

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
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The GRHC has available for purchase an important new book, “Don’t Cry, Ninotchka: My Story of Surviving WWII and Discrimination”, authored by Nina Carmichael Treece. Nina shares the dramatic story of her family’s escape from Russia to Poland from 1942-1945 and life in Germany from 1945-1954.

Nina writes, “During World War II, my parents and I escaped from Russia by covered wagon. Our trek lasted more than two years. It was a dangerous journey; safety, shelter, hunger, and the brutal Russian winters were a persistent problem.”

Nina was born in 1938, in Rohalik, a small Ukrainian village. When Nina was three, her father went to war with the Russian Army to fight the invading Germans. Her mother became involved with Wilhelm Streich, an Odessa German, and in 1942 they escaped from Russia by covered wagon.

“When I was six years old, I was left alone during a bombing attack. I huddled against a fence and prayed that my Mama would come back. I was glad when the bombs stopped falling and Mama found me. But as we were running across a big field, the bombing resumed.”

“After arriving in Poland, the Nazis decided whether we lived or died. One day there was a terrible odor. I asked, “What is that awful smell?” A boy waved his hand dismissively and said, “Oh it’s nothing. They are just burning Jews.” I asked, “What are Jews, and why are they burning them?”

“One year later, we felt lucky to be allowed into Germany, but after we arrived, we found out that we were not wanted, and still in danger of being sent back to Russia.”

When Nina was age 14, her Mama told her a story, “Your grandparents had a big farm near Sulin, Ukraine. Their main production was wheat. About 1920, after the Communists took over, your grandparents, like everyone else, had to give all the wheat they harvested to the Collective.”

“One year, after the harvest, your grandfather did not give all their wheat to the Collective. He hid one sack in the barn. Grandfather was a religious man (Mama knew that he worshiped on Saturdays) but he had a wife, four children, and other family members who depended on him, and did not trust the Communists to feed his family.”

“A neighbor suspected that your grandparents had extra wheat. So, she reported them to the authorities. When they threatened to harm his family, your grandfather could no longer keep quiet. He told them that the wheat was in the barn, inside a barrel, under a block of ice. The officials confiscated the wheat. Your grandfather was arrested and put in prison.”

“Your grandmother took food to the prison every day; she knew that grandfather would not survive otherwise. She did not know that your grandfather never got that food. Grandfather was dying of starvation. One day the jail keeper’s wife had a toothache and came to your grandfather for help (he was the dentist in their small village) she asked how she could repay him. Grandfather asked only for a crust of bread, and the jailer gave him all the bread he wanted. Grandfather ate too much and, after going so long without food, he could not digest the bread. And so, he died in agony.”

“No one told your grandmother that her husband had died, so she kept going to the prison every day. She was never allowed to see him, but they took the food she brought. Finally, one of the guards took pity on her, and told her, ‘Babushka, don’t come here anymore. Your husband is no longer in this world.’ Grandmother never got to see your grandfather’s body, and she never found out where he was buried.”

“My dream was living in America. Where I was told the gleanings were plentiful. Nine years later, that dream came true. America was so much more than I could have ever imagined. The possibilities far exceeded my

expectations.”

Nina and her family emigrated from Germany to New York on January 19, 1954. They took the train from New York to Chicago and on to Portland, Oregon, where they were welcomed by their friend, Anna Frank, from Ukraine. Nina writes, “She introduced us to our sponsor, Mrs. Cohen, and we were overcome with gratitude to this wonderful lady who took a risk in sponsoring us, strangers, whom she had never met.”

Ten years later, at the age of twenty-six, Nina became a citizen of the United States of America.

The book’s Addendum includes “Mama’s Recipes.” Nina writes, “Mama made a very simple version of these recipes while we lived in Germany because most of the time, we could not afford to buy meat, cheese, and butter. However, after we came to America and could afford those foods, Mama made the following dishes. She was a great cook, but all of her recipes were in her head. She never wrote them down. Sometimes I helped her cook, and saw how she made these dishes, but she never used measuring cups or spoons, so I never learned the exact amounts.”

“After mama died, I improvised and kept trying, until I got the food to taste as close to Mama’s as I could.” Nina includes the recipes for Perishky, Holuptsi (Cabbage Rolls), Boiled Varenyky (Filled Dough Pockets) and Red Cabbage (Sweet and Sour).

If you would like more information about the 25th Anniversary Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2021), becoming a Friend of the GRHC, or would like to a family history and photographs, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, Dept 2080, PO Box 6050, Fargo ND 58108-6050 (Tel: 701-231-8416; michael.miller@ndsu.edu, or go to www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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