

PART II - Geary Street Church, San Francisco

Chapter 4 – Pastor Gabriel Avramenko



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt1.jpg>

**Geary Street Church (4th and Geary Street), San Francisco, CA
Richmond District**

**Officially designated “Pentecostal Church of Evangelical Faith, Assembly of God”
[Photo from 1957 or 1958, Pastor Gabriel Avramenko in front, center]**

This was the church I attended as a youngster (1953-1961). Many memories, including attending Russian school classes upstairs (apartment rooms). I am in the front row, beside Pastor Gabriel Avramenko (to his right).



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/Geary2.jpg>

Front row: Froloff boys, Peter Dubenko, Ted Dubenko, Boris Prasoloff, Alex Dubenko

Second row: Nick Kravchenko, Gabe Krapivkin, Nick Akimoff, Stanley Wigowsky

Third row (standing): Luba Solovieff, Raissa Fedoroff, Natasha Prasoloff, ??, Susan Shevchuk, Alice Loukianoff, Tava Soboloff, ??, Bill Dubenko



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/Geary3.jpg>



1956



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt4.jpg>

1951

Rare photo of Mrs. Dubenko, far right. Next to her are Ivan & Dusya Zakatchenko. Children in front: (Left) Julie Krapivkin and Oleg Prasoloff (his mother is behind him)



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/Geary4.jpg> Water Baptism



Boris Prasoloff and Luba Solovieff

[illegible]

<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GeartSt2.png> SF Bay, 1954

<https://wigowsky.com/images/misc/GearyChurchSFbay.pdf>



Geary Street Church congregation, 1952

<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt1952.jpg>



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/Geary5.jpg>

Seated: Pastor Gabriel Avramenko, Gabe Krapivkin

Row 1: Nick Akimoff, Olga Wigowsky, Mr. Froloff,

Row 2: Nick Kravchenko, Kathy Prasoloff, Alex Souhorokoff, Andrew Shevchuk

Row 3: Alice Loukianoff, Dina Shevchuk, Mrs. Avramenko, Mr. Krapivkin (Lee)

Row 4: Irene Loukianoff, Peter Dubenko, Alex Shevchuk, Dusya Zakatchenko, Valya Dubenko

Row 5: Adolf Wigowsky, Bill Dubenko, George Dubenko, Andrei Akimoff, Ivan Zakatchenko, Raissa Fedoroff, Ted (Fedor) Dubenko, Stanley Wigowsky



Signs:

Бог есть любовь (1-е Иоанна 4:8)

God is love. (1 John 4:8)

**Ищите Господа, когда можно найти Его; призывайте Его, когда Он близко.
(Исаия 55:6)**

**Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.
(Isaiah 55:6)**

Исполнилось время и приблизилось Царствие Божие: покайтесь и веруйте в Евангелие (От Марка 1:15)

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:15)

Приблизьтесь к Богу, и приблизится к вам. (Иакова 4:8)

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. (James 4:8)



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt3.jpg>

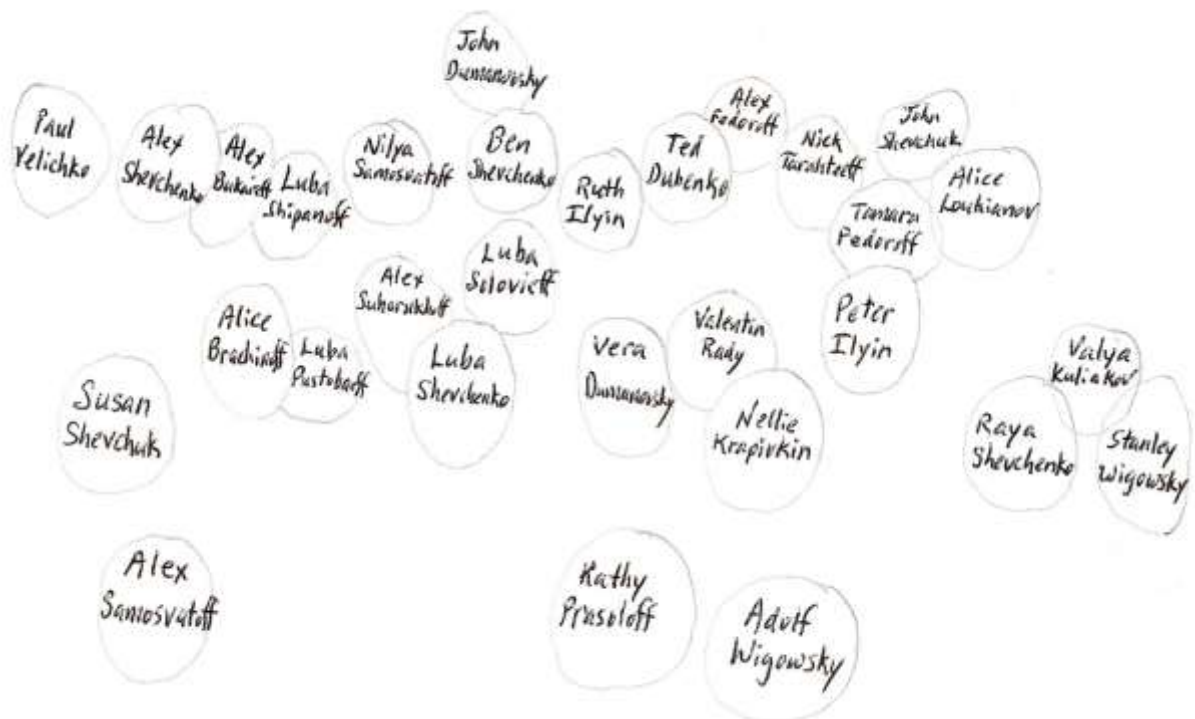
1955 Congregation



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt6.jpg> 1960, Young Adults
Alice Lookianoff Moure (with arm of Al Sohourukoff), Alex Shevchuk, Vera Dumanovsky Dubenko, Boris Prasoloff, Bill Davidiuk, Stanley Wigowsky, Nida Lokteff Wigowsky, Nila Samosvatoff Neciuk, Susie Shevchuk (forgot married name), Cathy Prasoloff, Nellie Krapivkin Ilyin, Raya Soboleff Bepaly, Lily Soboleff Ilyin, Walter Korzuchin.



<https://wigowsky.com/images/family/1960.jpg> Young Adult group, 1960
<https://wigowsky.com/images/misc/1960names.jpg> Names





<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt5.jpg> Christmas, 1961



1962, Youth group



Pastor Gabriel Avramenko

Directory of Affiliated and Co-operative Assemblies of God Arranged by Districts

This list contains name of city or community in which assembly is located, the name and location of assembly, and the name of the pastor.

* Assemblies with District affiliation or in co-operative fellowship.

RUSSIAN BRANCH

CALIFORNIA

SAN FRANCISCO—Russian Full Gospel Church, 884 Rhode Island Street. Paul Demetrius

*SAN FRANCISCO—Russian Pentecostal Evangelical Faith Church, 4012 Geary Blvd., **Gabriel L. Avramenko**

CONNECTICUT

BYRAM—Russian-American Assembly of God, 20 Division Street, Roy Dash, Sr.

DELAWARE

*WILMINGTON—Slavic Assembly of God, Harry R. Shewchuck

NEW JERSEY

*ATLANTIC CITY—Russian Mission, Michigan & Pacific Streets, Cornelius Janaskey

1957

<https://us2.campaign-archive.com/?u=c8e8cd3bf6c79b857f028d6bd&id=effe7d0ba2>

Newsletter from Al Akimoff (grandson of Gabriel Avramenko)

[See Chapter 21 for chapter about Al Akimoff]



I grew up on stories of how my parents escaped from Stalin's Ukraine and their 25-year journey across Russia and Central Asia over the mountains into China and a three-year trek across a war-ravaged China. I was three years old when we reached Shanghai. The city was eventually surrounded by Mao Tse Tung's army and there was a desperate struggle as thousands attempted to flee.

What I didn't know was that at this time Stalin had made an agreement with the nations involved in the war that all Russians were to be repatriated. If we did not escape from China we would be either killed because we were not communists or sent back to the Soviet Union.

There was a deluge of refugees pouring into America and other countries at the time. Shanghai was filled with thousands of Russians, and no one wanted us. The president of the Philippines finally agreed to take us. We were sent to a small Island called Tubabao. We lived there for two years and although I was between 3 and 5 years old, my earliest memories in life began here.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/344095249399156>

(Richmond District Memories and Beyond)

Through the 50s and 60s, you may have passed this scene on 4th Ave and Geary. A large crowd of people gathered in front of a storefront converted into a church. What most people did not know was the story of these people. Most of them left their country of Ukraine, some from Russia because of persecution, especially of the church at that time by Stalin. Millions were displaced as more millions were starved to death. This group of several hundred believers left Ukraine and travelled across the Soviet Union, Central Asia and over the mountains into China.

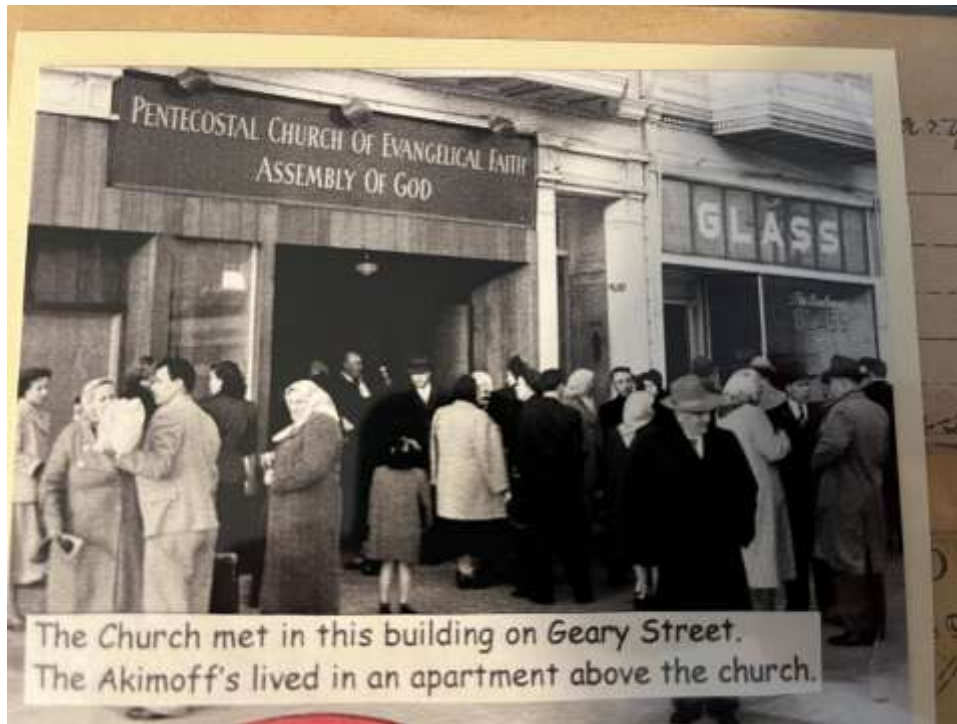
Al Akimoff: I lived on 9th Ave and was the grandson of the Pastor (Gabriel Avramenko) who led the group on their journey to America.

Comment: [Paul J. Wigowsky](#) (on Facebook)

This was the church I attended as a youngster (through teen years). Many memories, including attending Russian school classes upstairs (apartment rooms). I'm in the front row, beside Pastor Gabriel Avramenko (to his right).



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt8.jpg>



SPECIAL ATTENTION from Red Cross Nurses' Aide Grace Gallagher makes Raissa Akimoff feel a little more at home. Near at hand are Raissa's mother and father, Prascovia and Andrei Akimoff, and her two brothers, Alexander and Nikolai, who is saving his four cookies for later.

Al Akimoff was born in Kuldja, China as the beginning of the wave of baby boomers burst onto the earth. His parents and grandparents had fled from the persecution and famines in Ukraine and after a long journey that took them through the Urals and Central Asia they escaped into China. They had become believers in a brief revival that swept

through Ukraine in the late 1920s.

After some more years of traveling across China and living in refugee camps in Japan and Philippines, they arrived in the U.S. where Al grew up in a Slavic community in San Francisco.

Finding Jesus after a few rebellious years, Al was recruited by Loren Cunningham to join him in a summer outreach in the Caribbean Islands in 1964. It was a summer that changed his life. After graduation from Bible College, Al and several of his college mates traveled to Europe to attend Youth With a Mission's (YWAM) newly launched School of Evangelism.

In 1973 Al and Carolyn founded YWAM Slavic Ministries to initiate evangelism and discipleship in Eastern Europe. This year marks 40 years since they have ministered among the Slavic peoples of the world pioneering many ministries in the nations scattered across Eastern Europe.

Further Research led to this “gem”:

1. Franchuk Vladimir – **Pre-war exodus of Pentecostals from the USSR through China to America**. Date of access: July 23, 2013. [Archived](#) March 4, 2016

Archive link leads to:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160304195457/http://perchatkin.com/perchatkin/archives/3934> (Russian, English)

[Includes mention of **Gavriil I. Avramenko** and **Alexander E. Shevchenko**. Since both men are mentioned frequently in this account by Vladimir Franchuk, I will include it with this chapter instead of the next chapter, where I deal with Alexander E. Shevchenko's Paraguay group and their arrival in San Francisco in 1957 to join the Geary Street church.]

[This account has frequent quotes (*in italics*) of an article by **Alexander Shevchenko, A Brief History of Christians of the Evangelical Faith-Pentecostals**. I could not find the article in the archives.]

My further search soon led me to a curious publication by Pentecostal pastor Zabronsky entitled “A Group of 135 Russian Xinjiang Pentecostals Arrived in San Francisco.”

25.1.51 The **sea transport General Haan arrived in San Francisco** with 1,127 Russian refugees from the IRO camp in Tubabao, Samar Island, Philippines. With this transport arrived a group of 135 Russian Xinjiang Pentecostals, sponsored by the San Francisco Russian Pentecostal Church, operating through the Assemblies of God, from Church World Service.

The meeting of this group of Pentecostals was led by the pastor of the New York church, A. A. Gurov, from the Assemblies of God; he was assisted on the shore in finding his discharged people, transporting them from the pier to the city and placing them in

apartments of the San Francisco church. A representative of the General Council of the Assemblies of God churches in the USA, G. Kinderman, arrived especially for the meeting of the group of 135 Russian Xinjiang Pentecostals.

To accommodate those who arrived in San Francisco, a large house with two apartments was rented on Geary Street, in which 80 people were accommodated, the rest of the group members were received by the brothers and sisters in their homes and placed in their apartments on Russian Mountain, and some were temporarily housed in the premises of the community prayer house. All the Pentecostal Xinjiang people who arrived on Russian Mountain were first brought by car to the prayer house, where they were met by the pastor of the San Francisco church V. M. Zabronsky with a warm word: "Welcome" and cordially greeted them on their safe arrival in America. Here all the Xinjiang people were offered lunch, although at that moment the evening twilight was already approaching.

After dinner, the Xinjiang people climbed the stairs to the prayer house hall and took their places, where the brothers and sisters of the local community had already gathered for the evening service that was about to take place. After the evening meeting opened with prayer and the singing of psalms by the general and local church choir, under the direction of Brother I. M. Karpov, the pastor of the San Francisco church, V. M. Zabronsky, having read Psalm 32:1-22, gave a speech.

This group of 135 Russian Xinjiang Pentecostals is especially interesting because they traveled on foot and by cart from Xinjiang, Chinese Turkestan, to Urumqi, and they arrived in Shanghai at the end of World War II, in 1945. Their flight began with the revolution, more than 30 years ago. Most fled through Siberia. Others went through the Gobi Desert to central China. After the peace, the Reds reoccupied China, and these people had to flee again, saving their lives. Then they found refuge on Samar Island, in the Philippines, where they lived in the tropical jungle and only now was it possible to bring them to the United States. Their journey across China from Xinjiang was once described in the press in Shanghai and the United States. In the group of Xinjiang people, Russian Pentecostals, men, women, and children are mostly farmers and artisans, accustomed to the harsh life on their journey across the whole of vast China.

On Sunday, January 28, 1951, at the Neighborhood House on Russian Hill, Potrero Hill, a crowded solemn meeting was held, organized by the San Francisco Russian Pentecostal Community, with the participation of a representative of the Assemblies of God, in honor of the 135 Xinjiang Pentecostals who arrived in San Francisco on the General Haan transport.

The service meeting was led by the pastor of the San Francisco Pentecostal Church V. M. Zabronsky and the representative of the Assemblies of God, pastor A. A. Gurov. There was an honorary group of Xinjiang Pentecostals at the meeting. Speeches were made by: pastor V. M. Zabronsky, **presbyter of the Xinjiang group G. I. Avramenko**, and the representative of the Assemblies of God, pastor A. A. Gurov. T. V. Mogno led the general singing of religious psalms; I. M. Karpov led the magnificent singing of the choir of the local church, with the participation of the pianist, sister M. M. Karpova.

Presbyter G. I. Avramenko in a wonderful speech expressed gratitude to God on behalf of the entire group for the fact that after many years of wandering they had finally arrived in America for permanent residence. He thanked the local Pentecostal church and the general council of the Assemblies of God for all their work and assistance in getting them out of Tubabao to San Francisco. Between speeches there was singing of religious hymns and psalms. The singing of the Xinjiang people was led by their choirmaster I. Loktev.

After the break, the Sunday evening solemn and blessed service was again held at the Neighborhood House from 7 o'clock in the evening, and was as well attended as the morning meeting.

The Xinjiang people are temporarily housed in a house on Geary Street and in the homes of their fellow Pentecostals. The Assembly of God and the Pentecostal congregation are making efforts to provide them with permanent housing and to find them work. May the Lord help them all in this great and good work, a work of love and mercy in the name and glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior God. Amen.

Pastor of the Russian San Francisco Pentecostal Church V. M. Zabronsky.463

It was precisely about the fates of these people that I tried to find out something, and several months before the shock of joy in Philadelphia - in September 1998, I was on a mission trip to the northern part of China, which is called Xinjiang, I walked along the modern streets and alleys of low clay houses with flat roofs overgrown with grass, in Ghulja, Urumqi, sultry Kashgar on the edge of the Taklimakan desert... In the renewing China, which has experienced so many upheavals in recent decades, nothing reminds us today of the unusual community of Slavic Pentecostals...

Fortunately for us, they themselves managed to tell about their fate. There is an authentic document of history - the story of an eyewitness and participant of these events, Alexander Efremovich Shevchenko, who later headed the Slavic Pentecostal Church in the picturesque city of San Francisco for many years. (He retired in 1987, handing over the ministry to his son). And this story was published by Ivan Zub-Zolotarev in his magazine "Christian Herald" in Argentina. Shevchenko wrote:

Dear brother in Christ I.S. Zub-Zolotarev!

Peace and love from the Lord to you and to all the children of God who are with you. Receive brotherly greetings from me, my family, and from all brothers and sisters.

I want to share with you, and with all who love the Lord, even if only briefly, our spiritual experiences during our great journey according to the will of Almighty God. Feeling obliged, I cannot remain silent about those great mercies and blessings of God: Ps. 78:1-4; Ps. 119:24.

When we came to the Lord in Ukraine in 1925 and 1926, soon after our conversion, we received a revelation from the Lord that the way to China was ours. It was hard to imagine, because Ukraine is many thousands of miles away from China, and we knew little about China.

The time came - in 1928 the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, appointed the day for our departure, and we said goodbye to our relatives and friends, to the places where we were born and

raised, as well as to our property, and, obeying the calling of God, we set out on our journey.

The first stop was in Nizniy Uralsk, some stayed in the city of Uralsk, and most in its environs. In all the places where they stopped, divine services were held, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord greatly blessed the work, in a short period of time many souls were converted to the Lord, power from on high was manifested so that many received the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Glory to the Lord for everything!

In Nizhny Uralsk we received a great revelation from the Lord. One evening, when we were returning from a meeting, suddenly in the sky, in the west, a fiery star caught our attention, miraculously flickering. We stopped. A small circle opened in the sky, and the sister saw troops passing in this circle: guns, tanks, all kinds of equipment, and above all, a woman sitting with a scythe in her hands, a symbol of death. At the same time, the Holy Spirit said: "Great bloodshed is coming to Ukraine and Russia."

It is very important to note that this revelation was fulfilled 11 years later, when World War II came. We only heard about the destruction and mass extermination that took place, especially in Ukraine.

Then we thanked the Lord heartily for bringing us out of there beforehand. Although we are no better than others, His scepter of favor was extended to us. May there be eternal glory and thanksgiving to our Deliverer! 465

A participant in this exodus from Ukraine, **Vera Efremovna Ilyina** (the mother of the famous minister of the Gospel, the head of the Christian mission "Every Home for Christ" in the CIS countries, **Pavel Kirillovich Ilyin**), whom the Lord allowed me to meet in the spring of 2001 in San Francisco, was a young girl at that time - she was 17 years old. In her work "A Brief Description of Guidance by the Holy Spirit" she writes that the departure from their church, located in the Alexandrovka area at the junction of the Kherson, Nikolaev and Kirovograd regions, occurred at the beginning of summer, "when the barley had just begun to ripen, and the rest of the grain was still green, for in the spring it was prophetically said: "Do not sow, for you will not reap!" 466

Alexander Shevchenko in his work "A Brief History of Christians of the Evangelical Faith-Pentecostals" writes that there were many such families. Having reached the nearest railway station, they also paid a farewell visit to the local community of the KHEV, the presbyter of which was brother Rotaryuk (possibly, this was the union evangelist I. S. Rotaryuk, whose name is often found in the documents of the Union of KHEV and who worked in the Nikolaev district). At the farewell service during the Lord's Supper, Rotaryuk washed the feet of all the departing brothers, and said a parting word based on the text from Phil. 1:27, which was forever remembered by the pilgrims. 467

In August 1928, several families of Ukrainian Pentecostals, whom the local population began to call "Stundists", arrived in the village of Ranneye. Having found an empty two-story house, they began to gather on Sundays for their services. At first they thought there were about twenty of them, but then it turned out that similar Ukrainians had settled in neighboring villages and farmsteads. 470

In January 1930, they began to dispossess and exile peaceful farmers of the Urals to remote places, and this wave reached the village of Rannee. It was simply by God's miracle that the Drozdovs and Loktevs, as well as many other believers, escaped eviction. But by that time the community already knew that they were leaving for China by the command of the Holy Spirit.

The families that came from Ukraine (and these were the large families of Efrem Shevchenko, Pyotr Timofeevich Ionko and many others), as well as the newly converted families of the Ural Cossacks, prepared for a long journey, relying only on the mercy of God.

It was decided to move in separate groups. Some Ukrainian families left their place and went to Alma-Ata. And on August 24, 1930, it was time for the Ural relatives to set off on a long journey: the Drozdovs, Pustobaevs, Valshevs, they were joined by the family of the Ukrainian Andrey Yakovlev and the family of Arkhimeti Zemlyanushin. In all, there were about sixty souls: eight families in ten carts.

Working with their own hands, running a household where possible, the settlers lived near Frunze until May 1, 1931. Then they bought carriages and horses and moved to Alma-Ata in the spring. Here they again met with Efrem Andreevich Shevchenko, Pyotr Timofeevich Ionko, Andrey Zakharovich Demchenko, Leonty Dumanovsky, Iosif Zbrodin, Pavel Sizintsov and their families. In total, a group of more than 110 people gathered, who, remembering the prophecy, decided to make their way towards the Chinese border.

..... Gavriil Ivanovich Avramenko was elected presbyter of the church. He had been ordained to the ministry of a traveling evangelist by I. Ye. Voronayev back in 1927, as evidenced by his surviving certificate issued by the All-Ukrainian Union of KhEV. He had also been to the Urals among other Ukrainian brothers, and some Ural Cossacks converted through his testimony. Mikhail Kurennov was elected chairman of the community, and Alexander Yefremovich Shevchenko was elected secretary. Samuil Guba was registered as a deacon. A list of all families and children was compiled. When registering, the address of the prayer house was indicated. The house was in Zharkent on one of the central streets. The house, apparently, had previously belonged to the Dungans, who had fled to China. When they began to hold services for the first time, the police came to the sounds of singing. They demanded documents, and when they showed them, the police calmly left. 481

..... Now the path lay further - deep into the territory of Xinjiang, to Kuldja. By October 1932, more than 20 families of pilgrims had already gathered in this city, including the Drozdovs, Loktevs, Sizintsovs, Gaiduks, Lizogubovs, and Yakovlevs. A community was formed, with Gavriil Ivanovich Avramenko again elected as its presbyter, and Dmitry Lizogubov as its chairman. G. I. Loktev was elected cashier and manager. Thus began regular services in Kuldja: on Sunday mornings and evenings, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays - in the evenings. Every month, on the first days, they

celebrated the Lord's Supper with the washing of feet, as they had received from the Ukrainian brothers.

..... In April-May 1933, the following arrived in Kuldja with their families: Petr Ionko, Efrem Shevchenko, Alexey Dumanovsky, Ivan Porkhulov, Mikhail Kurennov, Mikhail Drozdov, David Pustobaev and others. The church grew to 100 souls.

Recalling this border crossing, Alexander Shevchenko later wrote:

Families were supposed to gather in the prayer house. You can't go empty-handed: everyone has children, you need to grab at least the bare necessities for clothing, food. And so, everyone takes their bag or bundle, children and goes. The city is constantly under police surveillance, as well as lovers of denunciation. Every suspicious person is subject to interrogation or arrest, but nothing can be done, the Lord has promised to protect, so everything will be fine. In the yard where they held a prayer meeting, there lived a family completely alien to them. And now they see how gradually these people with bundles fill the room where they hold their prayer meetings. More than once they mentally called them fools, fanatics, nothing more stupid could be invented; but the Lord always wants to confirm our faith in His power, protecting where we see no possibility.

Each of those who came tried to put the children to rest, and to rest themselves. It was not without noise: half-starved children screamed and each mother, with a sinking heart, offered up a fervent prayer to the Lord. And the screams of the children did not reach the ears of those who so greedily sought new victims.

They must leave at midnight. This is the moment when everyone is still on guard! This is the moment when any noise or rustle makes dogs bark! And guards jump on their barking like vultures on their prey. But this is the will of the Lord, so everyone is waiting for the appointed time. Most have settled down to rest on benches, only a few are sitting on guard so as not to miss the appointed time.

The Lord also provided a place for each family, the one who would lead the people was chosen - the brother who was the least noticeable, he did not differ from the others in intelligence, nor in knowledge, nor in resourcefulness, he had no idea about the country to which the Lord was directing them: except for meekness and humility. Several people were also indicated for constant prayer and communication with the Lord.

Time passes very slowly, the clock hand seems not to move at all. The silence is broken by the crying or moaning of children. Many sleep peacefully, entrusting themselves to the Lord - to the amazement of those who cannot calm down. Midnight... The guard brothers wake everyone up without turning on the light. The mothers calm the children, give them water and food. But the children do not understand the worries of their parents: they start screaming (especially the little ones) they were woken up at the wrong time, and the beds were uncomfortable. All their discontent spills out in crying.

The bodies of the unbelievers are filled with chills. The children's screams tell them of imminent death... The devil paints a vivid picture in their imagination: border guards come running to the noise, seeing bundles, bags and so many people in one room, and taking them to prison without questioning. And then Siberia is pictured, hard labor, separation

from family or execution... They listen anxiously, but nothing of the sort is heard and, seeing the steadfastness and faith of others, they gradually calm down and begin to pray.

It is time... Everyone bowed in fervent prayer, surrendering themselves and their children into the hands of the Almighty Lord. The brothers give their final instructions; the families take their proper place as the Lord has indicated and go out...

Before them was a pitch-black night, but suddenly the treetops rustled, the wind raised and carried dust along the road. A strong gust of wind blew in instantly, and the town was filled with various sounds. The whistle of the wind mixed with the cries of children, and everyone sighed with relief...

So, this is the kind of protection the Lord had prepared for them! And they were racking their brains over the fact that it would be impossible for such a large group to pass through the city and the border unnoticed. But now, holding on to each other so as not to get confused, one family after another moved.

Yes, it was a wonderful school, and it was etched into my memory for life. Indescribable joy filled all hearts. Everyone's soul sang, rejoiced, praised the Lord for His miraculous deliverance... No one doubted it anymore, and everyone saw a successful outcome. The Lord abundantly filled their hearts with His presence, inspired them, inspired them, and they freely went through everything that had recently frightened them and terrified them with its uncertainty.

The city is passed, finding themselves in a field, everyone stopped, the storm died down, it did its job: it covered the eyes of more than one guard, drove the dogs into secluded corners, and dispelled all the cries of children. And now a group of believers, led by the Lord, came out freely. The terrible danger has passed. But there, in an unknown country, the Lord promises to give them something to drink, to feed them, to send them everything they need for life, and to provide them with work.

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..... The journey of this group of 45 people from Zharkent to Kuldzha (a distance of 130 kilometers of an unfamiliar road, mostly through sandy deserts) was especially difficult and took 12 nights. Along the way, in an unknown small Chinese cemetery, they had to bury Yakov Ilyin, who died on the way. 485

Here is another fragment of memories about that transition:

In one place we walked day and night without water. Morning came, and there was no water, the children asked for a drink and the parents answered with tears that there was no water. Yes, it was truly a tragedy that cannot be forgotten. We all began to pray, cried out to the Lord, and the little children cried with tears for the Lord to give water. And he did not hesitate, it was said: "Turn left, go a little and I will give you water." And, indeed, we, having walked a little, went down into a small valley, where in the middle of the sandy desert it was difficult to imagine that there was water. Here, having drunk our fill, with renewed strength we moved on and having completed the journey, we came to the mountain of Ghulja, in western China.

..... *We are now convinced that not only in the days of the wandering of Israel and the First Apostolic Church, but also in our days, the Lord works miracles, leads by the Holy Spirit, heals, and saves. Hallelujah!* 486

..... In addition to the two above-mentioned groups (who came from Ukraine and the Ural Cossacks who became believers from them), in Kuldzha in May 1933 the paths of another, third organized group of pilgrims under the leadership of Mikhail Vasilyevich Danchenko crossed. They came from Rostov-on-Don independently and by a completely different route, but with the same goal - to hide in China from the coming disasters. Having left their native places, they also made a long and difficult journey, about which one of the most active participants of this incredible transition **Anna Bagdasaryan** later wrote a book of memoirs in the declining years in prosperous and quiet Canada, which, unfortunately, has not been published to this day. I brought the precious manuscript of this book out of Australia in the fall of 2002, thanks to the kindness of the brothers and sisters of the Slavic Pentecostal Church in Adelaide. This story of the amazing and difficult journey of this group to China is based on the material of this manuscript and the notes of conversations with Nikolai Mikhailovich Danchenko, with whom I had long conversations in Australia. (See "Led by the Holy Spirit" by Anna Bagdasaryan -- in **archives, books**)

..... In July 1933, two deacons were elected and ordained to assist the church presbyter: Pyotr Timofeevich Ionko and Georgy Ivanovich Loktev.⁴⁹⁵ And in 1938, G. I. Loktev was ordained to the pastoral ministry in place of **G. I. Avramenko**, who had fallen ill. 496

..... Kuldzha became a crossroads for various Pentecostal groups that left the Soviet Union — and not only Pentecostals. As already mentioned, there was also a Russian-language Baptist church in Kuldzha, as well as an Orthodox church. It must be understood that the huge mass of Russian people, driven out of their inhabited native places by collectivization, hunger and brutal lawlessness, migrated from place to place and eventually found themselves forced to flee to China — and Kuldzha in Xinjiang truly became a city of migrants. There were so many Russians here that later a consulate of the Soviet Union was even opened in Kuldzha, which, among its other activities (legal and illegal under the roof of the diplomatic department), was engaged in the widespread free screening of Soviet films that glorified the heavenly life in the USSR, and also actively agitated all those who had fled to return to the "Soviet Motherland," where they were promised mountains of gold.

..... In 1944, bloody events began again, which in 1948 grew into the so-called "people's revolution", which led to the establishment of the short-lived "Free Eastern Turkestan". One day in the fall of 1944, four Chinese brothers were present at one of the prayer meetings. (At that time, the church had 8 believing Chinese brothers). During prayer, the Holy Spirit filled the sister, and she began to say something in Chinese, which, of course, she did not know. However, in Kuldja, few people spoke Chinese, since the population was mainly Uighurs. Georgy Loktev said that at that moment he felt that God was saying something very important to the wary Chinese. Then the Chinese translated for him that this was a prophecy about the coming disasters in China. Soon,

war came to Kuldja. Many Slavs died, especially young people, including the church deacon Dubenko. The Chinese brothers also died.

..... The period from 1944 to 1948 is characterized by the fact that the weak, not yet established government freely allowed everyone who wanted to leave to do so and issued exit passes. Taking advantage of this, almost half of the church in Kuldja left for the central parts of China, and from there - to different countries of the world. Very soon this path was closed and all those who were late to leave were "slammed" in China for many years, although in 1947 the British consulate in Urumqi had already been given lists of almost all Pentecostal families who wanted to leave, and since then the international community has known about this group of people. 497

The further movement to the east began - to the distant sea. The first group set out in October 1946, a month later - the second. Among the third group, which left Kuldzha on December 19, 1946, was the old priest Gavril Ivanovich Avramenko, the large family of Efrem Shevchenko and Kirill Ilyin, who left Ukraine in 1928. Consequently, by that time, they had been on the road for more than 18 years... They were joined by the Pustobaevs and others who had become believers in the Urals. And then this door slammed shut for a long time...

During the struggle of the USSR Christians for the exodus from the country of God's enemies in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, there was a Pentecostal evangelical diaspora in America and to a lesser extent in Argentina and Australia. The one that believed the revelations of the Holy Spirit in the 1920s in Ukraine about the upcoming extermination of the people and the church and went out to the east, to China, according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The twists and turns of this first exodus of Pentecostals (and there were other exoduses from the Russian plains: Mennonites, Jews, Doukhobors, Molokans, Protestants under the tsars, through Germany during World War II) are touched upon in historical documents and testimonies. In America, everyone knows the representatives of this first exodus: Ilyin, Ionko, Shevchenko Sr. and many others.

One day in the late autumn of 1998 in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States of America, with the kind permission of the pastor of the "church on 7th street", as it is called, Jaroslav Pristatsky, I sat for long hours in the cozy silence of the church, completely alone, with excitement and reverence turning the pages of old Christian magazines, which truly constitute a precious pearl of the heritage of this church. It was damp outside, for several days already a piercing north wind had been blowing. It was more than cool in the church building, but I was digging with great joy for the gold mine of the history of our movement that I found here. And suddenly I was simply thrown into a fever - I found something that I had previously heard only vague echoes of and could not connect these echoes into a single whole. Before me was an inconspicuous publication in the magazine "Christian Herald" No. 140-141 for the distant year of 1949, where the following was written literally:

PHILIPPINES. Samar Island. News from brothers in distant Asia

Dear in the Lord brother and sister Zub-Zolotarev! Peace be with you!

We received a letter from you, for which we thank you. Although we know that you are busy, we are glad to receive news from you.

At present we are waiting to pass the Paraguayan commission, where the government of

Paraguay wants to take up to 500 souls, mostly farmers. We have decided to enroll, but we ask for your advice regarding leaving for Paraguay. It is impossible for us to remain here any longer. We have meetings here.

We have received the magazines "Christian Herald", for which we thank you; if possible, we ask you to send more copies. There is a great need for this here.

Awaiting your reply and advice, Your brother A. E. Shevchenko. 462

Ukrainians in the Philippines! Finally, by the grace of God, I have come across the trail of those people about whom I have been searching in vain for reliable information for many years. I remembered how in the summer of 1989, as a delegate to the Second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, which was held in Manila, I was still trying to find some information in Moscow, just before flying to the Philippines, about my fellow countrymen who left Ukraine at the end of the 20s and made the incredible journey of migration to America through China and the Philippines. Of course, I was unable to obtain any reliable evidence, names, addresses, etc. I also found nothing during my stay at the Congress in this exotic country. Unfortunately, I also failed to find anything when I was in China on missionary business for our mission "Possibility" – in Ghulja, Urumqi, and Kashgar, having made a tiring and long trip around the hot desert of Taklimakan in September 1998. And now, with excitement in my heart, I began to unravel the thin threads of this incredible story, which began in one of the Pentecostal communities of the Odessa region. It was the story of an extraordinary "bridge" between Odessa and San Francisco.

In the 1950s, the leadership of the Baptist Church in Ghulja was subjected to all kinds of pressure, both from Soviet agents and from the Communist regime of Mao Zedong that was established in China after 1949, with the aim of forcing the members of the Baptist Church to return to the Soviet Union. Portraits of the Communist leaders of the USSR were even hung in the prayer house. In the end, the congregation was not so much convinced as forced to obtain Soviet passports and taken as Soviet citizens to the virgin lands. By that time, the believers understood well that there was no longer any difference between the way of life in the Soviet Union and in Communist China.

However, the Pentecostal Church took a completely different position in these same conditions. Rightly understanding that there is no point in "changing one awl for another" in the socialist camp, which is equally intolerant of Christians in any country, recalling all the former prophetic sayings that China is not their last refuge, but only a long-term, albeit temporary, stop on the way, they firmly, amicably and unanimously filed a petition to leave for free Western countries.

Their faith was strengthened by a new prophetic revelation that "there was a long voyage ahead" in ships, and that they "were to sing on the great waters." 498

The further movement to the east began - to the distant sea. The first group set out in October 1946, a month later - the second. Among the third group, which left Kuldzha on December 19, 1946, was the old priest Gavril Ivanovich Avramenko, the large family of Efrem Shevchenko and Kirill Ilyin, who left Ukraine in 1928. Consequently, by that time, they had been on the road for more than 18 years... They were joined by the Pustobaevs and others who had become believers in the Urals. And then this door slammed shut for a long time...

..... Unlike the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, where all the Jews were united by a common history, close family and clan ties, common life events and a common leadership in the person of Moses, as well as a common route of the Exodus to Palestine, this Pentecostal exodus from the Soviet Union represents a completely different, completely amazing type of migration. It is the story of families and individual groups from different sides, who, not controlled by anyone, not having any central leadership, went their separate ways, listening only to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, as the only compass of their journey. And sometimes, like on the Silk Road, these were very different roads. But there was one common direction.

They came to China from different places from Ukraine, the Urals, Rostov-on-Don, among them were believers who joined them along the way from Georgia and Azerbaijan. They went to different places. The participants of this exodus and their descendants live today in Australia, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Israel... But they all had one common crossroad in their history.

This crossroad was the church in Ghulja.

..... They will talk about their further journey differently, depending on the time and events of their exit from China. Here is an excerpt from the **story of Alexander Shevchenko**:

The Lord blessed us for a long journey. It was said: "The journey is difficult, but I will give you help along the way and you will be sent by car and given everything you need." Then the Holy Spirit revealed about the further journey; it was said that "a great voyage lies ahead and you will sing on the great waters."

It was difficult for the human mind to comprehend how all this could happen, but, trusting in God's command, we set out on our journey on December 19, 1946. We hired carts to the city of Urumqi (the capital of Xinjiang) and with small children we set out on this harsh journey, since there was a lot of snow and severe frost, and the road ahead to the city of Urumqi was 650 kilometers.

There were indeed many difficulties on the way. At one point, we were detained by the authorities for 18 days, had to live in barns where there was no heating, two or four families together, and almost every day we went to the police for a pass. But all the time there was a refusal, so that many began to doubt whether we would move forward or not. But when we turned to the Lord, we received reinforcement; it was said: "If you go forward, have faith." Indeed, on the 18th day we received a pass and set off on our further journey, and safely arrived in the city of Urumqi. 502

..... They stayed here for four months. Together with other believers, they created a community, and a large choir was formed. They found work while waiting for their further movement to the East. Sometimes the American consul and his wife attended the services of this church. He was so touched by the inspired singing of the choir that one day he invited them to his consulate, where after a cup of tea he asked them to sing several Russian Christian hymns. The consul had a tape recorder. One could imagine the amazement of the believers in 1949, when the consul then turned on the device to play, and they heard their singing from a device whose existence they had never

suspected before. The consul enthusiastically promised them that all of America would soon hear this singing on the radio. 504

Four months later, they again set out in groups on their further journey. There were 153 people in Shevchenko's group. Having traveled through deserted places for about 700 kilometers, they were all again detained in the city of Hami for three months. There they had to endure a very meager financial situation, as well as threats from the Chinese authorities that there was no further way and there would be none. But they turned to the Rock of Life, the Lord, who consoled and strengthened them, saying that they would soon go further, and that "the cash register is ready, and it will be given into your hands, for My granaries are rich." 506

In his **memoirs**, which have not faded over the years, **Alexander Shevchenko** also spoke about God's great faithfulness to his promises:

When the time came, Almighty God arranged the hearts of the government, we were provided with cars for the further journey, completely free of charge, we were given money according to the amount of each family for the road, and also a general, several officers and soldiers armed with a full car were provided for escort and protection, and we quickly set off on our way.

Then we remembered that revelation, where it was said on the spot: "I will provide help and you will be sent in cars and given everything you need." And with great joy we heartily thanked the Lord for these wonderful deeds of His, which can never be forgotten. 507

I am very sorry that I interrupt here the quotation of this authentic historical document - the story of an eyewitness and participant of these events, Alexander Efremovich Shevchenko, who would later lead the Slavic Pentecostal Church in the picturesque city of San Francisco for many years. In his further memoirs, he tells how 153 people arrived from Kuldzha to Lanzhou (Gansui province), a year later - to Shanghai (it was already 1948, they lived there for 7 months). Then - the island of Samar in the Philippines, where the American base was located. There, in the Philippines, in February 1949, Anna Baghdasaryan with her relatives, and the **Frolov** family - Pentecostals from Shanghai and many others also ended up.

..... The young then **future radio missionary Alexander Shevchuk** also ended up on the island of Samar. Of course, at that time no one could have imagined that years would pass and after the war one Christian mission from the USA would buy a complex of the most powerful military radio station in the vicinity of Manila for a ridiculously small price - only 1,000 dollars - which during the war provided communication between the ships of the US Navy in this region. 509 After the war, this complex lost its significance and was prepared for dismantling and destruction. The mission decided to buy a radio station for the purpose of conducting Christian radio broadcasts to many countries of Asia in many different languages. This vision became a great blessing in the work of God for many countries.

..... In October 1965, **Alexander Shevchuk** and his family arrived in Manila and began their blessed work at this radio station. A few weeks later, Shevchuk wrote the following in his **letter** to Ivan Zub-Zolotarev:

My wife and I are from that group of settlers from northern China who were evacuated in 1948 from Shanghai to the island of Tubabao (Samar), Philippines. After some time, with our parents and a group of believers, we left our island, which had given us shelter and refuge for eight and a half months, and sailed towards South America.

After a long voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, we arrived in the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After a short rest, we were transferred from Sao Paulo on two motor airplanes to the central part of Paraguay, to the town of Carmen del Parana. We were joyfully and open-heartedly greeted by our brothers and sisters in faith, who showed us great love morally and with good advice on how to live on the chakra, and what to sow and harvest when. We were encouraged by the living meetings at **Colonia Fram**, where we had come to live. With a group of young people who had come to know the Lord as their personal Savior, **I was baptized by Brother Onesimus Koval**. In 1951, I moved to the capital city, where my two older brothers were already. At that time, Missionary Antony Giordano arrived in our city, and through his ministry and exemplary life, the Lord spoke to my heart to also go out to spiritual work. My wish came true when I was able to leave for North America with my whole family and after some time enroll in a Bible school in California. We arrived to live in San Francisco the day before New Year's 1955.

After finishing Bible school in 1959, I went to Canada and visited all our Slavic churches, as well as the eastern part of America. Since then, I have had several such visits with the word of testimony about our Lord Jesus Christ. The Pentecostal Church in San Francisco (my home church) asked me to stay on as an assistant pastor almost until the time when the Lord was pleased to call us to the missionary work of radio broadcasting in the Philippines. The pastor of our home church is **Brother A. E. Shevchenko**, who married us before the **dedication of our new prayer house in 1962**. This church of Christians of the evangelical faith **"Temple of the Good News"** sent us here as their missionaries.

We appeal to all brothers and sisters in faith, pray for us to God, that He may give us inspiration to convey His Word with boldness, to convey the Word of Life to our countrymen in Russia through the powerful stations of the Far East in Manila, Philippines. Many of us now have good apparatus. Well recorded on tape sermons, songs, poems and testimonies sent to us at the station, we promise to play in the direction of Russia if possible. This will be a great encouragement to our brothers and sisters in the homeland.

We did not think that we would return to the Philippines when we were here as children, but we did not want to resist the voice and the call of God to His field. We arrived during the rice harvest, which is the bread of the eastern countries. May God grant that our labor here and your prayers will bring sheaves to the Lord. 510

..... The group, which included the **Ilyin** and **Shevchuk** families, had the opportunity to see many amazing countries of the world on their way to Paraguay. The ship arrived in Australia, in Sydney, where some families who had chosen Australia for residence disembarked, then the route ran through the island of Ceylon, passed by Africa through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, visited Italy and France. Then there was Dakkar on the west coast of Africa, then they crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and finally docked in Brazil. Due to the length of the journey, they, with the permission of the captain, constantly held their services in the spacious hall on the ship, literally "singing on the great waters" and their gratitude to the Lord. From there, planes delivered them to Paraguay. They saw

the land of Paraguay for the first time on December 19, 1949, exactly 3 years after leaving Kuldzha.

And Vera Ilyina moved to San Francisco in 1957, when she was 46 years old. She left her village in Ukraine as a 17-year-old girl. 30 years of life - 30 years of the road. This was the exodus of the Ukrainian Pentecostals.

..... On Russian Christmas, January 6, 1951, on Samar Island, another 1,127 Russian refugees, including Anna Baghdasaryan, the large Shevchenko family, the elderly priest Avramenko - a total of 135 Xinjiang Pentecostals boarded the military transport General Haan, which set course for San Francisco.

Late in the night of January 25, the ship passed majestically under the brightly lit Golden Gate Bridge as it approached the dock.

The journey of these Pentecostal settlers from the Union of the Ukrainian Christians began near Odessa in 1928. In January 1951, their feet stepped onto the famous piers of the seaport of the snow-white city of San Francisco.

..... To sum up this story, it would be correct to say that this migration from Ukraine and Russia through China to many countries of the world not only saved many pilgrims from starvation or death in Soviet prisons and camps, not only enriched the diaspora, not only created the preconditions for cooperation between the churches of the former USSR and their Slavic co-religionists today in the most difficult time for our society, which, of course, is also very important. It is very important to understand that along the way, the settlers carried out a great evangelistic project. Moving from one place to another, they proclaimed the holy Word of God everywhere, were witnesses of salvation through Jesus Christ. This was the only possible form of Christian mission at that time and in those circumstances - bringing the Gospel to new territories and creating churches along the way. And even their further movement and subsequent departure from China was a powerful testimony for the thousands of people who came into contact with them, that these people, driven by faith in the prophetic word, had accomplished something that could not be explained by natural causes. Remaining in place, looking after those who had left, remembering their faith, which came into unthinkable contradiction with the realities of everyday natural life - they had to think that there is a place for miracles in life, and they themselves, the spectators, were witnesses to such a miracle.

It is interesting that the churches that the settlers founded along their way did not teach going abroad at all - this was a personal matter for each person. They Christocentrically taught the knowledge of a personal Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Not all Ukrainians reached China. Not all the new converts along the way joined them. The fate of one person and the fate of the movement as a whole are not the same thing.

..... Children should know about their fathers, who were powerfully used by the Holy Spirit - used both in their homeland and far beyond its borders. Children who live in the homeland of their fathers and far beyond its borders should know.

And that's why I wrote this book.

Vladimir Franchuk



Geary Street Church later became a Chinese Restaurant.

Afterthought

Growing up in the Geary Street Church in the Richmond District offered many opportunities to develop in many different directions. Church activities offered a chance to experience the many rituals that were enacted there: (1) Praying at the altar until you got “it” – “it” being the baptism of the Holy Ghost (Pentecostal style), with the manifestation of “speaking in tongues,” usually monosyllabic words strung together and repeated over and over again; (2) Washing the feet of a member of the same gender, according to the commandment, “do this likewise to one another” – a ritual that was concluded with a kiss on the lips (“brotherly kiss”), something that some ran away from; (3) Spending time after the church service outside the church, talking with friends about cars and girls; (4) Learning Russian from Russian Orthodox teachers in the rooms above the Church hall; (5) Sometimes skipping a church service if there was a SF 49ers football game on television, which we watched stealthily in the attic of the Prasoloff house across the street on 4th avenue; (6) Having a big meal of the day at home, sometimes with guests, and then taking a stroll to the nearby Golden Gate Park for a Sunday afternoon of fun and relaxation. We did not separate one activity from another as being secular and the other religious. It was all part of “church” – a term that meant

to us a life lived according to Christian rules and regulations, usually based loosely on biblical principles.

One memory stands out like a nightmarish encounter that happened in our 2nd avenue neighborhood. We lived near several families on a three-block stretch of 2nd avenue – from Cabrillo to Geary Streets: Wigowsky, Dubenko, Lookianoff, Samosvatoff, Shevchenko, and Krapivkin. The main character in this nightmare was Samosvatoff, the old man, who frequently got drunk and threatened his wife. On this unforgettable day, he chased her with knife, threatening to kill her. She ran away down the street to the Shevchenko house, where the old man Efrem Shevchenko and the rest of the family lived. The old man Samosvatoff chased his wife right into the sanctuary of the Shevchenko house. He stabbed her several times. Young Peter Shevchenko, who was of high school age, confronted the old man and tried to take the knife out of his hand. Peter was brave enough to fight him and dislodge the knife from the old man's hand. However, it was too late to save Mrs. Samosvatoff. She bled to death. Mr. Samosvatoff spent 10 years in jail for the premeditated murder of his wife. The Samosvatoff family – Alex, Peter, Nilla, Tony, and Nick – were left without a father to care for them, and they had to fend for themselves from then on. There was a strange twist of fate when the old man Samosvatoff finally got out of jail after serving 10 years for his crime. He was walking across the street in the Mission District when a vehicle ran him over, killing him in what appeared to be “God's justice” (or karma).

There were many other adventures as most of us went to school in the Richmond District (Roosevelt Junior High, and George Washington High School). We played a lot in nearby Golden Gate Park and also in Rossi Park on Arguello, and sometimes even visited Playland at the beach.

But those are stories that we youngsters laughed about years later when we grew up!