, Bergmann, and Riesen families, were deported to Archangelsk taiga. It was a terrible shock for all of us because we knew that they were our best farmers who worked from dawn till night. The families of "kulaks" were totally at a loss about what was going on. They were unable to pack any things to take with them. My father started helping them as much as he could in this dramatic situation. He packed what they were allowed to take along and took them to the railway station that was about 18 km from Liebental. Several months later he received a letter from our next door neighbors, the Frantzes, with words of gratitude for his support at this tragic moment in their lives. Herman Frantz had tried to escape this destiny when, after the wedding, he went with his young wife to Moscow in hope of obtaining a permission to immigrate to Canada. They were sent back to Liebental and later deported to Archangelsk to cut wood. There were numerous cases like this in different German colonies.

Our relatives on my mother's side managed to immigrate to Canada after the 1917 revolution. Their family name was Meister. We corresponded with them for some time, but at the beginning of the 1920s it became very dangerous to have contacts with relatives abroad. My parents had to ask our Canadian relatives not to write any more letters. We have not heard from them anymore, and those relations were lost forever.

The last years spent in Liebental were not happy. Grandfather August also lived there with his second wife and her daughter. Olga. Olga's husband, Oskar Seiberlich, often spoke in public against collective farms and socialist reforms. He was

repressed in 1937.

My uncle Rudolph Avgustovich left Liebental when collectivization started, and never returned. Much later we learned that he was among Gulag prisoners in Omsk. Two of his brothers lived in different colonies: Alexander resided in Alexandertal with his wife and three daughters, and Adolph with his family lived in Rosental. The latter family was heard to have moved to a newly founded German colony in Orenburg gubernia. Several years later Adolph, who was a Lutheran priest, was also arrested.

Even our family was not to live in Liebental. In 1930 residents of Liebental, Muravyev, Schenau, Lindenau, and Orlov were ordered to resettle to nearby colonies Alexandertal, Mariental, Neu-Hoffnung, Krasnovka and others. Colonists were not only hard working people, but they also had been using good farming practices which resulted in very high yields of grain (hard varieties of wheat, rye, oats, millet, buckwheat). As a result the authorities decided to organize a large exemplary grain producing sovkhoz⁵ here (which later was named after the famous party leader Molotov).

Inhabitants of the former colonies had two choices. They could stay and become employees of the new enterprise, but in this case they were obliged to surrender all their property (house, all other buildings, livestock, etc.) to the sovkhoz. They could also disassemble their houses and move to another colony in the area.

Of course, the majority chose the latter. My parents moved to Muravyev (this village has since disappeared, and so has Liebental). Our house had just been built, and it was a pity to dismantle it. Instead we were offered to occupy the house of colonist Kettler who had been deported as a kulak. This hardworking and thrifty settler had a thriving farmstead with a wonderful garden, outbuildings, and a kitchen. Our belongings were moved by carriages. I was allowed to drive the carriage while my father Yulius sat with his back to me and burst into tears. Though I was quite young then, I could fully understand his feelings.

After we moved to Muravyev my father started repairing farming machinery. In 1930 NKVD⁶ came to our house in the middle of the night. They took my father and two elder brothers, Theodor and Robert, who were later transported to Ulyanovsk prison. My mother and the younger children started preparing to be deported. My family was accused of having employed help on our farm before the collectivization. Indeed, a Chuvash peasant Stepan Prokopyev used to live with us. He was handicapped all his life, his parents died, and he was raised by his grandfather. Before his death the old man asked my grandfather to take Stepan in. The boy was 12 years old

when he was practically adopted by our family. It took a lot of witnesses to convince NKVD that Stepan had not been "exploited," but finally my father and brothers were released.

Stepan was a very kind hearted man. First he worked as a shepherd at our farm, and later in kolkhoz. He loved his work. In 1941 he willingly went with us to Kazakhstan when our family was deported though he was not a German and could have stayed. He died in Zhan-Ark in Kazakhstan after he was discharged for health reasons from trudarmiya.

In 1932 when we already lived in Muravyevka I was enrolled into a seven grade school in Alexandertal. All my brothers graduated from this school at different times. It was a boarding school. The school principal was Andrey Andreevich Ekk and among school staff were Hass (history and geography), Jakov Jakovlevich Fast (chemistry and natural sciences), Herz (German and Russian), and Balzer Egor Andreevich (theory and practice of farming machinery). I graduated in 1935. Up till 1937 all the subjects were taught in German. Later all the German teachers were replaced by Russian, and principal Ekk and Assistant Principal Balzer were subjected to repressions.

But we did not stay long in Muravyevka. In 1934 the collective farm decided that the spacious house could be used in a better way and we were ordered to move again. It is needless to say that in those days nobody could ignore such orders. This time we moved to Krasnovka about two miles from Muravyevka and settled in the house that used to belong to a famous cheese maker Heinrich Janzen. As a kulak he was dispossessed in 1929 and exiled to Archangel Oblast taiga. He was a well-known man, successfully ran a cheese factory and supplied the whole area with cheese and butter.

My parents worked for the kolkhoz⁷, brothers Robert, Julius, and Herbert attended Pedinstitut⁸ in Engels, and between 1935 and 1939 studied at school in the Rayon center Koshki.

A lot of my peers from the nearby German villages attended this school: Reimer, Penner, and Isaak. We all received a scholarship of eight rubles per month that covered apartment rent and books. By that time all the classes were taught in Russian, and for us it was a challenge. We often answered questions in German and were able to give an answer in * Russian only with the help of teachers. But the teachers understood our problem and were always very patient with us. Kosior taught geography; Ilyinsky, chemistry; Lvov, history; and Reimer, German.

During the period of my studies at the Koshkin Junior High School I lodged for a while with Albert Luisovich Mantei (Manthey), a brother of my "second" mother Agatha Mantei

(my birth mother Ida Henke died when I was very young).

Uncle Albert worked as an instructor at a Communist Party Raycom.⁹ After graduating from the Communist Institute in Moscow he was appointed to the administration of the Engels Pedinstitut where he also taught a Communist Party history class. He was arrested, released after six months, and appointed as head of the Political Department in one of the Volga Germans Autonomous Republic Cantons. He did not stay long in this position because he was again arrested. After serving his sentence he returned to his native village Hoffental and worked at the local Party Committee as an instructor. In 1937 he was the speaker at the Communist Party meeting devoted to the March 8 celebration¹⁰. Several days later Albert was again arrested. After he got out of prison he moved to Penza and taught German at school. At that time he was in his early thirties, and had daughters Valya and Zina, and a son.

My other uncle from the Manteis' family, German Luisovich, was an official at Alexandertal Selsoviet¹¹ under which jurisdiction were mainly German Mennonite colonies including Alexandertal, Mariental, Krasnovka, Muravyevka, Neuhoffnung, and Wiesental. Kolkhoz was founded on this territory, first named "Progress," and then renamed after Friedrich Engels. The kolkhoz was prospering under the leadership of Schneider, a delegate of one of the Communist Party Congresses. There were seven production teams: two at the central village of Alexandertal, and one each in Krasnovka, Muravyevka, Neuhoffnung, Wiesental, and Mariental. This German kolkhoz was very successful compared to others in the area. There were two cheese factories, a grain elevator, butter dairy, a stud farm, and livestock farms. The kolkhoz boasted modern farm machinery including "Fodzon" tractors, binders, sowing and mowing machines, plows, and tractor drive threshers. Grain crops were quite impressive—50-60 metric centners per hectare¹². They even founded an agricultural college in Alexandertal where graduates from Koshkin district and even Oblast studied. The kolkhoz was considered exemplary by the Party standards (like all the German kolkhozs of the district), and always met deadlines for agricultural produce procurement. Another kolkhoz existed in Strassburg.

But there were other examples. In the mid-1950s peasants from nearby Russian villages who had failed as farmers were brought to our area, and a commune "Red Plowman" was established on the land between Krasnovka and Strassburg. The communards lived in barracks and meals were provided. They worked "according to their abilities" (as one of the Communism principles teachers), but had all their needs met.

The state bought tractors, seeding machines, seeds, and still they failed. Soon the "Red Plowman" collapsed, and the land was given to the German collective farm named after Molotov.

The authorities found a simple way out of all the troubles: the German kolkhozs had to supply more grain, potatoes, and cheese than the planned amounts. The German leaders were first surprised by the new policy and then frustrated. Herman Mantei, one of the leaders of Alexandertal Village Soviet, raised his voice against such practices, was accused of nationalism, and later subjected to repressions.

I do not know what happened to the Mantei brothers. They were all arrested, exiled, and no one returned. Herbert Mantei, my sister Emilia Flehmann's husband, was at a labor camp in Kopeisk, Chelyabinsk area, in the Southern Urals.

In 1936 after graduating from the Koshkin secondary school, I went to Engels, the Volga German Autonomous Republic capital. I wanted to get into the Engels Pedagogical Institute that was training teachers for the schools of the German Republic as well as for the German colonies of the Ukraine, Caucuses, Baltic States, Siberia, Urals, and Altai. The Institute had departments of Physics and Mathematics, History, Philology, Chemistry, and others. There was also Rabfak¹³ where graduates with seven years of school were enrolled. My three brothers, Julius, Herbert, and Heinrich studied at this department after graduating from Alexandertal seven-grade school.

In 1939-1940 the language of the instruction at the Institute

was already Russian though there was a specialized German Department. But I knew that I was going to teach in Russian in future, and so I chose the Russian Physics and Mathematics department. During their first year students received a stipend of 90 rubles; seniors' stipend rose to 175 rubles. Our parents never sent any money to me or my brothers, and we did not expect them to. We lived according to our means, sometimes we were lucky to get an occasional job like when I taught for a while at the local "night" school.

I attended the Institute between 1938 and 1940, and completed two years. But in 1940 a law on the introduction of # student fees in higher educational institutions and on the elimination of stipends was passed in connection with the Russian-Finnish War.

I remember that the years of studies in Engels were far from being carefree. Instead of attending lectures we were running round the town trying to buy bread. Stores were empty—there were no groceries or clothing. The majority of students dropped out of the school at that time, including me. It was a difficult decision to make, but I did not have a choice.

In search for work with my friend Robert Resch we decided to move to the Stavropol area. The local Public Education Office sent us to a secondary school in the village of Soluno-Dmitrovskoye, Nogutsky Rayon, about 40 miles from the town of Mineral Waters. We arrived late in the evening, introduced ourselves, and spent the night at the school building.

In the morning it turned out that there was only one teacher's vacancy at the school. I was the lucky one and Robert had to return to the Public Education Office. However, as I found out later, he was employed at another school.

I started working at the Soluno-Dmitrovskoye School teaching mathematics, physics, and German to high school students. My salary was quite good and I was able to send money to my brother, Julius, who was a fourth-year student at the Stavropol Pedinstitut. Teachers received bread at the school canteen; otherwise it was impossible to buy anything. For clothes we had to drive 40 miles to the Mineral Waters market.

I enjoyed teaching very much, my students worked hard, and I did not have to worry about discipline during the classes. All the teachers were friendly and the atmosphere relaxed. As a young teacher (I was only 22 at the time) I appreciated that my colleagues treated me with respect and were very supportive.

I kept in touch with Robert Resch and we planned to get together in Stavropol during the summer holidays of 1940. The

Second World War had already started. We did see each other, but I soon learned that Robert did not return to school. My teaching days were also numbered. At the beginning of October 1941 I was called to the principal's office in the middle of a class. The Village Soviet Chairman read to me a decree by the Union of the People's Commissariat on the eviction of the Germans. I was fired on the spot and my account was settled. But for me it was no surprise: I knew that the Autonomous German Republic had been liquidated and I had heard about the deportation of a German colony Nikolaevka near Mineral Waters.

After reading the Decree to me in the principal's office, the Selsoviet Chairman, a middle-aged woman, found sincere words and apologized to me. All the teachers, students, and residents of Soluno-Dmitrovskoye were treating me with sympathy and understanding. In my turn, I tried to avoid talking to the people so that they did not get into trouble with the authorities.

I was notified that I could not leave the village. Those who disobeyed were facing court martial. This was not just a threat; NKVD watched us closely. Several days passed and then all the Germans of Nagautsky Rayon received orders to arrive to the assembly place at our village. There were less than ten of us, including the local secondary school director Arkady Evgrafovich Dering. Escorted by the NKVD people we were taken to Kursavka where we were to board a train.

In Kursavka I ran into my brother Julius (it should not have been such a surprise for me after all). Julius, his friend Edward Scholl, director Dering, I, and others found ourselves in a railcar bound for the railroad station Novomysskaya. There our railcar was attached to a train with Germans from the Caucasus. Soon the special train guarded by armed soldiers was heading east.

In the bare steppe near the station Ruzaevka in Mordovia we felt a sudden jolt, and our train stopped. It turned out that it had run into a cargo train carrying industrial equipment. There were many victims but several cars, including ours, were not damaged. Immediately the train was surrounded by armed guards: the authorities were afraid of the survivors' unpredictable behavior. Several young men from our railway car started helping guards with loading dead bodies into trucks that took them away. Local people were present at this macabre scene—some were helping, others looting: taking off watches, clothes, and dragging suitcases.

After a very difficult and long journey that lasted more than a month we reached Tomsk in Siberia and soon our final destination, village Pyshkino, Troitsky Rayon. Dering was appointed as a geography teacher at a secondary school in Pyshkino while Julius and I were going to teach at a seven year school in the village of Proletarka about 120 km away. We went by sleigh stopping every 25-30 km at a zaimka¹⁴

where we could have a rest and where supplies of water and firewood were stored. It took us several days to get to Proletarka where I was to teach mathematics; and Julius, physics.

Proletarka, an Old Believers' settlement founded back in the 17th century, had between 30 and 40 houses, all solid and well-maintained. We lodged at Meshcheryakov's house. Not far from the village there was a kolkhoz where Germans disfranchised in the 1930s were working. The kolkhoz leader, whose father had been exiled as a kulak, once mentioned in a conversation that one could stumble upon human bones in the taiga. I was puzzled and he told me the following story.

At the beginning of the collectivization authorities decided to make Gypsies settle in one place. Land was allocated, a collective farm was founded, seeds for sowing, agricultural tools, and livestock were supplied. But the enterprise turned out to be short-lived. The Gypsies took with them whatever they had not sold or consumed, and moved on. The runaways got as far as Rostov-on-the-Don when they were captured. The Gypsies were loaded into a railcar and sent to this remote taiga "to be reformed"; this is where local people and hunters keep making the terrifying "finds."

At the beginning of February 1942 we were notified by a Voenkomat¹⁵ that we were conscripted into the Labor Army¹⁶; the Chairman of the Village Union Tzarev handed us the call-up papers. We got to the rayon center by sleigh, and found quite a large group of Germans already there. We were ordered to line up, and those who did not have warm clothes were sent back. I was found fit for a labor battalion that was formed by the officials from the Pyshkinsko-Troitsky Voenkomat. Julius, who did not have winter clothes, had to return to Proletarka where he stayed till spring. Later I learned that he was sent to Ulyanovsk where a railroad was being built, and then to Vorkuta to work at coal mines.

Our battalion was transferred to Tomsk, and then to Abakan. We were moved into barracks and at first removed snow and trash from the streets; some worked at a workshop that manufactured equipment. I worked at a foundry as a molder apprentice; we were making molds for founding irons and skillets. For a while our team, including Dering, Funk, Dube, Schwindt, Kissner, Hamm, and me, worked at a meat processing plant and took carcasses to the railway station from where they were transported to the front. Soon we were moved to a village Khazyl-Al where railroad Abakan-Stalinsk (at present Kuznetsk) was being constructed. The village was about 2 km from the construction site. We found several Polish families living in the village. They had been deported in 1939 from the Western Ukraine.

In the summer of 1942 we lived through a terrifying experience. A group of emaciated people in ragged clothes was led through the village by armed guards. These were Labor Army Germans who had been building a railroad in the hills of Khakasiya, and now, apparently, were on the way to different locations where labor force was needed. I hardly recognized one of these exhausted people, Edward Scholl, a physics teacher and Julius' colleague from the Stavropol school. I called his name and started talking to him, but there was no reaction on his part. I handed Scholl some bread, but he seemed to be oblivious of what was going on around him. I doubt that Edward made it as far as Abakan. I later heard that most of those Germans died on the way.

We were much more fortunate in Khazyl-Al even though the work was very hard. Homeowners gave us food for our help, and soon barracks and a canteen were built nearby. But in October 1942 we were moved again, this time to Klyukvennaya station of Krasnoyarskaya railroad to build a narrow-gauge railroad. At first the work was badly organized—there were no wheelbarrows or spades. When these were provided, our labor battalion was redeployed to the town of Tula to rebuild coal mines that had been destroyed during the war.

After an exhausting trip we finally arrived at the village of Shchokino in Tulskaya oblast on November 25. The next night (all of the movement took place at night, and was accompanied by armed guards) some of the Trudarmeitsy¹⁷ found themselves in a "workers' settlement" Mines #19 that was 40 km from Shchokino. We were restricted to a "special zone," and were to sleep in dilapidated houses without water, electricity, and heating. It was a very cold winter with temperatures falling to -30 to -40 F.

The word "trudarmiya" means "labor army," and ostensibly was created to support warfare, but in reality it was a forced labor camp that looked like a high security prison for criminals: barbed wire fence, watchtowers, and armed guards. The first day we were ordered to form up and informed that we were traitors of the Motherland and Fascists' accomplices and that only by hard labor could we somehow start to make amends for what we had done. We were escorted by armed

guards to work and back; they were authorized to shoot at the slightest suspicion that someone was about to escape. Violation of the camp discipline was punished with gauptvakhta¹⁸; an escapee was sentenced to 20 years of penal servitude.

Soon we were sent to work at the mines without training or safety measures instructions, which resulted in the death of many people, especially at the beginning. I was assigned to help at the preparatory area where locals from nearby villages were working. They were told that the Germans were dangerous and unpredictable people and these local men were at first apprehensive. But when they saw that we were hard workers, the tension disappeared and we started working as a team. We did not feel any hostility. In general the local population did not treat us as enemies even though this was an occupied territory.

But the authorities were a different case. One of the officials, a Communist by the name of Kharitonov Timofey Ivanovich, was an illiterate and brutal man. His favorite pastime was humiliating those under his control. An 18 year old youth was working with us. His name was Ditler but Kharitonov always called him "Hitler," and only because of the name he sent the boy, who was physically not strong, to the most dangerous area in the mines. Soon Ditler died of tuberculosis.

Our life was almost intolerable in 1942-1944 but there was an improvement at the beginning of 1945. We were given a plot of land where we grew potatoes and beets, we could leave the zone and go to a nearby village to buy food, and if we achieved the set goals we were rewarded with food stamps.

After the war ended in 1945 the zone was eliminated and we all were taken on as coal mine industry staff. Our status was changed to "special settlement," and we had to register on a regular basis with the Ministry of Internal Affairs office. A visit to the nearby village without permission was punished with a 10-day arrest; leaving the Oblast boundaries could cost 20 years in prison.

For some time I did not know what had happened to my family, but in 1947 I received a letter from Vorkuta written by my brother Yulius. In October 1948 I received a permission to move to Karagandinskaya Oblast in Kazakhstan but I bought a ticket to Chelyabinsk instead. After a lot of effort I managed to register with the local Spetskomendatura¹⁹, and then find a job teaching mathematics at a secondary school. I taught at the same school until 1978 when I retired. But this is a different story.

FOOTNOTES

1 Bolshoi means "large" in Russian

2 "Small" in Russian

3 «Подворное и хуторское хозяйство в Самарской губернии», Samara, 1909, Vol. 1-3

4 Zemstvo was an elective district and provincial assembly in Russia between 1864 and 1917

5 There were two types of collective farms in the Soviet Union, "kolkhoz", and "sovkhоз"

6 NKVD - People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, secret police organization that executed repressions during Stalin rule

7 Kolkhoz is an abbreviation for "collective farm"

8 Teacher Training Institute

9 District Committee of the Communist Party

10 In the Soviet Union 8th of March was celebrated as the International Women's Day.

11 Village Soviet - a local council with certain powers of administration

12 This corresponds to 75 - 96 bushel per acre

13 Abbreviation for "Rabochiy Fakultet" which stands for Workers' Department

14 A dwelling built in a remote area (usually in Siberia) which served as a resting place for travelers passing by.

15 Enlistment office

16 Labor Army - Трудармия (Trudarmee) . Ethnic Germans were banned from serving in the military, and sent to Labor Army where conditions were similar to Gulag camps.

17 A German conscripted into the Labor Army was Trudarmeets (pi - Trudarmeitsy)

18 Gauptvakhta (from Hauptwache, Germ) in the Russian army is a punishment by arrest

19 Special Kommandatura was a local office of the Internal Affairs Ministry