



*Under the Guidance
of the
Holy Spirit*

Anna Bagdasarian

Author: Anna Bagdasarian

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Foreword

The notebook I accidentally came across was written in 1970. The name of the author, however, had not been recorded. Another coincidence (are there really coincidences?) - I was reading a historical book written by a Christian historian and I learned that somewhere there was a memoir written by Anna Bagdasarian. She was an Armenian Christian and her story told the journey the Lord led His children on from Russia to China. The book I was reading also quoted a few passages from her memoir. They coincided with the narration which Bagdasarian described in her notebook.

After approaching the close relatives of Anna Bagdasarian, I received permission to print this memoir in the form of a small book. They also permitted me to publish small portions of it in the magazine 'Immigrant' as it is interesting historical material. Only a few phrases needed correction in order to keep the rules of grammar and spelling. The rest of the story I have tried to maintain as it was written by the author. (Sister Anna herself did not have any children, only nieces and nephews.)

In her memoir, A. Bagdasarian includes many brothers and sisters using only their initials or portions of their names – three or four letters. That is why today it is impossible to know who is hiding behind these names. After speaking with sister Alexandra Timoshenko (she wrote: "The journey of three lives"), I found out some of the surnames which were familiar to her. Thanks to her I also learned the meaning of some

Chinese and Uighur words used in the memoir. They are noted by a star and the meaning can be found at the bottom of the page.

Perhaps the author wrote not so much in chronological order but rather subjective presentation. This is due in large part to the fact that she wrote tens of years after the events and it is difficult to remember the exact order.

In the foreword, A. Bagdasarian writes the following:

"Dear children, the desire of my heart before I leave for eternity, is to tell you about your childhood and about the strength of Christ which has led us since 1929. On foot over the sand, across a river, from city to city; then in China, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turning left then right, from country to country. And here, in 1951, the Lord led us to this promised and blessed country flowing with milk and honey - with not a dime in our pockets.

We are not better than those who stayed far behind. But one thing is sure: we were obedient to Christ's will, like Abraham. "The Lord said to Abram: leave your country, your family and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you" Gen. 12:1.

We received the same call! The Lord said: "There will be a great shedding of blood here. Leave!" The massacre started in 1941 when Germany attacked the U.S.S.R.

Before I begin the narration of the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives, I want to introduce you to how we came to know the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Organization of the All-Ukrainian Union (CEF) Pentecostals

Written by Anna Bagdasarian

with words from sister E. Voronayeva

Brother Ivan Efimovich Voronayev was an officer in the Russian Imperial Army. When he came to faith and received salvation in Christ Jesus, he abandoned his medals and rank, and as a result was sent to Siberia in exile.

In 1908, while in exile, he was reading the magazine "Bumble Bee", and learned that in America, in the city of Los Angeles, God had blessed a group of youth with the Holy Spirit and the ability to speak in tongues. This interested him greatly and he held the desire in his heart to learn more about this. As time went on, however, he forgot about it.

One day, he fell ill and under escort, he was taken to see a doctor. When Ivan Efimovich was sitting in the waiting room and the escort was standing nearby, he heard a voice say: "Run!" Looking around quickly he didn't see anyone. The escort was standing just as he had been. Voronayev began to doubt he had heard that voice and continued to sit. Once again a strict voice spoke: "Run!" This time, Ivan Efimovich stood up and went to the washroom which was out in the yard. He glanced back to see if the escort was following him. But there he was, standing as he had been in the same place, as if he hadn't seen a thing. Once he was out in the yard, Voronayev began to run through the back yards and got to his brothers of the same faith. In the end, the brothers helped him set out for America. (editor's note: There are many other books and magazines which have the details of this story).

Finding himself in America, he then invited his family to join him and started working in God's mission field; preaching the Word among the Baptists. He strongly opposed baptism by the Holy Spirit. Moving from Seattle to New York, I. E. Voronayev settled temporarily in the Baptist Bible Institute and then moved

into an apartment which just happened to be neighboured by several Pentecostal families.

His children made friends with the children of the believing Pentecostals and they started to attend the Sunday school where the Lord displayed His mighty strength. The father started to forbid his children from attending their Sunday school as he was afraid of being ex-communicated by the Baptists. One day, however, when Ivan Efimovich went to preach in the city of Philadelphia, his children went to the Pentecostal Sunday school where the Lord baptized the eldest daughter, Vera, with the Holy Spirit and she began to speak in tongues. As it is written "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Acts 2:4

When Voronayev returned home, his daughter boasted that God had baptized her with the Holy Spirit. Then, the father hugged his daughter tightly to his chest and asked her to pray for him. After a few days of intensive prayer, brother [Ivan] was baptized with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. Voronayev announced this to his Baptist brothers and said that now he believed in this promise and that every believer should accept the Holy Spirit as it is written in the Scriptures: "... Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Acts 19:2

After this, I. Voronayev left the Baptist brothers. A few of them believed this promise as well and went with him to the Pentecostals.

Soon, with God's help, they started to have their own meeting on Seventh Street in New York City where the Lord blessed them abundantly. Many of those who attended started to receive the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts were in abundance. One of these gifts was also the gift of prophecy...

In 1920, God the Holy Spirit led brothers I. E. Voronayev and V. Koltovich to go to the Soviet Union where, at that time, there was great freedom for preaching. After the Civil War, however, there was a famine and pestilence. Brother V. Koltovich did not have strong health and was afraid to travel there. He asked the Lord for confirmation through prophecy. Then the Lord willed

him to go to the city park. Koltovich took his sister's son and went to the place the Lord had sent him. Upon reaching that place, he sat down in the thicket, far away from the other people, in order to pray. Suddenly he saw a suitcase laying there full of provisions. Everything you could think of was in there! The brother was standing there in wonder and shock when the Holy Spirit spoke to him: "This is what I have prepared for you. And I will provide for you there..."

V. Koltovich was encouraged by this sign and was now bold enough to follow where the Lord led.

They arrived in the port at Odessa. The Holy Spirit showed them the house where they would stay and start their Mission across Ukraine.

In Northern Caucasus, in the city of Rostov, this news was brought to us by two brothers. One was a soldier, the other a sailor. Arriving in Rostov they found a family of Baptists and began to testify about the baptism of the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues. People began to take interest in such a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They came to pray and the Lord started to pour out the Holy Spirit on them in abundance. Filled with joy, they began to tell their neighbours and acquaintances about the miracle which the Lord had done in them. In the evening, ten Baptists came and among them was my mother's niece. And the Lord began to quench these thirsting souls...

Chapter 1 Biography

I was born in the provincial city of Nakhichevan' in 1902. At that time, we lived in the coastal city of Rostov-on-the-Don, in a patriarchal family. There were grandmas and grandpas and we were taught to respect our elders and honour the elderly. There were times when, as we were walking home, Mama would stop us and say 'Let the older man pass and then you can go.' We were made to kiss the hands of old men and women when we greeted each other or said good-bye. This taught us humility. What I disliked most of all was kissing the hand of the priest when he came to our house to bless it with the holy water according to the Gregorian tradition during the celebration of Christmas. I always hid in the farthest corner or under a bed so they wouldn't force me out and make me kiss the priest's hand or cross.

My grandfather was a very religious man; he knew God. He was kind by nature and many called him 'father.' He cared for the refugees who escaped from Armenia after many were massacred by the Kurds. He also knew the scripture: "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" Isaiah 58:7. After going to the market, he would often bring new arrivals home with him. Guests were holy people in our home...

As dusk was approaching one evening, my sister and I sat warm and comfortable in the room. As we waited for dinner, we listened to our grandma telling her tales and, looking through the open door of the stove, we gazed at the glowing embers. The sparks of the fire darted beautifully in different colours; flickering green as grass, then violet like flowers, and above them like large castles were the flames of red and yellow with luminous windows. The flames of the fire, along with an imagination, drew pictures of magical castles. Enraptured, we stared at the fire. The temperature

was dropping outside, decorating the windows with whimsical patterns...

In her youth, our grandma had been ill from anthrax she spent three days and three nights in a lethargic sleep. She saw many things in another world and she told us much of it, but many things she also kept to herself as an angel had told her to do. Of all of her tales, I remember this: three angels bent down on their knees and said 'faith, hope, and love!'

Grandma was very godly, she never got into any arguments; never judged anyone. Whenever we laughed without reason she would stop us and say: 'foul language, foolish talking and jesting are not becoming to you.' She knew this from the Scriptures.

In the summer, she would go out early every morning to the garden in order to pray among the flowers. There, she would get on her knees and pray for a long time bowing down to the ground. When she came back inside with dust on her nose it was very funny to us children. And really, how could we, as children, understand the severity of our elders.

She told us many things about Jesus Christ, about His suffering on the cross for us sinners.

"He Himself bore our sins in His Body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness: by His wounds you have been healed" 1 Peter 2:24.

She told us about heaven and hell, about how a bridge had been laid across hell and was made from a strand of hair and everyone must walk across it after death as a test of the deeds they have done on earth. Whoever's deeds correspond with the Word of God, which is the standard – such as: love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith, meekness and the like, against such there is no law. These people will go to heaven "Or do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Cor. 6:9-10. Such

people will not be able to cross the bridge. The hair will snap and they will fall into hell. 'What a terrible hell.' Grandma said, 'eternal flame burns but does not burn up. The enemy of our souls is satan who walks around with a pitch fork and throws each one in so that they would burn better.' "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Rev. 21:8

As we listened to these tales we would hold our breath. We believed everything she told us. I cried with fear and said: "I'm afraid, I don't want to go to hell!" Mama came and took me to bed and said: "you won't go to hell; after all you are going to be a good girl."

The years passed like this. Our grandparents passed away and we got older; life changed. We moved to the capital of Russia: St. Petersburg. Here, the empty fuss of life drowned out everything else. Like it is written in the Scriptures: "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word, making it unfruitful." Mat. 13:22...

Ungodliness increased just as the Scriptures tell us: "The foolish man says in his heart 'there is no God!'" It seems something like this happened with us. It's comfortable to live that way, just say: 'there is no God!' Then the fear of hell leaves you. No God – no sin. Our feet set out on the path to hell. That very place which I had feared so badly in childhood crying: 'I don't want to go to hell!'

However, the all-merciful God, by His great love to us, did not allow us to go to hell. He had mercy on us and in this godless world he sought us out, though we were worthless.

After the death of my elder sister I also wanted to die along with her and contemplated suicide; I was in such a state of desperation. Why bother living? I didn't have a single goal in my life. It was only the suffering of my Mama which kept me from committing suicide. It was as if Mama had somehow given up and

it seemed as though she aged twenty years in a moment. I knew that two graves would have driven her insane. By now I am enlightened as to who pushed me toward committing such a sin. The devil wanted to gain my soul, knowing in advance that I would escape from his clutches since I had been called by Christ.

After it turned out that I would not be able to escape from life along with my sister, I often began to feel her presence nearby. She died as a Gregorian; she loved Christ and read His Word, but it often seemed to her that she had found many contradictions in it. There was no one who could explain the Scriptures to her. She did believe, however, that Christ was the Son of God. We read "For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but rather to save the world through Him." John 3:17.

Thoughts about God really shook me. What if God does exist? If there is a God, then there is also sin – and if there is sin, there is punishment! "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 6:23. But the deceiver planted a different thought: there is no God and no sin – religion is the enemy of mankind.

However, the Lord did not leave me alone; I was shaken and bothered. But who could prove to me that there is a God? My cousin was a Baptist but little light shone from her. She went to the cinemas, theatres, and parties. It seemed there was only one difference between us: we told everyone to 'go to hell' but she would refrain from using this expression.

So three years passed in this dark fog after the death of my sister. I had a completely dissatisfying life. I was bored at the parties and filled with grief. My friends were out having fun but I would go off and cry in a corner.

– 'What's wrong with you? Look, we're having such fun! And you're all upset and crying,' - my friends would say.

– 'Yes, when you're all laughing I want to cry, and when you cry I feel like laughing.'

– 'What's with all the contradictions in you? Are you still crying over your sister? Let it go, you only live once...'

And that is how my friends admonished me and these admonitions never ended. But my soul just kept on crying and crying because my flesh didn't want to submit. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want." Gal. 5:17

This is how the last year of my worldly life ended.

Chapter 2 Conversion

The New Year arrived – it was 1928. Our group of friends decided to divine our fortunes. Some of them gathered at the house of one of my friends. But we decided to stay home and tell our own fortunes. Then on the day of Baptism [when everyone goes to jump in the freezing water of the river] we would have a big party at our place. We also needed wine for this occasion and since it was hard to come by we made watered down wine.

I had tried to get my fortune told many times before but I never could see anything during the séance. This time, without any particular preparation I placed a piece of white paper on the table, poured some water in a glass, dipped Mama's engagement ring in it, sat at the table and fixed my gaze on it. What would I see? My future groom? This is what every girl hopes to see. But no! I saw Christ crucified on the cross with His head hanging low. 'It's clear I'm going to die,' - I said to my sister and cousin who were sitting nearby – 'I see the crucifixion.' I left the table with displeasure. Then I thought to myself: 'hmm, let's have another go. Maybe this time I'll see something better.' I sat at the table again and attentively gazed at the little circle of the ring in the glass. I hadn't been sitting for long when again the same image appeared before my eyes. Now I was convinced I was going to die. My poor spirit didn't understand that I was to die to my sinful life in order to be saved and start a new life in Christ Jesus, my Lord.

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Rom. 10:9. God's will desired to stop us from continuing on the path to death right at the start of a new year.

The next day of the New Year my sister and I were lying in bed with high fevers. Our mother was in a panic. Where would we be able to find a doctor? After all, it was a holiday. And so we laid there for the rest of the holiday. Our party never happened on the day of Baptism so we rescheduled for Maslenitsa [Pancake Day

— like Shrove Tuesday]. We had to have fun in any case. But God's plan differed from ours. He wanted to make us His children, that we might serve Him and not the devil. Lord, forgive us! Oh, how we had been serving the devil with our souls. All day we were on our feet. We worked until we dropped and then danced like crazy until midnight at the parties. We didn't feel tired from that. But for you, Lord, we get tired just from sitting in the service; we look at our watches thinking - my, this service is going long. For prayer, we don't have the strength to stay on our knees so we lean comfortably. And whatever the preacher is saying is lost on us — we're not even listening.

Even though life was half decent, living by the flesh, God's search for us never stopped. My sister and I went into the Baptist Church on the main street; the choir was singing, the presbyter preached well, but my sister kept pestering me to sit further back: it's boring — she said. I did what she wanted because I knew she didn't have much longer left to live; third stage tuberculosis. Both of her lungs were affected; she'd cough up blood all the time. At the hospital they did an x-ray and said that even if she lived through March she certainly wouldn't make it to October.

Our eldest sister had left this life taking with her to the grave her diploma as a dentist, so I suggested to my sister: get everything you can out of life, live how you want!

As I wrote before, after the death of my older sister Mama was in terrible shape. So now, three years later she still hadn't managed to pull herself together. Grief, like fire, had consumed her heart; she cried with great groaning. She prayed God would give her patience but she just could not find comfort. One day, one of Mama's nieces walked in on her in such a state and made this suggestion:

— Let's go to this one place where they pray like nowhere else. No one looks at you, everyone stands with their eyes closed — you'd like it.

She had taken Mama to the Baptists before but she didn't like it there. Her niece promised to come back in the evening to get her. Mama suggested Papa come with her to meet her niece so

that she didn't have to walk alone. That evening, the temperature dropped even further. So much snow fell that year; it was right up to our waists. Outside there were only a few paths cleared enough for you to walk. My sister and I were surprised that Mama went out in the night with Papa. After all, she really couldn't walk very far without getting short of breath. What's more, she was also afraid of going out in the night. It wasn't a safe thing to do in those days. There were muggers and pickpockets who put up signs: until six pm is your time and after 6 pm it's our time! They stripped people down and stole their outer and under garments since there was nowhere to buy them.

After about two hours our parents returned. They never ended up meeting her niece and didn't make it to the house. They had looked for where the meeting could be but they didn't have the exact address so they returned home. However, Mama now had a strong desire to get to the service some time.

To our shock, Mama had been out walking for so long and she wasn't ill when she got back home. Usually she couldn't even walk a block without losing her breath. She even noticed it herself — something had happened with her body. She wasn't at all short of breath.

On another morning two sisters in faith, Gegerman and Zakharova, came to us in order to take Mama to the service. Mama's niece didn't go this time for she thought her aunt should see for herself since she is wiser. But her real reason for not going was actually quite different. As it turned out, during the prayer they realized one of the people in attendance had been possessed by a demon. When the prayer intensified about exorcism, it cried out in a high-pitched female voice: 'I'm going, I'm going!' Mama's niece had been so frightened that she fainted from fear. The sisters carried her into another room.

While our parents got ready to go for prayer, the two sisters drank the coffee I had put on the table and waited. Sitting with their coffee, they began to tell me about Christ and His sufferings. At that time, though, I wasn't interested. It seemed to me there was a smell coming off them that reminded me of my

grandmother's trunk – old and stale. Everything they said seemed so dated, not to mention that I actually knew quite a bit already. I read about it at some point, and grandma had told me so much. Finally, when I'd had enough of their chastising, I said:

– 'Ok, prove to me there is a God and then I'll believe.'

– 'Read the Word of God,' they answered, 'everything is there.'

– 'No! That's not enough for me. There are a lot of good books in the world. This is just one of them. How can I know that this is the Word of God and not just a tale by man?'

A few places in Scripture had just seemed like random words thrown together without any meaning. John 1:1-3, for example; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." It's incomprehensible no matter how many times you read it.

Now these words have great meaning to me. But then... 'No,' I thought – 'If only I could receive something incredible from God, like one of His miracles, then I would believe. Otherwise...'

Finally the sisters left, taking mama and papa with them.

Chapter 3 New Life

Our parents returned home in great spirits. They had lunch and then, in the evening, they got ready to go to another service.

– 'Where is the service?' I asked.

– 'In the new subdivision, past Sel'mashem.'

– 'Will you be able to find it? Aren't you afraid? After all, you have to go past the woods.' (The woods were the well-known shelter for the thieves).

– 'No, Anya, we're not afraid. God is our protection.' And with that they left.

My sister Liza and I were amazed by their behaviour. Going past the woods at night? You'd have to be very brave to do such a thing – and this was not at all like mama. We were sitting at home alone shaking with fear and they went off.

At one in the morning our parents came home. I noticed some kind of change in Mama. At dinner, Papa told us what they had seen at the service and how after the meeting there was a prayer about being baptized with the Holy Spirit. 'One young girl,' he started to say 'suddenly began speaking in tongues. The face of the young sister shone; she stretched her hands out toward a corner where she saw Christ. She testified about it to us later.'

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." Acts 2:17

Of course there was no way I could believe all the things papa was telling me. After all, I'm not as gullible as my parents. They'll believe any nonsense. I decided to boldly dissuade my father from this.

– 'Come on, Papa. We're living in the twentieth century. In this day and age there are no miracles. This would only fool an idiot – and you believe? That girl learned it somewhere.'

– 'How is it possible, my daughter that this girl spoke another language without ever studying?'

– 'Which language was she speaking?'

– 'I don't know all the languages but if she had been as educated as you, then I wouldn't have believed either. But this was a simple village girl. What does she know? Where could she have studied?'

Papa got angry with me which was something that had never happened before since I was his favourite little girl.

– 'Fine,' I said, stopping his anger. 'If this is true, that God baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and like you say he gives gifts – speaking in tongues and no one believed her, could she herself understand what she said?'

– 'No, because in the Bible it is written: "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit." 1 Cor. 14:2.'

– 'Ok,' I started to concede. 'Then if God baptizes our Mama and she starts speaking in tongues, then I will believe.'

With that, our argument was over and peace was in our house once more. It seemed, for now, that everyone was satisfied.

– 'You wouldn't mind,' Mama asked then 'if I invited some believers to our house for the next service, since it is so far for me to walk. They're all praying for God to give us our own building in the city. I prayed with them too.'

– 'No, we don't mind,' Liza and I answered. 'If that's what you want, we don't have any plans – the house is all yours.' And with that, we all went off to bed. It was already way past midnight by this point.

In the morning a trailer pulled up to our house; it was loaded with benches. One of the young brothers named Mikhail started to unload them and bring them into our house. I found out later that he had been the first in this church whom the Lord had baptized with the Holy Spirit. In the evening Mama tried to persuade us to come for the prayer with her and Papa. By doing

this she was trying to prepare us so that we would see a prayer service before they held a service meeting in our house.

– 'Maybe the Lord will say something at the prayer,' Mama said.

– 'Do you mean to say God can talk?' I asked. 'And everyone can hear His voice?'

– 'Yes,' replied Mama.

– 'Maybe it's just someone up on the roof sitting and talking?'

What Mama was telling us seemed strange to Liza and I. Even though I had on more than one occasion thought about why God used to speak to the nation but now He doesn't. God doesn't change after all! I couldn't imagine how God could speak in this day and age. Either out of curiosity or for Mama's sake we agreed to go with them to the prayer. But since we were unbelievers, prayer didn't mean anything to us. We didn't hear anything.

One evening our comfortable living room took on a whole new image: everything had been moved out of the way, benches were set up, the mirror had been taken down... and Liza and I had just prepared to go out.

– 'Where are you going?' Mama asked.

– 'To the theatre' we answered.

– 'Today a preacher is coming from Odessa. Why don't you stay?' Mama tried to persuade us.

She had a good goal – that we might hear the Word of God coming from the mouth of His servants, Ivan Voronayev and Vasiliy Koltovich.

– 'Oh, no!' I answered 'The preacher's not going anywhere. He'll still be here and we'll see him but this film is showing for the last time today. You know the one, 'The Poet and the King.' One more time to see Petergof and the fountains we saw when we studied in St. Petersburg.'

And so Liza and I left. The film ended late, it was almost midnight. We were afraid to walk home; it was cold. We hired a cabby on a sled. As we rode home we shook with fear. Who knows, maybe this cabby is going to steal our coats. When we arrived at

our house we paid the cabby, walked through the yard and up to the door. We could hear them praying on the other side of the door. We decided to wait until the service was over. We walked around the yard as we waited; there was snow piled up everywhere; we gazed at the night time sky. It was black as pitch and the stars looked like tiny holes. They were shining up high and you could see the Big Dipper over your head. Pleiades was also up there shining like a diamond; it was my favourite constellation. The snow was crunching under our feet and the temperature kept dropping lower and lower. It seemed like the nails were flying out of the fence with a crack. You can't gaze for very long in such freezing temperatures. We walked here and there for almost an hour. The doors weren't locked but Satan wasn't letting us in.

Eventually we no longer had the strength to stay out. We were so cold our teeth were chattering. We went into the house and made our way to the kitchen so we didn't interfere with the prayer. Frozen, shaken up with fear and dissatisfied... They hadn't shown the fountains as we had hoped, well just a glimpse, and it was Samson, the biggest one, and even then it was just a side shot. We had searched for happiness, spent our money and come home angry. As we went toward the kitchen we met young and old, glad and smiling. What are they so happy about? We asked each other later as we lay in bed. We went out to have some fun but we were only disappointed. Whereas they had come to pray, and in doing so rejoice. What to make of this? We couldn't come to an answer before we fell asleep.

In my dreams I saw a garden surrounded by a beautiful fence. In the garden there were flowers of about thirty centimetres in height. The flowers were white with large petals. In the garden there was also a house in which some women were rushing about – and I was one of them. I went inside; it was like a great manor. I went into the library and there was the manager and it seemed that I knew him and loved him very much. The manager asked me to lend him some money. I was concerned: where could I get money to lend him? And with that, I woke up. I myself couldn't imagine how in a dream I could be in love with this manager when

in life my heart was taken by another. This seemed to me like betrayal; it was impossible. Afterwards I would learn that for God everything is possible.

The next morning, my sister didn't get up out of bed. Last night's walk in the freezing cold was not without consequences. She had pain in her side and a high fever. Once again she had pleurisy – inflammation near her lungs. Blood flowed abundantly from her throat. It is so hard to have someone ill in your house. It was as if a great big threatening cloud hung over our house.

In the evening, Mama and Papa got ready to go to the prayer which was to take place in the home of one of the sisters. The night before the prayer had been at our house and they had prayed about being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Mama also prayed to be baptized. The Lord touched her but it was just a visitation. After the prayer one sister said:

– 'The Lord was so close to you. Perhaps you will have a dream or hear a voice – if so, stand and pray.'

That night Mama heard a trumpet sound. She was firm in her convictions; believe and pray. Although it was cold, Mama still got down on her knees and began to pray fervently. In her heart there was a lingering thirst for prayer. She could barely wait for the time to run to prayer.

I will never in my life forget that evening. I experienced such an extreme amount of fear. My sister lay there with a fever of 40 degrees and was muttering something. There were no neighbours near our house. The enemy of our souls was frightening me; it was as if outside people were running toward the woods. They were being chased and fired at. I heard a bang here and then again in a different place; something nearby and then far away. There was no one to talk to. I went to my sister and she was muttering something. I tried to persuade her to go to sleep but she said:

– 'Mama will come home baptized but I'm going to hell!'

Then she started mumbling again and I couldn't make out a word of it. At the time I thought she was raving, but later it turned out she had been praying in fear to God.

Hours seemed like years to me; I was like a watchman walking from one window to the next. Looking out: is someone breaking down the shutters? Are they trying to climb in the window? And that is how I kept watch until one in the morning when our parents got home. I opened the door for them and Papa announced from the doorstep:

– 'Anya, congratulate your mother. The Lord baptized her with the Holy Spirit!'

I glanced at Mama with curiosity – is this Mama or not. There was no obvious change as far as I could see. My sister yelled from the bedroom: 'Mama, come here. I want to look at you!'

– 'What do you want to see,' I said stopping her 'a star on her forehead?'

Later I came to my senses that: "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:5-7

Mama had truly been washed in the waters of rebirth. She came home drenched in sweat which had poured out while she was praying; even the lining of her coat was wet. This was the miraculous day, or rather night, of Mama's rebirth. It was February 16th 1928. She rejoiced with this great change in her life. Liza and I watched in amazement as we heard her praying in other languages without ever having studied them...

Faith in God started working in my heart. In the morning as I was going about my business I met Mama's niece who was walking along with another sister in faith. She asked me:

– 'Did the Lord baptize my aunt with the Holy Spirit?'

– 'Yes,' I replied.

She started to cry.

– 'Come to our place, I'll be going back home soon,' I started to say, trying to get away since we had already started attracting the attention of people passing by.

As I found out later, she had not been at the service the night before as she had been exhausted by the end of the day and had gone to bed early. Suddenly a large hand touched her cheek as if to slap her. Then she heard a voice: 'God has baptized your aunt with the Holy Spirit, stand up and rejoice!' She stood and looked all around but there was no one there. She looked at the clock. It was eleven o'clock. After praying she went back to sleep. It turns out that at that moment Mama was baptized with the sign of speaking in tongues.

In the morning she told her son and daughter-in-law about it at breakfast. Her son said: 'it looks like your lunacy is starting again – a tongue on fire.'

In 1919 when she was ill with typhus, she overheard a conversation taking place at her headboard. It was an argument. The first voice said: 'we need to take this soul.' The second replied: 'no! She will stay and repent and she will have a tongue on fire.'

She told her sons this. They diagnosed their mother with psychosis. It's too bad they didn't know the Word of God where it is written: "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them." Acts 2:3

The boy who had been working for them came to them after being with us and told them the news that God baptized her aunt with the Holy Spirit. The young guys were embarrassed; they didn't know what to make of it. Their mother left her breakfast and ran to our place picking up another sister along the way.

Upon arriving home, I saw Mama's niece with the other sister and another guest – brother Vasiliy Koltovich. When he arrived, he announced that God had moved his heart to come and visit us. Of course I was very accepting of his announcement, as courtesy requires. The breakfast was already out on the table and everyone had been waiting for me to return. However, I couldn't quite get on in conversation with the guest, no matter how hard I tried. Toward the end, my cousin started to whine:

– 'I've been a Baptist for ten years and have prayed for a long time about being baptized with the Holy Spirit. But my aunt has only just started to go to the prayers a week ago and God has

already baptized her, but not me. Does this mean He won't ever baptize me?"

Then she started to sob and later she outright howled in front of the guest. Her behaviour really started to bother me. And I was defensive of Mama.

– "What has Mama done?" I asked.

– "Prayed," she answered.

– "Then you pray too" I suggested.

She took great joy in my suggestion, moved her chair back from the table and right then and there dropped to her knees in tearful prayer. I never expected such a reaction on her part. Everyone sitting around the table also got down on their knees, except my sister who lay in bed. I was standing in indecisiveness, but for the sake of courtesy I also got down on my knees.

I had a peculiar kind of faith. I believed in healing and had prayed many times for my sister, after which she often felt a bit better. Since early childhood I had disliked icons, I didn't like lighting candles in front of them and considered this to be idolatry. I had often argued with my Mama because of these icons. I didn't like the priests. Kissing their hand made me shudder in disgust. I had hidden under the bed many times just to avoid them when they came to bless the cakes. My relatives considered me to be an atheist. But this wasn't quite the truth because I had always prayed in secret under the blanket...

And now everyone was praying for my cousin. Suddenly she became a 'foreigner.' I don't know what language she was speaking because no one could understand her words. Just as it is written in God's Word: "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit." 1 Cor. 14:2 Mama's niece was speaking in an unfamiliar language which she'd received through baptism. And when she started to sing I thought to myself that any singer would have envied her voice; the voice she had in the spirit. "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding." 1 Cor. 14:15

What a voice the Lord had given her! What has happened with me, Thomas? I was so afraid that I darted under the table. And I did this even in the presence of brother Vasily Koltovich; even though I had known since childhood that a table could not hide me from the Lord. In childhood I had asked my grandma:

– "Does God see under tables?"

– "Yes, He does" she replied.

– "Can He see through thick steel too?"

– "Yes."

– "How can he see? No one can see through steel!"

– "He can see even through steel."

– "How awful!"

And now I was experiencing some deep confusion. In fear I crawled under that table.

In Scripture it says: "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:18. 'I guess that's the truth,' I thought. 'God really does send the Holy Spirit and gives the gift of speaking in tongues just as it is written in Acts chapter 2 verse 4 "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."'

On that day God found me, praise be to Him! He Himself led my cousin to visit us, even against my desire, to show that even in the 20th century He gives and creates. For He is the unchanging God. He is the same God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Daniel and many other men of faith. God also saves in the furnace just as He did for Shadrack, Mishack and Abednego. He pours His miraculous water from a stone as He did for Moses. Even now He does miracles; miracles which I will tell you about as this story unfolds.

When we all stood up after praying, my cousin couldn't speak her own language for quite some time. She was trying to tell us something but it was all in a foreign tongue. She was also in a state of indescribable happiness.

Healing

Brother V. Koltovich went over to my sister Liza who was lying in bed and he asked her gently:

– 'And you sister, why didn't you pray?'

– 'I'm ill. I have tuberculosis,' Liza replied.

Then brother Koltovich opened the Gospel and read from Matthew chapter 15 verse 30 "Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them." Then he read another passage from Scripture, Luke 8:43-44: "And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped." Brother Koltovich read to Liza and us as well. He read many passages to strengthen the faith of the ill. Then he asked:

– 'Do you believe that Christ did this and that He can do it now?'

– 'I believe' she answered.

– 'To them that believe, all things are possible' he said and invited everyone to pray for healing.

Everyone started praying with fervor. With tears in my eyes I also begged the Lord to heal my sister. And the Lord heard us. Getting up from prayer, brother Koltovich anointed Liza with oil just as it is written in James 5:14 "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord." After all of this, Liza got up, got dressed and asked for something to eat – she hadn't done this for a long time. Her temperature was back to normal and she was smiling. My sister was healthy.

Now, we all anxiously awaited the evening service. God had done His work and the enemy had done his. Before the service, one of our acquaintances came by. Some of the brothers and sisters were already at our place. I invited our friend in to sit on one of the benches and listen to the sermon. She peeked inside and said:

– 'Look, what kind of company are you keeping? Who are you listening to?'

Truly it is written: "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." 1 Cor. 1:26-29

Our friend didn't come into the room where the service was but rather stayed in the kitchen and held up my sister with some empty talk. I tried to persuade Liza to come into the other room saying:

– 'Aren't you ashamed? Isn't that a sin? The Lord healed you and what do you do? Laugh and talk about nothing instead of praising God and thanking Him for healing.'

– 'If you had been in such pain' Liza started 'like I was... it hurt here, and here.' She started to point with her finger at the places she'd felt pain. Then she grabbed my hand and squeezed it causing me pain, trying to show how much she had suffered.

I left my sister alone and went to listen to the sermon. But, alas! I hadn't noticed how quickly the time had passed. Brother Koltovich was already calling people forward to pray about being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Many of the people present started to come forward, and I was one of them. The only thing was that I didn't know how to pray. An old woman was standing beside me.

– 'How do you pray?' I asked her.

– 'What do you want to pray about? Baptism in the Holy Spirit?'

– 'Yes.'

– 'Well you need to repent first and ask Jesus Christ to forgive you and then you say: 'baptize, baptize' if you don't know how to pray. Talk with God like you would talk with your father, whatever you need to receive from Him. You don't need to say much; He knows what you want.'

I started to say to the Lord: 'Oh, Jesus! I am so guilty, standing here with my disbelief before Your might. Forgive me. Forgive, forgive. Baptize me, Lord with Your Holy Spirit.'

At this moment, the enemy attacked me in a full rage. Oh, what a fight it was! He attacked my thoughts; I prayed more fervently, shaking my head to fight off the obsessive thoughts. Then I heard the Lord baptize Liza. I hadn't seen her come forward for prayer but she had already received the Holy Spirit. I stopped praying. I wanted to watch again how the Lord baptizes with the Spirit. I looked back to where Liza was praying and I saw how her face shone with joy. She prayed very loudly in a new language. This was the celebration of the victorious.

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it." Rev. 2:17

I ended up having to fight two spirits all day. The one living in me did not want to vacate my heart so that it could be cleaned for the Lord. I could sense this not only in my thoughts but also in every fiber of my heart. I could hear how it groaned and resisted, but the Spirit of the Lord calmed my aching heart.

In the evening, many people came to the service. The Word of Scripture was read to prepare everyone to receive grace. After the service ended, brother Koltovich invited anyone who wanted to come to the centre and pray to receive the Holy Spirit. Nine young people came forward. I was one of them. The Almighty and Loving Lord baptized eight souls but passed me over. There was no limit to the offence I took. Why? Surely He had enough spirit for me too! After all, God gives of the spirit without limit. I talked about it later in my family circle. Father, mother and Liza tried to comfort me but the heartfelt pain would not leave me. I spoke to the Lord in my unreasonable offense: 'if You don't want to baptize me, Lord, then I won't bother you.'

Mama and Liza tried to convince me to pray again. In order to free myself from their attempts I started to get undressed

so that I might go to bed soon. However, this didn't work. I was already in bed in just my night shirt and they were still persuading me to pray again. I got down on my knees.

I couldn't speak because the tears of hurt choked me and flowed down my cheeks. I started to pour out all of my hurt before the Lord. And He, as a loving Father, touched my heart with His warmth and the Holy Spirit came upon me. I spoke in a foreign tongue; joy streamed from my heart in abundance. After this great fight, peace and calm reigned in my heart. The Spirit of the Lord had conquered me. It was February 18, 1928 at one in the morning.

"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." Rom. 8:9

I cried out in exaltation: 'I am Christ's! I am a temple for the Lord!' "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" 1 Cor. 3:16

Chapter 4

Apostolic Days

The days of the Apostles were upon us. The Lord was performing miracles. In the morning I ran to my neighbour who had been unable to eat or sleep for thirty days. She had more illnesses than you could list; tuberculosis in her lungs, failing kidneys, women's issues and to top it off she was paralyzed from the waist down. She couldn't even touch or sway her legs because of the intense pain, especially in her knees. She had been left for dead. The doctor only came to check in on her, there was no sense trying to help her.

In joy I announced to her about the amazing miracle God had done in our house. I asked her if she wanted me to pray for her that the Lord might heal her. She agreed.

That evening, before the service, as soon as brother Koltovich arrived, I invited him to come and pray for my neighbour. Upon entering her house he saw her suffering, cries and troubles. Those who lived with her did their best not to hump anything because every careless thud only increased the suffering of the sick. Going over to the woman we got down on our knees beside her bed. The prayer of five mouths went up to the throne of grace asking the Father of blessing to send His healing in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. Brother Vasilii took the oil from his pocket and wanted to anoint this woman, but at the same time her mother tried to smooth out the blanket and ever so slightly touched her daughter, bringing on unbearable pain. After anointing her, brother Vasilii warned her: 'Pray, sister, and believe! The enemy of our souls will come to tempt you and he will try to steal your faith. But you fend off his arrows and believe: The Lord has healed you!'

We went to the evening service. At this time Satan really did come and try to tempt the woman. She told us later how he tried to whisper in her ear: 'Do you really think you will be healed? Don't our miracle-making icons do miracles? Just think, they

came, prayed and you're healed! Don't believe it. You will never get up out of bed.' And on and on he went never leaving her alone. The sick woman agonized without relief until midnight. Then, she suddenly remembered the words of Brother Koltovich when he said the enemy would come to steal her faith. 'But you fend off his arrows and don't believe the deceiver. You have been healed.' The woman started to pray intensely. Then she fell asleep. While she was sleeping her legs stretched out by themselves.

Upon waking in the morning she felt completely healed. She dressed, made her bed and sat down to have breakfast. Those who lived with her were overjoyed at her recovery and gave thanks to God. At about this time, the doctor let himself in; he had refused to treat her further as he said it was useless and would only continue to watch her. Wonderstruck at what he saw, he stood in the doorway staring at her as she ate her breakfast. He had been expecting to see her in a coffin but here was this 'invalid' in perfect condition. This change took place overnight.

— 'What did you do?' asked the doctor.

— 'They prayed for me' she replied 'and I'm all better.'

— 'Yeah, and it helped?' he questioned.

— 'It helped a lot.' She said smiling.

In a state of perplexity the doctor left. He was no longer needed in this home. There is no better doctor than the Lord, Jesus Christ.

THE ATTACK OF THE ENEMY

A few days after I had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, my boyfriend came to visit. We had been friends for ten years. I was so glad to see him and I immediately began to witness to him about Christ and about what He had done for us. I was absolutely certain that he would also accept Christ and that together with Christ we would walk along life's path. We had always had the same opinions and had never had any arguments. But it didn't turn out as I had expected. The enemy rose up through him.

– ‘God? Christ?! I don’t believe there is a God,’ my boyfriend said. ‘Where was he during the Turkish massacre when my grandmother and her sons, my uncles, went to church, sat under the icons and prayed. And the Turks slaughtered all the children. No, no, I don’t believe in God.’

– ‘Yes, well, your grandma prayed to the icons, not to God,’ I replied. ‘Our God creates anything He wants both on earth and in heaven. Their idols of gold and silver are just made by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak; eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear; nostrils that cannot smell; hands which cannot feel and feet which do not walk. Their throats produce no sound. May their deeds be as they are for those who put their trust in them.’

I felt pity as I looked on his pained face.

– ‘You’ve changed,’ he said. ‘Your language has changed. You don’t speak the way you used to. Come back, come back...’

– ‘I can’t; there is no return for me. But you can come to God and then we can be together.’

His face changed for just a moment; he lifted his head proudly and his eyes flashed. Then he coldly pronounced his ultimatum:

– ‘Christ or me. You choose.’

– ‘Christ, of course,’ I replied with a flat confident voice.

– ‘Then you won’t see me ever again,’ he choked out and... left.

He left my life forever. Christ had conquered, though it was hard for me to believe. Christ had done the operation, but it was still painful. Now He owned my heart and my love belonged to Him...

The Lord displayed His strength in amazing ways. We saw many healings and many demons were cast out. Though the devil tried to attack the people, God’s strength was victorious when it was His will. What a difficult thing it was to pray to cast out the demons. Often, they spoke through the mouths of those they had possessed. One day we prayed for one unbelieving woman. Her mother-in-law had heard about the miracles which God was doing in our group and she asked us to come and pray for her daughter-

in-law. Brother Kuz’ma Klachkov invited us to be part of this work. No sooner had we rung the doorbell when a shriek rang out: ‘Don’t let them in!’ The mother-in-law opened the door, invited us in and told us to pay no mind to her screams. She led us into the washroom where, in the corner, the daughter-in-law’s sheets had been laid out. She was sitting on them like a frightened animal. Silently, her strange eyes gazed at us with her head lowered. We didn’t pay any attention to her, though, as we made room for ourselves. Sitting at the edge of the washroom, we started our conversation.

The woman snorted like a pig and could barely speak. When she controlled her upper lip, she could make out some intelligible words. After a long conversation with brother Klachkov she was changed and she spoke these words to us:

– ‘You are so beautiful! Once, long ago I was also beautiful, but look at me now,’ and she pointed to her mouth where her front teeth were missing.

And because of all the grunting her gums were deeply hollowed. She was severely disfigured:

– ‘He did this to me,’ she spoke again.

The evil spirit which had possessed her is the one she spoke of as ‘he.’

– ‘And now he says that you are my creation. And for some reason I don’t know you. Is it possible for the creature to not know his own creation?’

Brother Klachkov explained many things to her and then suggested we pray. He asked her to pray as well. The prayer was heated. The Lord promised to cleanse her and said there was a legion of demons in her.

Three months later she came to us asking for prayer for her husband who was in the same condition she had been in. Brother Klachkov asked her how long it had been since the Lord cleansed her. She said that likely it had been immediately after they had prayed. Her husband then took her out to the country side where she fully recovered. Her husband, however, said that it wasn’t God who had cleansed her but rather the time in the

country and the fresh air. Then, what had been in her was now in him. Brother Klachkov asked:

– 'Why didn't you come to us after your cleansing in order to praise God along with us?'

– 'I went to my own church, where I lit some candles,' she replied.

– 'Ok, if it pleases God we will come and pray for your husband.'

But the Lord said: 'This is punishment for his pride.' Soon after, the husband of this woman died.

In the spring, we moved from meeting in our home to brother Lozhkin, in his newly constructed barn, in the yard near his house. On the day we opened the new meeting place for prayer we also planned for baptism with water. We were prepared in advance for this as we were instructed in the Scriptures. All the unmarried people were taught that according to the Scripture they were not permitted to marry non-believers. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" 2 Cor. 6: 14-15 Consider carefully before you make a promise to God so that later you do not break your vow. Christ said: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." John 12:26. This is an amazing promise from our Lord. Christ was crucified on Golgotha for our sins. Would you go to Golgotha? Are you ready to bear the cross with Him?

As we listened to the instructions of the teachers, each one of us thought about what we would be agreeing to, what was waiting for us – maybe even the cross. We had to be ready just as the early Christians were ready.

In spite of these 'passions' we all answered with a happy 'yes, we are ready to die for Christ!' There were twenty of us who were ready to be baptized. Our whole family was baptized together.

Brother Vasily Koltovich performed the baptism in the river Don in May.

We left from the prayer meeting in straight rows and we walked along the streets singing Psalms. Many people had already gathered at the river. But this was the last open baptism in water. After this we only did it in secret at night. After the baptism we went back to the meeting to do the washing of feet and have communion. After all of this, we sat down for tea.

The group grew bigger and poor brother Klachkov never had time to work. He was a shoemaker by trade and that was how he provided for his family. Now it was all prayers, discussions, visitations... and they took brother Klachkov everywhere. His wife met him crying, saying there's nothing left to feed the children and the shoes are piling up waiting to be repaired. We decided to select a leader for the church and pay him. Around this time, another brother arrived. Some of the members of the church who were better off than the rest and who had a voice in the congregation, decided to make Egor the minister. Brother Klachkov had worked hard planting the church and had gone hungry at times for her and now it turned out brother Egor would take over when it was all done for him. This was a blow to our group and left a bitter taste in our mouths. No one thought about separating at that time; we just started praying even harder.

Brother Klachkov went back to work, but Egor didn't serve for long. Some of us wrote to brother Voronayev in Odessa and asked him to send someone to help resolve the conflict. Polina V. Kushneryova was then sent to us and she became the mediator between Egor and Klachkov; she kept them in check. Later, brother Vasily Stepanovich Pavlov and his wife, Kharitina, came to our 'rebellious' congregation. He was a member of the presidium of the union in Odessa.

By this time, our congregation had grown to around 250 members. There were also groups meeting in the outskirts and villages; they grew like mushrooms. The Lord worked mightily through brother V. Pavlov. He was gifted as a visionary. He lived

with his family at our place and then in the fall they moved to their own apartment.

In the summer, we went to the meeting every day at sunrise to pray. Some non-believers came as well. They were curious to see and hear what the preaching was about and to learn how Pentecostals pray. One time, a young woman came and got down on her knees like everyone else. The prayer was on fire. Getting up off his knees, brother Pavlov came over to this woman and called her to leave with him. When they came back into the building the woman fell to her knees and cried out in prayer: 'Truly this is God! Lord, only You and I knew – no one else.' Later we learned that brother Pavlov had seen a vision of her rolling something up, taking it out to the cellar and burying it. She had given herself an abortion.

Another time, an old woman came to pray with us. Brother Pavlov spoke to her after the prayer:

– 'What is it that your son brings you and you hide in a chest?'

In fear she only said it was true and then... left. It turned out that her son was stealing and she was hiding what he stole. But she was afraid to come for prayer and never ended up repenting. Sometime later we found out she'd been telling people: 'Don't go there - they reveal all your sins.'

At another preparation course for baptism with water, brother Pavlov asked an old woman:

– 'Sister, what's going on with you and the icons? Do you worship them now?'

– 'No brother,' she replied. 'I don't worship.'

– 'Then why do I see this icon hanging on your back?'

– 'I hid one icon 'blessing' on the bottom of my trunk,' she confessed.

She had to get rid of that 'blessing' so that God would truly bless her. It was so hard for the Orthodox to destroy these images because their faith was so strongly tied to icon-worship.

Winter came again; it was 1929. One wonderful frozen Sunday morning, we arrived home after the morning service and

had our lunch. Our parents washed the dishes and Liza and I sat down near the stove to warm ourselves and chat. Liza was telling me about her dream when we heard a knock at the window. We looked out and saw brother and sister Obukho. We were glad to have some company. They came in and said they wanted to pray with us and that's why they came. We started to pray. After a short time, the Lord filled His vessel and spoke to Liza. He said: 'Look, daughter, you had a dream: the vessel is the head and in it there are many flowers. The head is Me and the different flowers are the many nations. The two little heads are you, My daughters and the roses in your mouths, this is My Word. The little heads swirled around the big head. You must speak My Word to the nations. The dew which waters the flowers is My blessing.'

We rejoiced, cheered and celebrated because what was said was exactly what she had seen in her dream. My sister had an incredible gift. Through her, we were told of our journey to China and then through China.

Chapter 5

THE ARRIVAL OF I. E. VORONAYEV

Brother I. E. Voronayev decided to come and visit Northern Caucasus. Or, perhaps he had been sent to come to our region. Before he came we started to think of where we could put him up. We decided there was no more comfortable place than our house. Early in the morning brother Kuzma came to get me and we drove to the train station in Rostov. It was still quite early so we waited for the train to arrive. When it pulled up to the platform and came to a stop two well-dressed men stepped out of the train car with suitcases in their hands. They were I. E. Voronayev and M. S. Boot. Once we met the brothers, we traveled by tram back home where my parents were waiting with breakfast. Ivan Efimovich Voronayev told us many things about his work for the Lord and he remembered his daughter Vera, his very first helper. She had passed away at the peak of her prime. She had been not more than 20 years old. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he recollected his time with her. M. Boot, who had arrived with Ivan Efimovich, was a minister in the city of Pyatikhodka. At that time we could sense a spiritual power in him. He was missing his left hand up to the elbow. He told us that he wanted to check himself and he had prayed to God as King David had prayed saying: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps.139:23-24. God tested him – a rabid dog bit his eldest son. A few days later the boy lay dying in his father's arms. In full consciousness he said to his father: 'I don't want to die!' Then the father still prayed: 'Test me, Lord.' They buried the eldest son and when they got home the second son fell ill. The father in terror repeated: 'Test me, Lord.' They buried the second son too. His wife fell ill. In anguish he continued to pray: 'Test me, Lord.' He knew the Lord was testing him, that it was hard for him to endure all of this, but he stayed strong in his faith. Soon, his wife died as well. He alone remained, even with an arm

missing. Afterward, God blessed brother M. Boot abundantly and placed him in ministry...

Ivan Efimovich did not stay with us long as he was in a great hurry. He had several other places to go, just as the Apostle Paul had gone. He traveled to different churches instructing the brothers. As soon as he returned to Odessa he was arrested by the Soviet authorities. The time had come for God's children to be tested ...

In June of 1929, the union of CEF sent sister Polina Kushneryova to visit the churches in Caucasus. The sister lived with us. She saw in a vision that she was walking along with Liza and me. And so, after sharing her vision, she invited us to work with her in this trip. My sister and I agreed to work alongside her. I left my responsibilities at the church, administration and treasury, to my father for the time of my absence and then we set off. Sasha Voronayev and Vasily Pavlov also came with us. Sasha and brother Pavlov were to stay in Armavir with the Assyrian brothers, and sister Polina, Liza and I went on further. Along the way brother A joined us...

We traveled along a bumpy road in carts. With each bump the cart shook and as a result, so did we. And so we traveled from village to village. When we had just finished holding a service in one place, another place was already waiting for us or someone was there to pick us up. Many people attended the services; so many of them were there that they even stood inner porch and under the windows. The room was crowded with people listening. The thirst for the Word of God was so strong that the people left their fields of work even though it was the high season. Everyone wanted to hear the sermons of the visiting brothers and sisters.

Sister Kushneryova appointed Liza and me to preach the Word as well. We were newly converted; the Word was still largely unfamiliar to us, but the Lord gave us wisdom. The brother introduced us like this: 'They are newly converted sisters who are like the dove sent out from Noah's ark. It was only able to bring a small leaf.' The crowds listened to our simple words and were touched to the heart. The Lord richly blessed our ministry.

We traveled around to the villages for three months. We visited fifteen congregations. Our Heavenly Father prepared us in His way. He taught us to endure hardships. Truly, there was almost nothing we didn't encounter during that time. We experienced a great deal of loss, hunger, cold and discomfort. But we put up with it all with great joy for the Lord. We ate food which had flies in it in order not to offend the sister for her lack of attention. We slept in beds as dusty as the road. We washed in the river and washed our clothes there too. We hung them to dry on the bushes. We had taken a whole suitcase of clothing with us but we couldn't change into it, in order not to be a temptation.

We saw all kinds of people; some bold and rustic, some generous, some greedy. I remember how they drove us, three sisters and brother A. to the Cossack village of Batalbashinskaya. The brother brought us to a wealthy family; a good house and a large yard. The sister came out to meet us with a big smile. Then she ushered us into the kitchen and sat us down at the table. She put on the tea pot and started to clean some herring and cut up some bread. She told us to eat. Brother A., sister Kushneryova, Liza and I started to eat with their daughter.

We arrived hungry after traveling all night in the rickety cart. In the morning we hadn't had the chance to eat anything. We each took a piece of bread and herring and a cup of tea. The sister said:

— 'Whatever we have, that's what we'll give.'

After that she showed us a room upstairs where we could sleep. There were three places already set up for us. Brother A. went to sleep at another house.

Lying on our tummies, we read the Bible and prepared for the next day's sermon. The sun was already setting, it was dusk and it became difficult to read. We hadn't noticed how quickly time had passed — it was time to rest. We hadn't had a chance to rest like this our whole trip. Every evening there was a service and then discussions until long past midnight. Sister Polina needed to take her dentures out. She went to the kitchen and asked for a glass of water. She opened the door and froze like a statue. The

kitchen was all lit up, the table was covered with all kinds of meats and the whole family was sitting down to dinner. Recovering from her shock, Polina quickly shut the door and forgot about her glass of water. 'Here's a riddle (her favourite word for when something was bothering her) here is an utmost of greed, even though the despossession of the kulaks has already begun. [the political repression of well-off peasants by the Soviet government].

The hostess came running: 'Sisters, I forgot about you, come for dinner.' But we declined even though our stomachs were rumbling.

In the morning brother A. came and said:

— 'Let's go, I know you are hungry.'

He took us to the home of a poor family where two widowed sisters lived. They were very glad to meet us.

— 'Sisters,' said one of them 'sit down and eat. Here is some hot bread; I just took it out of the oven. And this young garlic is fresh from the garden. Sorry for the meager offerings.'

We thanked the sisters for their hospitality. What they ate themselves is what they offered us.

Soon, we were called to start the service. Their building was spacious. When we entered the house, not everyone had finished arriving yet. One sister came in and made a curtsy in one direction and then in the other. Then she went to greet all the other brothers and sisters. Everyone else who entered did the same. I asked one of the elderly men:

— 'Brother, have you heard about the Holy Spirit?'

— 'Of course, I was one of the Apostles,' he answered.

After the service, we were summoned to the village meeting. Everyone followed us. When we got there we were asked why we had come to this place. We replied that we wanted to visit our brothers and sisters. After listening to us, the authorities told us to remove ourselves immediately. We had to obey. The brothers hitched up a horse and we rode in the cart all night to Essentuki station. Here, we said our goodbyes to sister Kushneryova and traveled to Kislovodsk. Sister Kushneryova still needed to visit another fifteen congregations.

Once we got to Kislovodsk, sister M. P. saw us and throwing up her hands, she said:

– ‘What’s with the masquerade? Go wash and straighten yourselves up.’

We had to go bathe and get dressed as it suited the sisters. We didn’t stay in Kislovodsk for long, though, because Liza had fallen seriously ill. Even before we reached Essentuki she had started to complain of pain in her stomach. This is why we left sister Polina Kushneryova. We returned home. Our parents were so glad to see us, and of course, so were we. Sister Polina returned shortly after that as well. The Soviet Union promptly sent her to Siberia to the city of Omsk. We never saw her again on this Earth.

ASSUMPTION

Back at home, a mighty task was waiting for us. One sister from the city of Novocherkassk, having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, had later allowed the enemy into her heart. Pride had overtaken her. She was a very passionate sister. She frequently prayed in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit had displayed much strength through her. And all of this had led to her pride. She started to go off on her own in prayer, not desiring to have fellowship with others. The Word of God says: “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7. She considered others to be unworthy of praying with her. Due to her pride, she could not distinguish between the voices she heard. One voice pushed her to fast to the point of collapse and she was on the brink of death. One day she heard: ‘Go and sit in the cellar on the barrel and I will bring you gifts on a golden platter.’ The sister believed that it was God speaking so she went out to the cellar. As she was climbing down the ladder, she slipped and fell due to her lack of strength. Her husband found her in a state of total weakness. The enemy sought her soul, but the Lord did not wish for her to die and He spared her that she might repent. Her

husband invited the brothers to their home but they decided to bring her to us. On the train, she heard a voice saying: ‘Let’s see who can run under the train faster.’ She told the brothers what she’d heard and asked them to hold on to her because some kind of force was pushing her.

Prayers for her soul to be freed lasted a whole week. Satan knew that his end was coming and started screaming and crying loudly: ‘Oy, fire, God’s fire is burning me! I don’t want to go to the abyss. It’s dark in there – let me go at least into the straw!’ The battle was desperate for this soul. Finally, throwing her upwards, he left. The sister lay stretched out on the floor with foam and blood coming from her mouth. The demon went to the abyss.

The sister’s face lightened, the oppression was lifted from her soul and she repented before God with joy and exclamation. She praised the Lord for freeing her. All of us rejoiced as well at this victory. Everyone became dear and cherished by her, something she had not felt toward believers for a long time. There were many cases like this in our lives ...

The Ukrainian Group

(Told by brother M. I.)

One day, the Lord led some brothers and sisters from Ukraine to visit us. In Ukraine, in the village of Adamovka, there lived a Seventh Day Adventist who worked fervently for the Lord and called many to repentance. Besides Pentecostals, there were no other denominations in the vicinity. He invited some preachers while he himself went from house to house inviting the people to come to God. One sister named S. lived in the village and worked in the fields. The Holy Spirit said to her: ‘Leave everything and go home. My work is Great!’ She ran home in a hurry and in doing so she met brother G. who announced that he had been commanded to go to the village of Adamovka which was located six hundred and fifteen miles from them. Without doubting for a minute, they left all their work and set out. Upon arriving in the village, they

found many brothers and sisters who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit but were in need of education in the Word of God. They got straight to work and prepared twenty six souls for baptism with water.

Baptism with water was announced for the day of Pentecost. The time had come to dedicate these souls to the Lord. They walked along singing hymns on their way to the pond, but they were met by their fellow villagers who were holding sticks and pitch forks in their hands:

– 'Don't go another step,' they yelled angrily. 'We'll beat the lot of you! We won't let you taint our pond!'

What could be done? After all, the Orthodox who had been put up to this by their priest could really start a fight. An old man who was there at the time found a solution. He drove to the owner of a different pond which was located three miles from this place. After answering his questions, the owner gave permission to use his pond for the baptism; he even promised to be in attendance himself.

Everyone walked from one pond to the other. The persecutors followed them with swearing. The sun was beating down and the dust rose high from all the feet. But the believers pressed on in spite of the difficulties. The baptism was performed with success. All twenty six souls entered into the covenant with the Lord. "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ," 1 Peter 3:21.

Those who hadn't permitted the believers to perform baptism in the nearby pond started to argue amongst themselves, looking for the instigator of the rebellion.

The brother and sister were requested to stay for some time longer. It was said: 'A great task is still ahead.' The Lord started to display His work. The brother served by preaching and teaching because none of the believers were familiar with the Scriptures, even though they had all been baptized with the Holy Spirit. God did not want His children to be led astray. That's why

He sent these instructors to them. And so, they spent three months there. After that time, the Lord called them again to go further to the village of C., just a short distance from the city of Nikolaev. The brother and sister, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, sold and distributed their possessions and traveled on to that village.

When they arrived, they found the local brotherhood ready to go. The Lord united the groups and led them to Rostov-on-the-Don in Northern Caucasus. There, He showed them a place called Kamenolomnya. Here, the believers were trying to register their congregation but they didn't yet have enough members to do so. Until they were registered, they were not able to continue to meet according to the law. The one who arrived filled in the needed numbers. Then, they were allowed to register. Many people were saved there and baptized with the Holy Spirit. At this point, baptism in water was done only at night because the fellow villagers of Orthodox faith created barriers for the Pentecostals. The local priests set them against the Pentecostals.

In 1929, our young brother whose last name is Verkhovod, decided to get married. He went to Kamenolomnya where three sisters from the Ukrainian group lived. He liked one of them and he proposed to her. 'Get a different one,' the local brothers advised him. 'This one has a bad temper.' But the brother answered; 'Perhaps she's angry but she's beautiful.' In the end, he suffered quite a bit of grief. Her whole family then went back to Rostov...

In our church we had a special prayer group. The members of this group had been appointed by the Holy Spirit as being the Holiest of the Holy of the people of the Lord. God revealed to them all the needs. People walked and drove from the surrounding areas to tell about their needs. One day, the Holy Spirit revealed to brother Egor through His vessel: 'They will come and take you, my son. Twisting your arms behind you, they will lead you away.' Then the Lord turned to another vessel to speak to the first vessel and said: 'Go to the Port, Artur.'

I stood at the prayer in great sorrow. God was speaking to everyone but not to me. Right then a vessel turned toward me and

gave these words: 'Do not be sorrowful, you also will go.' Many other things were said but it happened so long ago that I no longer remember. The only other thing I can recall is the month – March and some date. After the prayer we started to reflect on what had been said by the Holy Spirit. The dates seemed to match as the date when we planned for the next prayer group. We decided that in March they would come and carry off our whole prayer group. On that day, we came prepared for the prayer. We wore brand new clothing and took needles and threads in our pockets in case we needed to mend something.

Only now can I imagine how our mother felt that day, as if she agreed to the sacrifice as Abraham had done. God told him: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." Gen. 22:2. Mama walked us to the prayer and decided to stay and watch. The date had been given for the Ukrainian brothers and brother Verkhovod. They left, but nobody came to take away our group. We felt broken spiritually because of our folly. God's mercy was shown to us. It was October of 1929. At this prayer, God filled a vessel with the Spirit and said: 'There will be a great shedding of blood in this place. Go away from here!' The attack was even shown in reality. The vessel took off his coat, rolled it up like a machine gun and fired. It was frightening to watch the actions of this prophet. We were perplexed. The civil strife had ended and there was peace everywhere. How could there be shedding of blood? Our dear sister and leader of our prayer group complained aloud: 'I am old and my children will not agree to leave. How can I do this? For is God not a God of confusion but rather of love and peace? Her children were not believers.

But the Lord hurried us. In a week we had sold everything which we would not need for our journey. The other items we would need we packed up. We worked without tiring day and night. These were days of amazement for us. We prayed with fervor and were already prepared to set out. The Lord joined us all

together in order to lead us further. We waited only for the Lord's signal to show us when and where.

Chapter 6

THE JOURNEY TO BATUMI

We gathered for prayer. The Lord revealed when and where and how our trip would go; with the sounds of singing, the scrape of a moving steamship, waves splashing, it was shown in action how the steamship would be tossed in a storm. Through a prophet the Lord acted mightily on the day we were shown to leave. We arrived at the pier – this was our first exodus. Each family arrived by their own means. We checked in our luggage. There were many people there to see us off. Many of them knew about the departure but they had not been told to go. We stood in line to buy our tickets. At this moment the boiler on board blew and they couldn't sell tickets. We had to return home.

What a blow this was to our faith! What a laughingstock we were to the ones who came to see us off. In this grief, however, we grew closer to one another. What did that mean? Why didn't it go as the Lord had said? What is the reason for the laughter of the non-believers? So we went back home, taking with us the families who had come from other places.

The next morning, brother Slyusarev and the other brothers decided to determine the reason for such a 'disgrace' as it seemed to us. The Lord rebuked us saying: 'You are children of one Father but you, yourselves are not in agreement. You don't have harmony, connection or unity. Create a list so that none may be left behind.' (Later, this list became very useful for us.)

We whole-heartedly repented of our mistake, asking God in prayer to help us not to make the same mistake. The brothers sent Liza and me to the pier again to find out when the steamship would be ready. They stayed and continued to pray. When we returned home, at that very moment, the Lord revealed to us through His vessel, the day we were to leave. This was the day they had told us the steamship would be ready. This greatly strengthened our faith.

On November 29th, 1929 we left Rostov organized and graceful, like one united community. There were 59 of us. We knew everyone, even though many had come from other places. One brother bought the tickets. I asked him to get second class tickets for us but he said: 'No, we'll have the same for everyone so that no one stumbles.' I agreed. When we all boarded and sat down it was crowded. We couldn't travel like that. They suggested we pay more for another cabin which was bigger.

Lying on the soft sheets in a comfortable cabin we rested after all that had happened with us. We were the only ones in the cabin – all believers.

For two days, as we travelled across the Azov Sea, the water was calm. Then, when we reached the Black Sea we could see a large black stripe between the two seas, where they met. The boat started to rock. Lying on the bunk, I recollected the words the Father had spoken to us. All the sounds the Holy Spirit had conveyed to us in the prophecy were heard in their time. The scraping of the steamboat, the noise from the waves on the sides of the boat, these sounds matched what had been revealed by the Lord. They brought one girl to our cabin who had been on the lower deck, and she was getting seasick. Lying on her bed she couldn't calm down: 'Captain, stop the boat! What godless people. Can't they hear the people are dying,' she screamed. All her lamentations made us laugh. We laughed at Melaniya in good spirit.

Finally the steamboat came to dock at the pier in Novorossiysk. But the captain didn't want to stay for long in the port, saying: 'They'll blow me to splinters here.' [Editor's note: sometimes there are tornados here called 'Boreas']. And he started to set out for the open sea. As we were leaving the bay, something hit the steamboat sharply at the side. The engine stalled and everything that had been on the tables flew onto the floor and rolled around. Screams were heard. The non-believing passengers were in a panic and threw themselves up onto the deck, trying to save themselves. We, believers, on the other hand, lay calmly on our bunks and sang praise to God. This hadn't come as a surprise

to us. God had warned us about this earlier. He was leading us to Batumi, so we knew everyone would be safe.

We found out later that one of the men working on the steamboat named K., had been a Pentecostal who had fallen away. He heard the believers in the hold singing and praising God. He realized God's children were on board and he started to comfort the other passengers saying: 'Don't be afraid and don't worry. Nothing bad will happen to the steamboat. There are believers on board. Amongst them there must be one soul which pleases God and for the sake of this soul God will keep the steamboat safe.' Hurriedly, the steamboat straightened up, the engine turned back on and we started moving, though it threw us side to side like a ball. The Lord miraculously saved the steamboat, even though it was quite old, nonetheless it was under God's protection. We learned later that the steamboat which had been coming after us sank.

The steamboat arrived in Batumi. It was warm here and everything around us was green even though it was already December. The Lord determined a place for us to live and gave us jobs in the coastal city of Kobuleti. We settled in the mountains. We went up to the peak. A beautiful picture unfolded before our eyes: there were mandarin plantations and terraces coming down the mountains. The trees were covered with ripe fruit that looked like gold. The aroma from the flowers and fruit made our heads swim with the scent. We felt as if we were in the Garden of Eden.

In single file we climbed one mountain, then a second, and finally, the third. Before us there was a flat plain on which stood a house built on stone columns (this was done because of the rain). It was surrounded on all sides by rose bushes and other unique kinds of flowers. Here, a room was given to each family. Our luggage had not arrived yet. We only had one blanket which we spread out on the floor in the corner of the room and the three of us slept there.

We held our worship services sitting on the floor, but in any case, we could feel God's blessing. Almost every day, more believers arrived, having been led here by the Lord. They came

from all over Russia. God announced their arrival to us and told us to go meet them. Here, was an assembly of the whole nation which God had lead in a special way. We rejoiced that the Lord directed and guided us. But His judgement also took place here. Just as it is written: "For it is time for judgement to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" 1 Peter 4:17

Two of our cottages were overcrowded with new arrivals. We got a third, a fourth and then a fifth cottage. Just as God had promised that a thousand souls would gather here, so it happened. And where was the milk and honey? To get water we had to walk down to the bottom of the mountain. We had to earn our bread. For whoever does not work, will not eat – this was our motto. The Word of God tells us: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'" 2 Thess. 3:10

God tested us. Many were disappointed here and fell into disbelief, then left to go back home. The Lord had chosen for Himself the faithful and obedient that He might lead us further as His children. Among us His prophesy in Ezekiel chapter 20 verse 38 was fulfilled. "I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

We lived like in a children's fairy tale: our cottage was in the mountain, and at the base of the mountain lived a wolf. Our singing carried off far into the mountains and came back as an echo.

Once our baggage arrived we set up our room. We were given cots instead of beds. We laid our sheets, put a table cloth on the table, put pictures up on the walls and placed fresh flowers in a vase on the table. We had a lovely room once we'd finished. Our window looked out from the mountain to the sea – it was hard to tear our eyes away. When the sun with its rays shone on the sea at sunset it was impossible not to thank God for His amazing plan in creating such a universe.

Our life was like that in a beehive: in the mornings we ran out single file through Lysk, and we returned home the same way. Everyone was friendly with each other so that no one was left behind, because it was dangerous to be alone. Ajarians watched the young girls to try to steal them. That was their tradition, but for us this would have been a tragedy.

The parents were at home preparing dinner. Everyone had their own hand-made stove out in the yard. Each housewife rushed around the stove as she waited for her workers' return. After dinner, we got together to pray. What prayers they were! The Lord through the Holy Spirit instructed and comforted us, but also rebuked us. He also announced the future to us but it was alarming. We were to expect difficulties, but what kind?

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come." John 16:13

THE ARREST

Fear came over brother Egor, the leader of our congregation. For no matter what happened, he would be the first one held accountable for us all. He decided to run away from his responsibility. He stopped coming to the services, he didn't even show up at other times. He left the city.

The Lord in the Spirit called us to gather in his house and pray. The prayer was heated. The Lord spoke to him: 'You run when no one is chasing you. You will end up in the place you least expect.' Short and strict; this is what happened to him. Our brother went to the city to visit the family K-b. When he got there, there were some men from the OGPU who had come for brother K-b. When they saw Egor they said: 'We need you too.' They arrested him on the spot. Sasha Voronayev ran there but they chased him away and wouldn't let him anywhere near his friend.

It came to pass as the Holy Spirit had foretold. We all pitied Egor and his family since he was the breadwinner for eight other people. We decided to write a request on behalf of the workers, asking for him to be freed. We all signed the request and then stood in prayer to see what the Lord would say about this. The Lord answered: 'In protecting him you also protect Me. You should all go there, but not at the same time.' This was a great lesson for us. Each of God's children needs to be honoured just as we honour our Lord. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" Matt. 25:40. Soon this also came to pass as the Lord had said.

One rainy morning in November, our cottages were surrounded by the OGPU and the police. All the heads of the households were brought out, lined up, and then driven to the office of the farm. There, the higher authorities were waiting for them. They also took a few of the single women and widows, but after questioning them, they let them go. They loaded all the men into a truck and took them to customs in Batumi. They put them temporarily into a barn which had previously been used as a warehouse. Instead of a smooth floor, it was covered in rocks.

This is how the Lord humbled our hearts and our flesh. Papa didn't use to be able to sleep on a mattress that didn't have springs. (I kept taking out his cot with springs, hoping he would return). But he never got to sleep on that cot. Lying down on the smooth stones, his flesh humbled to his soul.

Our happy 'beehive' came to a standstill in February 1930. The joyful hymns were no longer sung and the cheerful hubbub of conversation grew quiet. Everyone grew quiet and started to bring tearful prayers to the throne of grace. More groups, led by the Holy Spirit, kept coming and coming.

On their journey, the Lord told them: 'chains await many.' As soon as they arrived in Batumi, all the men were taken off the steamboat and put in prison. The women and children were taken in by the rest of the brothers and sisters whom the Lord had sent to them through prophecy.

Our brothers didn't stay long at customs in Batumi. For about a month, we brought them food, clothing and bedding. One day we went to visit them but there was no one at customs. Where did they go? No one answered us; there was no one there to even ask. The Merciful God revealed this to us so that we would not be utterly sorrowful; 'My children are in Turkestan.' But what could we do with our doubts? Was this really true? About two months later we miraculously received a letter from one of the brothers. He wrote that they were in Turkestan building a farm called Char-Dar. He also informed us that our Papa and a few other brothers were working on the farm OGPU in the city of Tiflis.

In the middle of summer, while walking along the railroad tracks, I told Liza that I was going to visit Papa in Tiflis.

– 'What about me?' she asked.

– 'You stay home with Mama and Varya. I don't have enough money for the both of us.' (When they arrested Papa they also took all of our savings – three thousand rubles. But later it was returned to us in the city of Baku).

Liza went silent. I could see that she was grieving in her soul. We had never before been separated from each other. We did everything and went everywhere together. She went ahead to the station Tsikhiz-Dziri and sat down on the bench and waited for me. She was looking down at the ground and saw a handkerchief all rolled up near her feet. She picked it up, unrolled it and saw money. It was exactly the amount for another ticket.

– 'You see this?' Liza said when I caught up with her. 'God has given me the money for a ticket. I prayed to Him.'

Then she showed me the money. Now, I didn't have any reason to make her stay home, so we traveled together.

Tiflis

We stayed with Papa in Tiflis for two weeks. We had a good time there. We went to the services of different denominations with sister Obukhova. She had also come to visit her husband.

One day we went to the Charismatics on the celebration of the harvest. They were having tea: the tables were covered and all the believers were very hospitable. We had to stand because of the tables. The service started and everyone stood in a circle. One brother recited a Psalm by memory and then started to sing. The prayers were contagious – everyone was stomping and the tempo kept increasing. With all the intensity of the service, we started to want to stomp as well. Then we felt a bit afraid. We got out of the circle and made our way to sister Obukhova and convinced her to go home. Liza had come down with malaria again. We hurried to leave Batumi...

Before we knew it, the year had passed in a flurry of work and prayer. We had received much edification from the Lord. He revealed to us: 'Go to China and through China.' This seemed impossible to us. How could we reach China? We didn't even have a map. Brother Slyusarev said: 'If the Lord is leading us abroad, then He will lead us to the Promised Land.'

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Isaiah 60:1-3.

Chapter 7

THE JOURNEY TO VASIL'EVKA

In February of 1931, God showed us the path to Vasil'evka. We were working on a fruit warehouse. The working season was coming to a close and some were being laid off.

One evening we were praying as was our custom, and the Lord told us to square up with our employers. We had been told when and where earlier. Through his vessel, God warned us even through one who was sleeping. In our hearts, we decided to take advantage of the time, to work two more weeks on two more shifts in order to earn some more money before we had to square up. After deciding this, the four of us went to sleep on three cots. In the morning, we woke up and had to hurry to get the train to work but we couldn't get up; neither Marfusha, nor Marusya, nor Liza, nor I. We turned from side to side, nothing was hurting, and it was as if we had been tied to the cots by invisible chains. One of us suggested: 'Let's ask the Lord what this means. After all, this doesn't just happen for no reason.' Our Loving Father who cares for His children answered: 'Your decision does not please Me. Repent and go free yourselves immediately.' "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." 1 Sam.15:22. We got up, dressed and walked to the fruit warehouse because the train had already left.

When the supervisor saw us he got very angry because we were so late. But we told him that we came to settle up. Uncle Ablyas in indignation denied us flatly shouting:

– 'We want to take you on permanently. No, no, there'll be no resignations.'

– 'But you're laying people off – lay us off instead and keep the others.'

In our minds, we lifted many prayers up to the Lord. We continued to persuade our supervisor:

– 'Uncle Ablyas, let us go, for we're moving.'

– 'Good for you,' he said after a short pause. 'Today we'll square things up. I've already done the estimates but they haven't been finalized so I can still change them. If you had come tomorrow you couldn't have begged me enough to do this.' Our Father knew beforehand when to send us. It's just our earthly mind that doesn't submit so easily to the will of the Father.

The day of our departure came. We had to load up onto the train which only stopped for one minute here. This was a mighty task. Our group was about 60 people total. Twenty of us were children; there was one old man who was blind and weak, two old women, one of whom was a hundred despite her fall into childhood. The rest were women who couldn't work, except for fifteen young women and girls who were able to work.

At work we had become acquainted with the wife of the station manager. This friendship allowed us to go to him with a request for help. He promised to give us another wagon which they would hook up to the rest. When we got our last suitcase on the platform the wagon was brought. We loaded up easily and fit comfortably in the area provided. They placed a board across the wagon to separate our area from the rest. The other passengers could occupy the space on the other side. When we stopped at the stations on the way, the conductors changed and they told each other not to sit anyone else with us because we were travelling as a team. We thanked the Lord for His concern for us.

When the train came to Tiflis I wanted so badly to get off and go visit Papa and then catch up with the group later. After all, we'd be stopping just a half a mile from the barracks where my father was. I asked the Lord for permission to go into Tiflis but through Liza I was told 'No.' I didn't believe her so I went to another vessel but this one also told me I didn't have permission.

There were the barracks; I could see lights on there but I couldn't go. I missed my Papa so badly; tears trickled down my cheeks. I couldn't understand then why God wouldn't let me meet with him. Only sometime later I learned that this was for the good of both my Papa and me. He knew everything in advance.

From Georgia we traveled to Azerbaijan, to the city of Baku. Here we had to unload. But this was not an easy task. There were so many things; it would take many trips to get everything and everyone off and keep us all in good condition; some of us needed special care. All the way we had been praying that the Lord would help us get off the train. It seemed we would again need to appeal to the station manager. I went up to him and showed him our great stack of tickets and asked for help. The manager sent us two workers and allowed us to unload from the back door of the wagon. We put some people in charge of watching the bags and then started to unload. Unfortunately, some of our watchmen weren't paying close enough attention. As we came back with some more bags, we saw two young guys walking off with a suitcase. It looked familiar but we assumed our watchman had been attentive. This was Martha's suitcase. She ended up with just the clothes on her back. It was a shame, of course, but she didn't complain.

From the train station, we moved over to the platform and piled our bags up into a small mountain. We sat all around them so that no one could get near our things.

We really needed to pray but the enemy was bothering us by sending his servants. It's very hard to concentrate with strangers all around. We were worried with thoughts about where we could find a place to get an answer from the Lord. What could we do? Brother Peter Slyusarev had been here before and he suggested we go to one sister who was a prophet. We rejoiced at the idea and set out to her place. First we traveled on the tram and then we had to walk quite a ways since this sister lived with her family on the outskirts of Baku. The weather was cold; it was winter, but we were dressed lightly as had been fitting in Batumi. It's always warm in Batumi. Finally, we reached her place. The sister opened her door and greeted us warmly. When we went into the sitting room we saw her husband. He turned out to be a rather unwelcoming and unpleasant man. He met us with some unflattering phrases and questions; who we were, where we were from, why had we come? We replied that we were only visiting for

a moment to pray. Bowing our heads in prayer before God we asked for further guidance. We received our answer immediately because our Father knew our needs. The answer was: 'my children, continue your journey - Vasil'evka village.' We didn't need anything more. God had confirmed what was said before. Our doubts left us since this sister didn't know us or our needs. We thanked our hosts. The sister said to her husband: 'Now did you hear who they are?'

We returned to the platform with joy. It was a dark night and cold too. The sun of certainty that we were going in the right direction warmed us and gave us light. The snakes of doubts disappeared...

VASIL'EVKA

The next morning, we boarded a steamboat and sailed along the river Kura to Vasil'evka. God willed us to add one more soul from the village to our number since this person was also destined for the journey.

By the evening, we had reached our destination. An empty beach lay before us. There was only one log house standing a little way from the shore which housed some of the few visitors to this place. This time, the house was packed with hunters. Where they came from and what they were hunting for I don't know. The stench of tobacco smoke, crowded atmosphere and empty conversations drove us away from here. We set ourselves up outside the house and decided to take turns guarding our bags. Now all the young people started running around the house without worrying about whose turn it was to watch; we just wanted to stay warm. A north wind was blowing and we were in light jackets; we were freezing.

Despite the temperature outside our prayers were hot. The Lord spoke to us: 'Someone will come and ask you; "Where are you going and why? There are no promises on the Earth." But you stand firm in your faith. You will meet many people like this.'

Not even an hour had passed when the leader of the local church came and said these words. Then he took two of the old people and a sister with small children and left.

In the morning, the hunters left. The house which had just one room was all ours, but we couldn't pray there. Brother Peter Sobolev led us to a brother who lived nearby to pray in order to find out what we should do and where we could find shelter for some time.

The Lord sent us to the village hall to ask for a room. As we were going there we saw brother Slyusarev coming towards us.

– 'Where are you going?' he asked.

– 'To the village hall to ask for a place.'

– 'I was just there. There is nothing that would suit us.'

We gave up. Doubts wormed into our hearts in a flash. If they wouldn't give him anything then why bother? Sister Kilya was with us and she never gets discouraged.

– 'Why are you letting your spirits drop?' she asked. 'The Father has sent us, he will give us something. They didn't give him something because he went of his own will.'

We were encouraged and went on. Eight young sisters and brother Sobolev entered the office.

We sat down on the bench in silence and waited. The chairman looked up at us and then continued to write something. Finally he finished his work and asked us in broken Russian:

– 'What you need?'

– 'A room... we have nowhere to live.'

– 'How many are you?'

– 'As many as you can see.'

The chairman called for his assistant and sent him to show us a room where we could live. We really liked it.

– 'How much per month?' we asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. We went into the room and he returned to his office. A day passed, and then another and a messenger came and said to me:

– 'Go, they called for you at the village hall. Take Sobolev with you.'

– 'Why aren't you going? Go, yes,' the supervisor said when we got to the office.

– 'We weren't told, but can we move?'

– 'Go, go,' said a Muslim.

We moved to Oriat where they gave us a room. Brother Slyusarev and brother Zakatniy received a room in Kultuk, the next village over. There were just two families with many children left in the little house. We felt great pity for them. We met the owner of our building and asked him:

– 'We have some friends still left there. Can we take them in with us until they find an apartment?'

– 'What's good for you is good for me,' he replied and left.

Now our joy was full. Everyone had shelter: it was crowded, yes but no one took offence. We turned on the stoves and cooked. We got warmed up and full. We thanked the Lord for His care and mercy, and then lay down to sleep on the floor. It was funny to look at the number of legs. We were like sardines; you never knew whose leg was where until you started to move your own. There were twenty two of us in here.

We spent two weeks like this and then the families found their own places and left. There were just eight of us left. Brother Sobolev was like a knight in shining armour, helping everyone out – he was the only man, after all.

We lived miserly in the flesh but richly in God. He led us and instructed us. He didn't allow us to get jobs because we had to set out again soon on our journey.

Our landlord, who was also the chairman, was amazed at us and said:

– 'For us Muslims, when someone comes we set out the food. But when someone comes to you, you start praying. We, Muslims, pray three times a day, but you pray all day long. Who are you?'

And really, when we look back, those were days of blessing, they weren't a time of heartache...

Living in abundance of the flesh, we started to move away from the Father. But this was not without troubles. Soon temptation

came. Brother Peter Sobolev decided to marry sister Martha. She was perfect for him. She was also eager to get married. The problem was that she was already divorced. This is why there was a disagreement among our group. It was written: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Luke 16:18

The brother had young nephews who also wanted to marry young sisters who had left their husbands because the husbands hadn't agreed to go on this journey with them. They were all watching their uncle. If he is allowed to get married then they won't be stopped either. There was a nuance though. Martha had left her husband before she was a believer. When she was saved, she decided to try and fix their marriage but her husband didn't want her back since he already had another wife and two children. Martha came back to the congregation and stayed single.

This marriage caused a lot of noise; there were many arguments and disagreements. They spent a long time arbitrating and judging what should be done with brother Peter and sister Martha. Some thought the marriage was okay and others thought it was wrong. The peace we had come to know was now gone. A minister, brother Kostya, had married them in the home. This event threw us off balance. But God continued to prepare His children for their journey by testing, trying and organizing us for the great trip to China.

Since it was winter, we decided to travel to Baku and buy winter coats for everyone. We dressed warmly, got ready and then started to pray asking for blessing on our trip. But the Father said: 'There is no way.' We took off our warm clothes and stayed home. By the evening, a strong wind was blowing and it groaned all night long. We would have suffered greatly if we hadn't obeyed God.

A week later we got permission from the Father to go. When we got off the steamboat, we met with our other group; Varya and the brothers and sisters. The Lord leads His own! We were glad to see them. We gave them directions and then went into the city for our coats. I needed to send a letter to Papa which

I had written back at home. I explained the whole path we'd taken so that he might join us later.

I took the letter out of my pocket but the stamp was gone. Then I remembered that it was in the envelope. I stuck it on and dropped it into the mailbox. Papa got my letter, of course, as he told me later. But actually the letter wasn't there; it was just an empty envelope. He took it as a sign that we were still alive but that they didn't want him to join them yet. He had decided to run away earlier. That's why God hadn't let me go see him in Tiflis. He would have had to run with me if I had gotten off the train. But God stopped him because he would have been considered an escaped convict. They were getting ready to release Papa. When he was set free, he met brother Egor who had also been let go. He suggested to Papa that they go back home but Papa didn't agree.

God knew that there was a long journey ahead of him to China. That's why He tested him. He spent a year at the collective farm in persecution. He wouldn't have been able to handle everything we'd experienced over that year. He would have complained.

We didn't live in Vasil'evka for long. One hundred had been sent to save one sheep and now we were ready to go further. A welcome bell sounded – time to set out! Everyone was glad that we were going further. The local brothers were worried – should they believe or not? Everything seemed too strange to them. How could they tear themselves away from their familiar surroundings? Where would they go and why? The wife of the presbyter asked God for confirmation about this revelation. The Merciful God revealed to her with a sign. During her prayer she saw a vision. God showed her the nation walking under a banner on which was written: 'JOURNEY.' To strengthen her faith, or maybe because of a lack of faith, I don't know, God took away her ability to speak. She couldn't say a word for a day and a half... and she still didn't believe and stayed home.

FALLING AWAY

At one of the prayers, it was said to brother Slyusarev: 'I will test you with your own children; your children will not enter the promise.' The brother was grieved and offended and said foolishly: 'What good is this promise to me if my children won't enter it?' Up to this point, the brother had walked in faith and had been ready for the journey.

Brother Turchin came to us with a prophet. They tried to persuade us not to go anywhere. Brother Slyusarev was present when they were speaking. During the prayer it was said to him from God: 'There is no way for you.' So he remained at that place. His children were in great sorrow. The brother and his family left us. Later, we heard that he had been arrested; his children had fallen away from God and were now in the world.

For us, though, a clear voice had spoken that we must move further according to God's will. He strengthened our faith through a few of His vessels. One sister was shown 12-2-11. Another was told that this was the time to leave. The 12 of February was clear but what was the 11? There were less than 11 families but more than 11 people. On the appointed day, we started to load our baggage onto the platform. The weather, for some reason, was not favourable to us; the sun would shine and then hide behind the clouds; then the rain started to drizzle. The roads were slippery and we had to walk; and not only walk but carry our suitcases too. There were not extra supplies. But it was sunny in our souls. The sun of faith warmed our souls and shone the way.

When we got to the booth to find out when the steamboat was leaving they told us: 'There's no steamboat today; and even if there is, it's going to have to stay here to be fixed. The season for sailing is closed.'

As we walked home we again started questioning the Father: 'Why did they say that to us?' The Lord comforted us. Once again, we carried our things to the dock. When we had piled up the bags, the brothers came to see us off – or to laugh at our misfortune. They were certain that we had been deceived.

We didn't have to wait long. The steamboat docked and let the passengers off and went further to Sal'yany. Then it docked again. They offered to check the luggage and then tied up the barge and took it where it needed to go. We didn't check our luggage. Time passed; it was already nine o'clock at night. The steamboat came to the dock again and they started to board. There were many things to carry; it was dark and there were potholes. I took one bag and asked Mama and Liza to watch the rest. I returned with a helper and saw Liza standing there alone. Mama had also gone to take a suitcase to the boat. There was no time to go looking for Mama; we had to load up quickly. I was going toward the steamboat when Varya came up to me. She said:

– 'Do you know where your Mama is?'

– 'She boarded.'

– 'She drowned,' she replied.

– 'She what!?' I cried out in horror. Then I saw Mama walking over with water dripping from her. There was no time for questions. I led her and Liza onto the boat while dragging the bags along the ramp. I just managed to get onto the boat when they pulled the ramp away. The steamboat made a "toot" and started to move away from the platform. It was exactly 11 pm. God had set the time for our departure.

It was a cold night and Mama was soaking wet. I went up to the captain to ask for a cabin for Mama. He told me that the cabins were only for the crew and service workers; everyone else had to stay on the deck. Once he heard about Mama's condition, he advised us to go to the service hall and to sit there. He knew that a woman had fallen into the water during boarding. He suggested we change her into dry clothing.

I walked and kept up my 'guard' for wet Mama, Liza and Varya, all the while dragging the suitcase. I left them there and then went to collect the rest of our things from around the steamboat. It was warm in the service hall. We took off Mama's wet coat and took it to the machine room so that it might dry by the morning. Mama sat in the hallway, changed and dry. One of the workers who was going out for his shift gave Mama his cabin.

Another worker made hot tea for Mama. That's how we spent the night – Mama in the cabin and we sat in the hall on the suitcases.

Our friends who were sitting on the deck came to us to get warm and to pray. After her winter swim, Mama had a fever all night but by the morning, she woke in good health. Praise God!

How did Mama end up in the water? It turned out that as soon as I had left, she decided to help me. She took a suitcase with the help of another sister and went to the steamboat, asking Liza to wait for me. After she put the suitcase on board, she decided to get another one. She couldn't find the other sister. She didn't have good eyesight and it was dark. She went in a different direction – right into the river. The workers on the shore heard her scream and they hurried over and grabbed her by the hand. It took great strength to pull her up because the river Kura doesn't give up its victims. This was a miracle for us. After all the anxiety and worry, we finally arrived in the city of Baku. After unloading from the steamboat, we moved our things over to the Caspian pier. There had been so many people on the steamboat that they were standing all the way to the entrance doors. Somehow, they'd set themselves up, piled their bags in one place and chose guards. Thoughts about how we were going to get everything on the ship didn't stop us, especially not me. The Lord promised to arrange everything but our faith started to waver when reality approached. An announcement was made that everyone needed to be vaccinated against smallpox. Without the vaccination, they wouldn't allow you to board. Each one of us had to get vaccinated. They offered to give us one certificate to verify that our whole group had been given the shot.

We went to get tickets. When we got to the counter, the cashier told us we had to go to the municipal counter. When we found that counter, they denied us tickets; said they were sold out. Disappointed, we went back to everyone. Sad, we sat on the pier. Thoughts irritated us: how could this be? What can we do? We prayed. After all, the Lord had promised. Busy with my thoughts, I didn't notice as the manager of sea transportation walked by us in uniform. Liza pointed him out to me by poking me in the side.

Mama said worriedly: 'Don't look at him!' As soon as I lifted my eyes in his direction he stopped right in front of me and asked in Armenian:

– 'Where are you going? How did you end up in this company? Do you have a ticket?'

I answered his questions, saying:

– 'We're going to Turkistan. We are families of special settlers. We can't get tickets because they're sold out.'

– 'Do you have documents for everyone?'

I showed him the certificate we'd been given at the vaccination centre.

– 'Come with me,' he said.

I called Liza and brother Sobolev to come with me because we are inseparable. He led us to the municipal counter where we'd previously been denied tickets and he ordered them to give tickets to all the new settlers.

How I rejoiced that very moment at how the Father had sent us help through the manager. After paying for our tickets and thanking him, we went back to sit down where we had been before. A short time later the manager came to me once more and asked:

– 'So is everyone satisfied?'

– 'Yes,' I replied, 'but as you can see there is a great crowd at the doors; how shall we get through? We have children and many bags.'

– 'Very well, I'll do this too.'

He went up to the gates to the ship and ordered:

– 'See that woman with the big group; do not hold back whoever she lets in.'

We started carrying in our bags like ants. Everyone who saw us carrying our things rushed in behind us but the guards at the gates didn't let them through. People started grumbling, but we were already on the other side, not far from the boat.

Once again, the man who had been kind to us, whom God had sent to help His children, came to us. He called me:

– 'Come, I'll show you around.'

- 'Please show me the hold.'
- 'Don't you know where the hold is?' he was surprised.
- 'No,' I replied, 'I don't.'

We boarded the boat. He led me to an opening in the deck and said:

- 'Here is the hold.'

Peering down into the opening, I saw a ladder that went down sharply.

- 'Thank you,' I said.

- 'Now let's go and I'll show you the rooms.'

Great fear welled up inside me. 'Lord, keep me safe,' I prayed in my soul.

- 'I've seen the rooms before, I've been in them, but this is the first time I saw the hold.'

At that moment one of the crew came up to him with some kind of question and I used the opportunity to slip away and get back to my group. A short time after, the manager came and said:

- 'As soon as the horn blows you can board.'

- 'Oh, no,' I pleaded, 'the crowds will be boarding and we won't be able to get all our baggage on. And how shall I get our elderly through such a crowd?'

- 'Very well, I'll do this for you as well. Ten minutes before we blow the horn, you may board.'

He was true to his word. Ten minutes before the horn, he came and ordered that we be allowed to board. He came and shook our hands and wished us a safe trip and then left.

Like ants, we started to take our things down into the hold. Then we set ourselves up on the floor wherever we liked. We were just helping the last old man to get down into the hold when the horn sounded. The people flooded the deck and started to make their way down to the hold. It filled up beyond capacity so many were left on the deck. We sailed all night; it seemed like a very long night. It was impossible to sleep with the multitude of people and voices.

Chapter 8 KRASNOVODSK

By the evening, the boat reached the port of Kranovodsk. Once again we went through the hustle-bustle of unloading, helping our weaker friends get their things off the boat. I was already shaking with worry and responsibility. We still needed to buy tickets for the train. We reached the train station and piled our bags in a corner. I took Liza and one of the elderly brothers with me to the counter to buy the tickets. I asked the cashier:

- 'We're special settlers moving to live with our fathers. Could we please have tickets for Tashkent?'

- 'Go to the OGPU,' was the response. 'They deal with that.'

Our hearts went cold in our chests. We know what this organization does. They've arrested our brothers more than once. But there was nothing else we could do. We walked along the dusty road and prayed: 'Father, You alone are our help and hope; just as the Scriptures tell us: "Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed." Is. 49:23

We reached the OGPU establishment. They let us in but then turned us down. They advised us to approach the manager of the station. We went back to the train station to find some local brothers looking for us. That evening we went to pray, leaving just a few guards to watch our things. The Lord comforted us and promised to help. The next morning we found the manager of the station. It seemed he had already been informed about us. He led us to the counter through the back doors and ordered the cashier to give us tickets. They gave us as many as we needed. The manager told us that we would be given a separate wagon which would be attached to the train at the rear.

When the train arrived we loaded up and traveled to Tashkent. We traveled three days. On the fourth day we arrived in Tashkent. The most difficult part was, as always, loading and unloading. Furthermore, we had more bags than was permitted per person. Plus, we didn't all have enough money to pay for extra baggage. When the train arrived at the station, I took all our tickets, fifty in total, and went to the controller with a request. We had children and the elderly after all, and they want us to be fast. He asked me to point out who was with me and then they started unloading us onto the street. Then we all met at the square as best we could.

We ended up having to live on the square for a whole month. We cooked here and heated water to take into the washroom to wash the dirt off us as much as possible. Each evening we went to the local brothers to pray. Sitting at the station, I wrote a letter to Papa in Tiflis. I told him we were in Tashkent. I wrote that when he is set free, he should come to Tashkent. I included the address of brother Zav... so Papa could find us through him.

Finally, we were directed to the farm Char-Dara. With great difficulty we made it first to Syrdar'i. The wagon was more than crowded. On the way, someone stole Papa's suitcase from me. It had been the heaviest. We found the farm's co-operative office. Here, we were given bread, which was greatly appreciated since our supplies had been all used up. They loaded us all into a truck and took us to the river Syrdar'i where we waited for three days. The shore was deserted; there were no buildings we could see, just a tall stack of boards. We took down some boards and from nothing we set up something like tents. It was enough to protect us from the sun and rain. It rained everyday while we were there. It dripped through the roof and got us wet. In the daytime, we hung things out to dry, then at night we got wet again. We started to cry out to God. The rain stopped and sometime later a boat picked us up. We left in the morning and by the evening, we reached the co-operative farm.

CHAR-DARA CO-OP FARM

We met at last. We all rejoiced that our journey was over at least for a while. Each of us was met by a family. Almost everyone had somewhere to live. Only a few people, like us, didn't have anywhere to reside.

A storeroom was given to us for our baggage so that they could unload the car. Finally, we also received a tent to live in. After having dinner with brother Danchenko, we returned to our tent to rest. It was so pleasant to take off our outer garments and stretch out on our cots after the traveling ordeal of almost two months.

In the morning, after our tea, we went to the storeroom to sort out our baggage. Suddenly one of our brothers came running after me and told me I was wanted in the farm's office. They had learned about our professions and gave us jobs. They had many vacancies for accountants. We had to go immediately to wash up and get dressed. I hadn't managed to get my suitcase out yet so I borrowed a dress from another sister. I went to the office to start my job.

On another day, sitting at the table enjoying my free time, I started to write a letter to Papa about the place we were living in. I hadn't even finished the first page when Liza came running and called me into the tent. I excused myself from the head accountant and ran after my sister. I thought to myself: 'what happened?' We ran toward the storeroom and there he stood - my Papa! What a surprise! I can't describe the joy that came over me then. Finally, we were together.

We were given a place in the barracks. There was enough room for four cots which we placed parallel to each other and hung up a carpet on the wall. This was now our apartment. There was a bedroom, a living room and a washroom. The toilet and the kitchen were in the yard. We got some kind of broth from the kitchen, which was made from dried fish. As we ate, it started to

separate into fibers. But we had to have something. We got hot water there as well. Papa asked us:

– 'Do you have much money left?'

– 'Two hundred rubles,' Mama replied.

– 'Well, I guess we're stuck,' he said with regret. 'We'll never get out of here without money and there's no way to earn any.'

– 'Oh, Papa, God is bigger than that,' I said, entering the conversation. 'He's led us this far, and helped us all along the way. He won't leave us here.'

– 'He's strong, of course, but there's no money. And without money you can't get anywhere,' Papa said, continuing his unhappy thought.

– 'God will give,' I answered him and ran off to work.

Our lunch break was three hours. From twelve o'clock the sand is so hot that it burns through the sole of your shoes. Soon, they also gave Liza a job and then Papa. Not three months had passed when Liza got malaria. She had to go to the hospital. The doctor prescribed quinine and wrote her a note recommending a change of climate.

– 'I don't need a doctor's note,' Liza protested. 'I just got here, I need to work.'

– 'Take it, you'll need it,' the doctor tried to persuade her. And really, that note came in handy later. God knew everything in advance.

At first, we walked in the mountains where we sang and prayed. No one bothered us in the beginning but later they hassled us. So we became more careful. We went in secret and met in the deep irrigation ditches. We didn't sing anymore, just prayed. The Lord blessed our prayers. The heavier they pressed us, the more dangerous it was to meet, the more fervently we prayed.

Two months had passed since we arrived at the farm. Now we were working day and night. We had to get the annual report together. Our office was busy until three in the morning. It was impossible for me to go to the prayers, but our group was

vigilant. At the lunch break they told me what had been said or what visions had been seen.

I knew that God planned to send us further. Now, not only Liza was suffering from malaria but Mama was too. The quinine wasn't helping. The doctor advised we take Mama away from this place. I also understood that this was God's plan. I asked the head accountant to let me go so that I could take my sick relatives away. Liza wasn't working anymore because of her illness. After I got the certificate I quit. The head accountant's reply had been:

– 'We don't have enough workers. The report isn't finished. When we finish, then you can go. Send your sick ones to the city, but you stay here.'

– 'Please, have mercy,' I replied. 'Who will feed them? They can't work and no one will give them bread.'

– 'That's true,' he agreed. 'Fine, finish what you've started and in a week you can go.'

I was so happy that the head accountant had agreed. I worked with doubled strength. They gave me credit for overtime.

When I received my pay I was given one thousand two hundred rubles.

In Tashkent Again

We went to get tickets for the boat. It was a gorgeous day in July; a good day for sailing along Syrdar'i. It was hot out but on the river it was cooler. A breeze cooled down by the water refreshed our faces. We sailed back to that place where the rain had tortured us for three days. This time we had to take a tractor to the station in order to get to Tashkent.

When we reached Syrdar'i station we didn't recognize each other. Who had we become like? How awful! Red dust covered us from head to toe; only the hollows of our eyes remained clean.

There was still a lot of time before our departure. There was a pond not far from the station where the children swam. We got our clean clothes and went to wash. Washed and dressed, we went to buy something to eat. The abundance made us glad. Here you could buy cherries, apples and other fruits. There were also pickles which we hadn't seen for ages. After eating with a great appetite, we went to sit under a tree and wait for the train.

The train arrived and our family was the only passengers – Papa, Mama, Liza and I. We knew the Lord had directed all of us to meet in Tashkent. When we got there, we started to wait for the rest of our brothers and sisters. We spent a whole month waiting. We lived with brother Zav... Papa sold grapes at the market to pay for our stay. In the evenings, we met at different houses for prayer because the authorities had closed the prayer houses and arrested some of the brothers.

Some more time passed and the rest of our group arrived; hugs, kisses and questions. We had all missed each other dearly. Now that we were together we waited only for the word from the Father. In Tashkent, three more families joined us. They were the family of brother Zav..., Sima and her mother, and brother Pavel Luk... and his family. (Brother Pavel used to work on the railroad). I was glad brother Pavel had joined us; I was hoping to put him in charge of the responsibilities that had previously been mine. With my human understanding I decided that this brother had some connections and it would be easier for him to get tickets. He even promised to do so without any hesitation.

As soon as I put my hope in a person I fell ill immediately. I shook from malaria three times a day. My teeth were constantly chattering, my eyesight became blurry and it was time to move on.

The day for departure came but there were no tickets. There wasn't even any hope – just promises. I started to suffer materially. Twice my cash register was short and I had to pay from my own pocket. My savings for the month disappeared. Sadness welled up inside me. Why was I so unsuccessful? After all, the Lord had told us to move but we hadn't even taken a step. I began to cry out to the Lord. We, I in particular, received a sharp rebuke

from the Father. It was said to me: 'Negligent servant, your soul has put its trust in man and not in God.' And then the command: 'Go get the tickets.' I cried to the Lord: 'How can I go, Lord? I would have to go in the morning and that is when malaria shakes me the hardest.' 'Don't be downcast,' the sisters comforted me. They offered to go and stand in line for me and then I could come later. So that's what we did.

Liza and I arrived at the station. The sisters were standing in line but still a ways off even though they had been waiting since sunrise.

– 'You stand here,' I said. 'We will go to the back doors. Maybe we can get the tickets that way. The Lord promised after all.'

We knocked at the door. It opened and someone asked: – 'Who do you need?'

– 'We don't need anyone but we do need 45 tickets to the city of Alma-Ata.'

– 'I can't help you through the back door. Go to the counter. But we don't give that many tickets to just one person.'

– 'There are many of us in line.'

– 'Okay, go to the window,' the cashier replied.

Until we got back to them, the sisters had started to worry; they were coming to the window and we still weren't back.

– 'Where were you?' the cashier asked. 'I was afraid there wouldn't be enough. Here are the last 45.'

I gave him the money, got the tickets and the change and we ran home with joy. I forgot about my malaria and it 'forgot' about me. We gathered our group together and headed for the station. We boarded without a hitch. Everyone was seated in their place. I decided to count how much money was left. It turned out that the change I received was exactly the amount I'd had to pay back to the till. Brother Pavel didn't go with us. He stayed back having lost his faith.

Chapter 9

ALMA-ATA

We traveled in the last wagon. When we reached Alma-Ata, our wagon stopped far away from the station. After unloading, we had to ask the Lord where we should go next. The Lord promised His help with this. After the prayers, the brothers went to the station. They returned a little while later with shining faces. What God had told us is exactly what happened. At the station a local sister met the brothers. For two days she had been unable to leave and sat at the station. She showed us the way to the camp where our brothers had settled.

– ‘New Moscow is well known by all the cabbies,’ she told us. ‘They’ll take you there. Now I know why the Lord kept me here for two days. Today I’ll be able to leave.’

The sister went to buy her ticket and the brothers came to announce to us about the mercy of the Heavenly Father. Then, they found a cabbie, agreed to the fare and put all our bags into the cart. They put our one-hundred year old lady on top of the bags, tied her there so she wouldn’t fall and drove her to the camp. The rest of us walked. Other pedestrians stopped and watched our unusual procession. Some of the residents even came outside to take a curious glance at the grandma tied to the cart, and at the rest of us who followed. That’s how we made our way across the whole city and found ourselves on the outskirts. We started to climb the mountain. Darkness came over the land and caught us still journeying. We couldn’t see the ‘swallows’ nests’ stuck to the sides of the mountains, which the brothers had made for themselves and for the ones who would come here by the will of God. This was a transit point for Christians.

Many of God’s children found rest in these little huts. We had also been sent here by a revelation from God in order to rest and receive His next instructions for us.

When the cabbie stopped and told us we had reached the place, it looked to us as if the cart was right on the roof of the hut. It turned out that the roof was level with the road, just a little distance from it. The brothers went up to one of the doors and asked them to call on the elder. The local brother went to announce our arrival to brother Ratchenko who was in charge here at this time. (Brother Gavril Ivanovich Avraamenko had led prior to him).

We had to wait a little while for him because he was asking the Lord about us. Finally the brother came out. He only had one arm but he helped everyone get their bags off the cart and settle into a hut. The cabbie left once he got his money and we were all glad that our journey was over, albeit temporarily.

Shaken up on the train and exhausted from three hours of walking through the city, we all immediately fell asleep, the moment we laid down after prayers.

Early, at sunrise, they woke us up to pray. It was difficult to shake off our sleepiness. At the prayer, the Lord commanded us to: ‘Shake off the dust.’ We understood that this meant we needed to part with some of our things. And really, what did we need this stuff for anyway? We had a sewing machine, a meat grinder, irons, pots, plates, and a sturdy bag. We decided to free ourselves of the weight and sell it at the flea market. When we asked for blessing on this God said: ‘No, no.’ We stayed calm that day.

One sister came to us after having been at the market and she told us the police had surrounded it and rounded some people up. We thanked God for holding us back that day. The next day we asked for His blessing once again and this time the Father answered: ‘Go, I will give you success.’ Truly, everything we brought out to sell was sold. We gathered a good sum of money but it still wasn’t enough for tickets for our whole family to make it to the determined place. Sister Sima, who had joined us in Tashkent, loaned us the money we needed.

Everyone had reduced their baggage and we were now traveling light – just one suitcase per person. We started asking the Lord about our journey. The Lord revealed to us: ‘Continue to

Zharkent.' He also told us the date. The only hitch was that we knew they wouldn't let us go there without a pass. This was the border with China. They only give passes to Zharkent to people who are traveling on business or some special assignment. We started to pray to God asking what to do. We had to travel through a few security points. The Lord gave us this answer: 'I am your pass.'

The trip to the station was no longer difficult. There was almost no baggage left – just one suitcase in each hand. When we arrived at the station we saw endless lines waiting for tickets. There's no way we'd be given tickets. Someone said: 'There are less people here, let's stand in this line.' It turned out this line was for those on holiday or traveling for business. I had my holiday pass but no one would give me fifty plus tickets.

We went further and brother Sobolev got in one of the long lines. We saw one counter with no line. It was nine o'clock. We stood at the window and prayed. Since there was no one there, then there was no one to sell tickets. 'Lord, You said we would leave this morning but there is no way we can get tickets. The train will arrive at eleven o'clock. Has there been a mistake? You do not do anything false!' The Lord rebuked us for our lack of faith. Then, as soon as we finished praying, the window at the counter opened. We were the first in line.

We got our tickets and loaded up onto the train which was just arriving. When we started to see if everyone was still with us, we realized brother Sobolev was missing. We ran to the counter he'd been in line for and he was sleeping soundly. We managed to jump back on the train for Saryozek at the last second.

Not far from the train station, a transportation office was located. Trucks took different goods to Zharkent. We brought our bags and piled them up near the wall; then went to get tickets. Many people were going to Zharkent so we had to wait three days until it was our turn. At sunrise on the fourth day, we loaded ourselves onto three trucks. In the office, they thought there were no men traveling with us since Liza and I alone had gone for the tickets.

While we had been waiting for our departure, we had run out of food and there was nowhere to buy more. We sat in the trucks with rumbling stomachs and prayed. It was scary to travel without food. What if... Lord, help us! Lord, lead us! Alas, the weakness of our flesh.

The sun was up. Suddenly, at the side of the road we saw a huge loaf of bread. We cried: 'bread, bread!' But no one dared to stop the truck. At lunch, the drivers stopped to eat and add water to the radiator. They had watermelon. They cut it and ate.

One of them liked one of our girls. He decided to flirt with her. He threw a watermelon rind at her, expecting her to throw it back at him and then he could introduce himself. Instead, the young girl gave him a harsh stare and dropped the rind on the ground. He wasn't impressed and started to harass us: 'Where are your passes? We'll have a look at your papers at the next security point.'

There were two more security points left. When we got to the first one, the driver stopped and honked the horn. He honked and honked but no one came out. They started cursing the security officers, then drove away. We reached the last point and there was no one here either. No one heard the horn. The Lord took the security officers away at that time. Although we had been afraid, we trusted God and His promise to be our pass. With Him, we could get in anywhere! Praise Him!

Zharkent

When we got to Zharkent, the drivers asked where to let us off. We gave the street name and they went to their garage. It turned out that their garage was on the street we needed. One of our brothers went with them. Many people came to help us get away from this place because it was a trap for catching new arrivals who didn't have passes. At that time, there also weren't any officers just like at the security points. God helped us escape from this place too. Taking our suitcases, we left the garage and started to take up residence in the empty houses of Zharkent; there were many uninhabited houses.

The next morning, after praying for protection, we went to look for work at the nearest farm, located about ten miles from the city, closer to the border with China. Just as the Father had promised, there were jobs for all of us. Some of us worked in the office, others in the cotton fields. This farm was a cotton plantation for governmental needs.

After signing on to work officially, we went back into the city to collect our things and we took them by cart to the farm. They had prepared accommodations for us. Life went at an even pace: work, everyday tasks and prayer meetings. The prayers were our main focus. The Lord instructed many of us, gave us warnings and promised to lead us into China according to His timing.

I hadn't realized we were so close to the Chinese border. One day we saw a group of people surrounded by soldiers. 'Deserters,' said one woman, 'they wanted to run away into China.' 'There's no way I'm going to China,' I thought to myself. 'How frightening!' The Lord had His own plans for our group, however.

In the spring, the Lord started to lead us out a few at a time. Life here had been pretty good. Although there was snow in the winter and it got quite cold, we had grown accustomed to this.

They started to watch us. 'These Evangelicals, they pray and pray and then they're gone,' the local authorities would say. So we started to meet at sunrise but they found out. They followed us. One day a woman came with a mandate to take some youth, and she asked:

– 'Where are the Baptists?'

– 'We don't know any Baptists,' we replied.

She showed us the mandate for arrest and sat down to wait for the 'Baptists.' But no one came because they had already been warned. Even the small children understood the position we were in and they warned the adults. One time, we met together on our lunch break in brother Danchenko's room. Our room was across the porch. One door on the porch led to the garden and the other led to the yard. The yard was enclosed by a fence, made of duval (clay bricks). In the middle there was a place for the gate but there never

was one. There was just an opening and on the other side were the gates to the office.

We had just started to pray (although we were forbidden to meet and there were almost twenty of us) when we saw someone running towards us from the office. He was always coming after someone. He had been waiting for a long time to catch us meeting in service. Now was his chance – we froze. 'Now you're done for!' the enemy whispered. In fear, we had forgotten that the Lord had promised to lead us away from this place. After crossing the street, the man stopped at the opening, took a step, then turned around and went back. What was that all about? Why did he turn around? At that moment, a sister saw a vision: an angel with a sword was standing near the opening. One more step and that man would have come under the sword.

When we all left through the back door, brother Danchenko went to the office to find out why the man had come. They told him that the man wanted to ask Danchenko to fix his bike but then he realized no one was home at his place and came back to the office.

The Lord protected us in miraculous ways countless times. I was standing out on the porch at night guarding and I looked through a window. In the room, they were praying and I was out pacing. It was a cold dark night; chilly and scary. I strained my ears to try to hear if someone was coming. They had blocked up the windows with blankets and pillows so that the sound of many people praying couldn't be heard outside. Of course, they also tried to pray quietly, but when the Spirit comes upon you, surely you can't hold yourself back. It was a strong prayer and the Lord was instructing. Suddenly, I saw light on the road. A car was coming. 'Lord, take it away!' I called. The car stopped not far from our residence. 'What should I do?' I thought to myself. 'Should I stop the prayer? There still wouldn't be enough time for everyone to leave and instructions from the Lord are so important to us. Lord, lead them away!' I was praying and shaking in fear and nervousness.

The Lord heard my prayer. The noise of the people praying didn't reach the ears of the people in the car, and the headlights shone further down the road. Praise God! The danger was removed. I was so grateful to the Lord that He saved us and prevented me from stopping the prayer during which the Lord had told us important things.

Chapter 10 IN CHINA

It was now May, 1933. The Lord said: 'To China on foot, across the river and sand.' The day of our departure was also announced. Fear seized me but could I disobey? No! I would rather die!

When the day to leave came, the Lord named the ones who were to go. We were a group of twenty and three children who were five, six and seven. Everything was ready for departure. Backpacks were ready for a long journey; we each took a blanket, which didn't have any stuffing, a small cushion instead of a pillow and three changes of underwear. We also took bread. We put on three dresses and a coat. I took a kettle and water, Papa had a jar of boiled sugar candies rolled up in a towel.

In the afternoon, we sent the children to the edge of the farm where it would be easier to leave unnoticed. When it started to get dark, we sent Mama and Liza, another Liza and the wife of one brother. A little while before we left we prayed. The Lord promised to remove the security officers who guarded the farm's wealth.

Right before we were to leave, the farm managers were gone. The guards weren't needed. When we were ready to go out, our neighbour came home and made a fire in the yard to cook dinner. How could we leave now? It was bright from the fire; the whole street was lit up and we needed darkness. We decided to go out through the back door and into the garden. We put up curtains in our windows and left the lights on. Everything was as it should be in the room, only we weren't there. We had even secured the door with wire. We were just about to go through the opening in the fence when we heard someone coming. I ran into the washroom quickly and hid. I heard Papa call me quietly.

I came out and we started walking. I couldn't feel my legs because of my great fear. Just before we got to the meeting place we noticed some silhouettes. They were from Mama and Liza.

Together, we continued our walk but increased the pace. There was the tree we were to meet everyone by. Suddenly we saw someone's figure on the road. We fell to the ground and froze. Quietly the figure coughed. It was one of us. We got up and kept going. Finally the whole group was together.

We stood to pray. The Lord gave instructions and finally a quiet command: 'Go!' Ahead of us, sheet-lightning lit up the distant horizon. We moved forward quickly. Someone grabbed the children by the hand and pulled them forward, and I grabbed Mama and pulled her, praying: 'Lord, give us strength!' With a heavy backpack on my shoulders, pulling me down, Mama also slowed me. She had a backpack too and the long grass tangled around our feet. We had to press onward.

After the long grass, we passed through some bushes and then we were on sand. The hills were also sandy. If you weren't careful and stepped slightly off the path you would slip right down the slope. We hurried as best we could so as to go as far as possible in the night.

The sunrise was coming and we had already reached the mountains. We went up, up, up. As we walked along the mountain path, it felt as though we were getting closer and closer to God. We wanted to sing and praise the Almighty Creator, Who is all-loving and omnipresent. We couldn't see anyone around us so we started to sing praise to our Lord.

Suddenly, some people were coming toward us. We were afraid of them and they were frightened by us. They were smugglers. When we figured out that neither group intended any harm to the other, they warned us to walk quietly and to stop singing because the border guards here travel by horse.

From the long, hurried walk we were all very tired – especially the elderly and children. And we hadn't slept as well. The sun came up and it started to get hot. Here, it is already hot in May. When he reached a bush, one brother stopped the whole group and invited us to pray to thank God for His protection. We all got down on our knees and intensely prayed to the Father for help crossing the border into China. The Lord promised to protect.

After that, we felt calm and without any doubts, we laid down to rest, right on the ground, hiding our heads from the sun in the bushes. We slept like logs after all our worries and concerns.

When we woke up, the sun was high above our heads. It was close to lunchtime. We ate and then set out again. The Lord led us since we had no idea where we were. 'Go left, right, straight,' He told us. It turned out to be a very hot day. The sun beat down; our mouths were dry; bile splashed around inside and came up leaving a bitter taste in our mouths. We sucked our sugar candies and handed them out to others; they made us feel a little better. But they also made us thirsty. We called out to the Lord: 'Lord, you see everything; help us!' 'Go right,' He answered, 'and there will be water.' We went a little ways and we saw canebrake. We went down and there was enough water you could even swim in it. We drank as much as we could. I refilled my kettle and we went on. We had to walk one hundred miles to reach the place the Lord was directing us to.

Once again, we spent the whole night walking. My sister, Liza, fainted from exhaustion and thirst as we had already drunk all the water. Our group stood up and again we called out to the Father: 'Lord, thirst is distressing us – send water!' We hadn't finished praying when it started to rain. We took out our cups, pots and whatever we had and started to gather water. I gave Liza some water to drink and unloaded her bag and we set out again. And so we went, further and further. Of course, this trip was challenging for us, for our flesh was weak. Our faith, however, kept moving us forward. Since God had spoken to us, we had to obey and fulfill His command.

The sky started to go grey; it was morning. The Lord told us that at seven in the morning we would cross the border. There were some 'wise men' among us, however. They began to doubt and said: 'We'll go and see, is it far? Will we be able to cross? If we go in the day, they will see us.' They doubted the Father. They put their minds higher than the Lord's. They said: 'Let's go at night.'

So we stayed sitting in the bushes. It was a cloudy day and a light rain drizzled. We learned later that the guards slept at that time and we could easily have gone in the day...

THE BORDER

We waited until it was night and then prayed. The Father blessed us in our small faith by His mercy. We set out. The hills got smaller and smaller which meant we were descending into the valley. Green grass appeared as well as some shrubs. Finally, we went down the last slope and came out on the plain.

— 'Let's pray for the last time on our Motherland before we step on foreign ground,' suggested the brother who had been leading us. Even though we prayed very quietly, the prayer was on fire. We needed to cross a raging river. The mountain stream flowed so quickly that it even took stones along with it. We were terrified when we learned that it sometimes even swept horses off their feet. What would become of us? None of us could swim. But the Lord comforted us: 'Do not fear! The water will stand still. Let this be a testimony to you. It will only go up to your ankles.' Oh what mercy the Father showed us! We went down past the shrubs. From there, we could see a smooth highway, littered with rubble. Guards on horses traveled along. We hurried to pass this point as fast as possible. There it was; the terrifying river. We entered it in single file. The water was still like a mirror and as deep as our ankles. We gathered water in whatever containers we had. Kettles and pots clinked and the sounds made us fear someone would hear us. The bank on the other side was quite high so two brothers scrambled up and helped pull the rest of us up. Praise God! We were on Chinese soil! Is everyone still with us? Oh, where is brother Sobolev? We ran back to the river bank. Our brother was sitting down tying up his shoe laces. He had taken his shoes off before crossing so they didn't get wet. We walked boldly across the fields with joy in our hearts and a strong desire to sing. The flowers here seemed so beautiful; they were like ones you see in your

fantasies. Despite all this, we still needed to hurry. How would the locals here react to us?

We walked through the rice fields. They had already been watered; only small ridges separated the fields. We walked and walked and walked and found ourselves at a dead-end. Where should we go? We started to pray. The Lord told us to turn to the right and go further. But even after these instructions, there were still some who doubted. 'What do you mean 'to the right'? There's no path there. Let's go left.' An argument broke out among us. Some of the 'wise men' didn't trust the Holy Spirit. In order to stop fighting, we decided to listen to them. We went left. The ridge of the field came to an end and we found ourselves in a swamp. We skipped from tussock to tussock and waded deeper and deeper into the muck — it was up to our knees. We jumped over the ditches filled with water. It became dangerous to go further. We had been walking almost all night and where did we end up? Right back at the place the Lord had told us to go right.

Our 'wise' brothers and sisters fell silent. Now they were willing to obey. They had learned from experience. We went right.

We came through the fields and a road was before us. The sun was starting to come up. We made it to a village. Here, we decided to dry ourselves off and have a rest, but the Lord commanded us to continue our journey without stopping. The disobedience of some members of our group was persistent, and because of this we all suffered.

We lit a fire to stand near to dry. We hadn't even got ourselves comfortable when a Uighur came up to us. He said something in his language and then left.

— 'They are coming to catch us,' said our leader. 'Gather your things and let's get moving!'

We went a little ways from that place. It was already light out. Five Dungans came to meet us. They told us they were the authorities here and that they had to check what we were carrying. We had to obey. We sat down like the sons of Jacob; each of us opened our bags. The Dungans were writing something down and suggested that each of us give them something. We had to obey

once more. We set aside some things from our meager belongings and made a small pile. As a gift to us, they gave us cake and talkcan [a food made from roasted barley]. They left, but they told us to stay here until the evening and then they would, supposedly, lead us. They left one person to guard us.

– ‘We need to leave as soon as possible,’ said our leader. We got up and left. The guard came chasing after us on a horse, screaming something in his language that we couldn’t understand.

– ‘We need to give him something so he’ll leave us alone,’ our leader said.

As we rushed along, we pulled whatever we could out of our bags; a towel, a shirt – he still kept following us. My Papa took off his vest and gave it to him. The Uighur turned his horse around, gave a snap of his whip and rode off but kept looking back to remember which way we were going.

As soon as the Uighur was out of sight, we turned left. There were large tea bushes in front of us. We hid in the bushes and decided to rest, but in prayer, the Lord commanded us to keep going. ‘Where shall we go? They’ll see us immediately,’ came the complaints once more from the distrusting souls. We sat. It was a hot day and the sun beat down; thirst came over us yet again. A woman Uighur came past us with two rams; she was shepherding them. She saw us and stood at a distance and watched. It was obvious she was following us with her eyes. She didn’t dare come close because there were no men at home; they were all in the fields working.

If we had been obedient to God, we wouldn’t have had such worries nor suffered so greatly from thirst. We would have reached our resting place sooner.

Finally it was evening and the woman left. We waited for darkness to move forward, but it was not to be. The Uighur trotted over to us on his horse and invited us to his tent:

– ‘I have ayran [a Turkish yogurt drink] and clotted cream,’ he said.

But we just looked at him with distrust. Each of us had already put our backpack on. One sister, in fear, went off, not wanting to share

in our fate. She had a sack of something good. The Uighur came over to her with the same offer. She stood up and came back over to us. She told us that he had ayran... She hadn’t even finished her sentence when the Uighur bent down from his horse, grabbed her sack, and rode off into the darkness. The sister rushed off after him and started to yell.

– ‘Where are you running?’ the brothers said, stopping her. ‘We have to get away from here, for he will come back and he won’t be alone.’

Everyone jumped to their feet and quickly went in the opposite direction. The sun was already setting. The great fire ball fell beneath the horizon, shooting out rays in all directions but they didn’t carry very far. Once again, we heard the gallop of horses and someone shouting: ‘Hey, hey!’ Then we heard a dog howling. We walked in single file, prodding each other along. The man on the horse didn’t see us. We had been shielded from his sight. We gathered in a group and began to call out to God: ‘What shall we do, Lord?’ ‘Stay here, for Satan never sleeps,’ the Lord replied.

The sleepless night of journeying and a day of waiting had worn us out. We were glad for the rest. We lay down where we could and fell asleep. I can’t remember how long we slept, but the Lord woke us up. An invisible hand lightly hit the face of one sister, and through this sleeping vessel, the Lord said: ‘Go, children.’

We woke each other up quickly and thanked the Lord for his protection and mercy; then we set out. We went past mills and across streets. Dogs barked, but we went past separate dwellings before morning arrived.

The sun began to rise. We really wanted to have a drink. We hadn’t eaten anything for a whole day because we’d run out of supplies. The extra kilometres of wandering and disobedience to the Father had brought this upon us. We reached a gorge with streams running through it. We rushed to the water but there were all kinds of bugs in it. We put a kerchief over it and drank what passed through.

It was already light now. We could hear voices above us on the road. We hurried to hide in the gorge. Then we heard Russian; a boy and his dog passed by. With a loud bark, the dog rushed down into the gorge. The boy, not suspecting a thing, called for it and kept going, never noticing us.

It turned out to be another hot day. It was good that we were down in the gorge and not up in the sun. We climbed up to pasture like goats on the acacia flowers; then we jumped back down to hide. And that's how we spent the day in the gorge. Dusk came and the sounds of daytime grew quiet. We called out to the Father ...

THROUGH CHINA

We got the command to move forward. We walked along the side of the road hurriedly. We crossed over the ditch and were again in fields and paths. And so we continued all night without stopping; another sunrise. We found a place, something like hills, surrounded with shrubbery. We decided to stop to rest but the Lord said: 'No, children, Satan is here.' We went on, having learnt from our bitter past experience. We covered another distance in a hurry. It was getting light out. We found a good corner to hide from by-passers for the day but the Lord said: 'Satan is here too.' We were feeling desperate: 'Where isn't Satan, Lord?' We could see some people on the fields in the distance. 'Go right, children,' said the Father. We turned right and saw a ditch had been dug. 'I will protect you here,' said the Lord.

There was a lively conversation on the field. It was Taranchinskiy¹ conversation, as we later found out. People were working on a poppy field, gathering opium. Our ditch was surrounded by reeds. Bulls walked near by the edge of the ditch; they were grazing. Shepherds walked along nearby as well but they didn't see us. We were all terrified. What if they see us?

¹ Taranchinskiy – Tarancha; this was the term for Uigurs and their products.

The day got hot and the sun beat down and we were still wearing three dresses from the time we left Zharkent. The kids were tossing about from the heat. The water we had collected was gone. Two sisters went out to look for water. They walked through the field to the mill. The miller turned out to be Russian. The sisters went up and stood at the doorway. The miller turned to them and asked:

– 'How many of you are there?'

The sisters remained silent, thinking: 'If we're done for, let's not betray the others.'

– 'Why don't you speak?' the miller asked again. 'In a dream last night, an old man came to me and told me to help people passing by. Cook up some noodles because I don't have any bread. My wife has gone to the city to the doctor. You can make the noodles yourselves and cook them, then at lunch, take them to your group. No one will see.'

The rest of us were sitting, worrying about our sisters. They left and disappeared, it seemed, for they were gone so long. Suddenly the reeds started to rustle and a man appeared with a bucket. We froze in fear. Then, we saw our sisters with kettles full of water.

– 'Don't be afraid,' said the miller, 'we brought you noodles, pass your cups.'

Each of us stretched out our cups, and the miller filled them with noodles. They had been made with water and no eggs but seasoned with green onion. There was neither butter nor meat but it seemed like the most delicious food we'd ever eaten in our lives.

– When the workers have left the field, come to my place and I will show you the best way to go,' he said.

We ate until we were full after four days of fasting. We thanked the Lord for His care for us and His generosity through this person. We also thanked the miller for the tasty lunch.

We waited, but now we were happy. The heat fell and we now had water too. The bulls came and wanted to get down in the ditch. We used sticks to poke them in the nose and drive them away.

Finally the workers left, singing their songs; each one went to his home, to his family. It got quiet and dark. We crawled out of the ditch and walked single-file; in the direction we'd been shown. Our sisters showed us where to turn. We reached the mill where the kind man lived and he came out to meet us with a bucket of milk and a big taranchinskiy flat bread. We each got a cup of milk and a piece of flat bread. What delicious milk! Since childhood, I had not been fond of milk. 'Now I'll drink milk forever.' I thought to myself. But... I couldn't bring myself to drink it again.

Chapter 11 SUIDING

Finally we rid ourselves of our backpacks and burdens. We left them, with brother Danchenko while we went into the nearest city, Suiding. We took only our Bibles with us. Brother Danchenko was responsible for finding a cart to carry our bags.

It was no longer difficult to walk. We rejoiced as we walked along because there was no grass to tangle our feet, no bumps to trip over and we didn't need to hide, for now. We had to cross a stream. The stronger ones went to test it first – was it deep? They carried the weaker ones across so as not to lose time taking shoes on and off. As we approached the city, we couldn't make up our mind about entering it – there were guards standing nearby. We decided to play it safe and spend the night in the surrounding bushes. As usual, with our heads in the bushes we nodded off.

At sunrise we woke up, dusted ourselves off and set off. We reached a small bridge at the entrance to the city. We sat on the railing like crows and waited for our eldest brother. At that moment a woman came out with buckets and when she saw us she said:

– 'What are you all doing standing here in a big group?! Quickly now, in twos and threes, go in while the Chiriquí (Chinese soldiers) are sleeping. Over there is an Orthodox church and when you go into the yard, you'll see Shandong² Russian officer Golikov. Go to him and he will help you.'

We jumped off the railing and almost ran to the location we'd been told. It was Sunday. People were coming from all directions to the service. The church doors were still closed. So when we entered the yard, we sat on the logs lying there.

² Shandong – city authority

Soon we saw a middle-aged man in uniform. He went out to walk in his garden. There was a house behind the church. 'This is Golikov,' said one of the old women, pointing at him.

One of our brothers went up to Golikov to ask for advice. He seemed friendly and open to helping refugees.

– 'The Chinese soldiers have never taken anyone from my yard,' said Golikov, 'but now they are starting to come here from time to time. You go to the end of the garden and wait until evening. In the evening, go out through the hole where the ditch is. Then keep going along the road right into Gulja.'¹

Brother Danchenko asked us to go to the home of this man's uncle to ask for horses to go get the rest of our things from the miller.

'When it got dark, we all headed for the city of Gulja; except for me and the sisters who stayed with me. Some women led us to the house of a kind person. When I asked, they said the owner of the house wasn't home and would come back only in the evening. The women then invited me to spend the night and I agreed.

We sat and talked for a little while when suddenly their friends, the Chiriquí, came in. I was terrified. What would happen now? When they saw us, they just shook their heads. Then they started speaking in Chinese. We couldn't understand a word but we knew they were talking about us. The hostess was also concerned and said:

– 'There's nowhere for you to sleep here. Go to my daughter's place.'

And she led us there. No one was home. We had just sat down to eat when a middle-aged Chinese man entered. He was a translator. He saw us and asked the hostess:

– 'Are they running away from Russia?'

– 'No,' she replied, 'they came here from Zaimka to pray at the church.'

¹ Gulja – also known as Yining city

– 'Why does she look in such bad shape?' he asked, pointing at my mother.

– 'She's sick.'

– 'Why are the other young ones so thin?'

– 'They work very hard in the fields under a greedy employer. He doesn't feed them well.'

The Chinese man shook his head and left. We prayed and went to sleep. At sunrise, the door opened again and the translator's head poked in. 'Mm...' he muttered and left. We woke up immediately and prayed: 'Lord, keep us safe!' 'Get away from here. There is a snake!' the Lord replied. We gathered our things quickly and rushed outside. We quickly came to the yard of Golikov. We could already see the gate. Praise God no one had seen us! We went to a corner of the garden and waited. It was already bright out. Some of our friends had already left by wagon [a type of horse-drawn carriage]. Someone went into the yard – so they must have woken up in the house. I went inside to make a request. The owner met me and said:

– 'How can I help you?'

– 'Please,' I said, 'help us to get to Gulja. I have some money. I'll give you all of it. There are four of us left here.' And I told him everything that had happened to us yesterday.

– 'I don't have any carts right now. I don't work with transportation,' said Golikov. 'In the yard there are some people living who do this work. Ask them and they will help you.'

I thanked Golikov for his advice and went to the place he had pointed to. Here lived two Greeks, the wives of soldiers. Their husbands had been sent to Urumqi where there was a war.

The women met me affectionately. When I told them about my need they said:

– 'The horses are gone but if they aren't tired when they come back, we will take you tomorrow. Now come, sit under our overhang with us.

– 'Please,' I begged them, 'take us now. I am not feeling well; I'm coming down with something. I need to reach Gulja while I'm still well.'

– 'You'll get there, you will,' they comforted me.

I went to the garden to find my sisters and bring them to the overhang, and brother Danchenko was already there. He told us that everyone else was traveling and the bags were being brought. Oh, how many worries I had suffered until that time!

Now, we were all sitting under the overhang. The women of the house had gone to the market to buy some things for us as well. They bought tukaches (a kind of bread) and radishes. In the evening their coach woman came, she was also a soldier.

– 'How are the horses,' asked the Greeks, 'not tired, are they?'

– 'No, I rode them slowly,' she replied.

– 'Can you leave again tomorrow?'

– 'Yes. We'll leave early in the morning,' answered the coach woman. Then she left to rest.

The next day, early in the morning, we were all ready to leave. What was there really to get ready? Jump up from the ground where you were sleeping, shake yourself off and there you go – all ready. We waited and waited but the coach woman didn't come. It was already ten in the morning. We grew all anxious as we waited. Finally she showed up. We got on the road and set off. The road travels through the military town of Kure. The road, which goes further, was in the vicinity. We weren't transporting anything, since we were locals. Half way there, the coach woman suggested we stop at the teahouse to drink and rest. We had to water the horses anyway. We hadn't finished our tea when at the next table one Chinese man pointed at my Mama and, laughing, said: 'She's running from Russia!' I didn't understand a word, but our coach woman started to argue with him. She nodded at us to leave and then she stepped out herself. The Chinese man was one of the 'guests' we'd met the day before who came to visit our shelter.

We got on the road and pushed the horses faster. We had only gone a little way when we saw the mapa (a taranchinskiy team of horses) on two wheels rushing toward us. On the top, sitting bent over with their knees up, were the Chiriquf.

– 'They're coming after us,' said our soldier as she drove the horses to a full gallop. We were faster and the distance between us grew. It was as if we were flying on wings. The trip should have taken three hours but we covered the distance in one. The Chiriquf lost their ground, or maybe they got tired of chasing us, who knows?

GULJA

– 'This is Gulja! We're here!' our lifesaver said. Now we were safe. We didn't have to be afraid of the Chiriquf here. We could just turn down a different road.

– 'Where should I drop you off?' our coach woman asked, 'to the Baptists?'

– 'No,' we replied, 'to the Pentecostals.'

– 'I don't know where the Pentecostals live.'

We went to the Baptists. I asked them where the Pentecostals live and they directed us to the family of the Stateynikovs. A brother and sister saw us and met us with joy. We saw them for the first time in our lives but the meeting was as if we'd been friends all our lives. We unloaded and I went to the market to exchange money so we could pay our coach woman.

That very evening, we went to a service. All our fellow refugees were in the city now and had found places to live. The service was packed. One sister testified about how the Lord had foretold them that twenty people would come and that they should accept them. We were warmly welcomed.

We lived with the Stateynikovs for three days. By that time we had found a flat to share with the Danchenko family. We primed the walls of the flat. One room was ours the other was for the Danchenkos. We primed the floors because they were not wooden but clay. Clay floors need to be primed regularly with liquid clay. Next, we set up beds on the kan⁴, we put boards on

⁴ Kan – a low brick bench in buildings, heated by smoke from a fire

blocks and sacks on the boards. The sacks were filled with hay which the landlord gave us. Then we put nails into a board and nailed it to the wall. We pinned paper to the walls so they wouldn't make our clothes dirty, and hung a curtain across. This was our wardrobe. Now we were set.

We warmed some water and bathed quickly in the barn because we felt as though we were coming down with something. We had something to eat and then lay in our beds... for three weeks. We had a terrible stomach virus.

Word came that another group, the one coming after us, had been caught. Our hearts were filled with grief. Varya was in that group. How was she? What had happened? How could God allow this, for He had determined in what sequence we should go?

It turned out that God was not at fault. The group had complained. We read in Numbers 14: 27, 29 "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites... In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me."

The group had gone out with the protection of the Heavenly Father. They walked for a few days in want and burdened with hunger. Their thirst grew. They had given in to the thought that they would die in the desert of dehydration. In desperation they cried out to the Lord. The answer came: 'Dig a hole.' They began to dig; some with their hands, others with knives. The sand became damp and water started to collect in the hole. Quenching their thirst, they thanked God for the mercy He had shown them. Now they had the strength to go on.

At last they had reached the border. The Lord commanded them to keep going but the human mind thinks in its own way. 'Let's send a few of us to get some flat bread; we'll eat and then cross the border.'

While a few went to get food, the others sat and waited. The sun beat down and again, they were thirsty. The children grew

faint from the heat. The ones that were sent for food, returned. The mothers, feeling sorry for their children, started to complain to the brothers saying: 'we don't want to see our children die of thirst. It would be better if the border guards caught us.' And that is what happened. Hearing some noise coming from near the border, the guards showed up and arrested everyone. They took them all back to the farm except for a few brothers who were taken for questioning.

God is merciful. He forgives those who repent. He allowed them to join the next group of refugees and led them again, this time all the way to China.

It was a big group that time; fifty people, many of whom were children. How could they manage with such a crowd? The Lord commanded everyone to gather in the prayer house but to keep the light off. Everyone who was there sat on their things and prayed. This required strong faith. Midnight came.

Suddenly a strong wind began to blow; a tornado was coming. It made a deafening noise outside. The Lord told them to leave and walk in single file. He also determined the order the families were to walk in. One family realized that not all their children were with them. Three sons were missing. They stopped and the father went back to the house, looking for his children. Maybe they're under the bench? Sleeping? He couldn't find them anywhere. His wife stopped with the other children to wait for her husband. They began to run to catch up with the group and the wind literally carried them off. 'Lord, where shall we go? Help!' The Lord had mercy on them and showed them the way through the father. And so it happened that they crossed the border after three days, but their group took ten days. The wife had a problem with her legs and she wouldn't have been able to make a ten-day trip. God foresaw this plan for them in advance.

The main group walked through the rice fields in water up to their waists, just as we had. At that time the rice fields were flooded. They had to cross the river Horgos five times. And the three sons whom the father had been searching for were with the main group.

After a day of walking to Gulja, they buried brother Yakov Ilyin, whom the brothers had taken turns carrying on their backs through the night. His wife Pelageya, now a widow, arrived at the city with their four children, Marusya, Misha, Lyonya and Vanya.

Many groups had made their way to China before us and after us, but I don't know how the Lord led them.

Sister Kondrat'evna was in one of the groups. She was the only one from Vasil'evka whom the Lord had sent us to meet. She was walking with brother Yakov's family. After his death, she joined our family. Our family grew but where could we get money to feed everyone? We had to look for jobs immediately. We could go work as servants – this offered good money but terrible conditions for us. You had to go and sit all day with the housewife and do next to nothing, or play the balalaika. Many girls found work this way but then they were sold as wives to Chinese men. 'Go, get away from this,' I thought, 'like the Loi or Daryns (Chinese officials).'

Kondrat'evna called me to her workshop to sew. They were hiring. But I said:

– 'I don't know how.'

– 'It doesn't matter, I'll teach you,' she said. We were hired to sew pants. They promised to pay us two Lanas⁵ per pair of pants, but they only gave us one. The second was just a promise. But we could still live on one Lana a day. In the evening, after work and dinner, we went out into the yard to rest. We looked and all around us were tall poplar trees. We looked back in the direction from which we came and our hearts rejoiced: 'could it be true that we're free now?! Is this a dream?'

Time kept going. It was August. Varya, whom we'd been missing and worrying about, arrived. While she had been on her journey, many parasites had found a home in her clothes.

– 'I won't come into your house until I've washed and changed my clothes,' she said.

⁵ Lana – monetary coin – this amount was enough to eat for a day.

Some more time passed and the Lord willed us to move on. He showed us the place and even gave us the month and the date of our departure. Who would trust Him? It means this is not home for us nor for the others. We started to prepare. We ordered bread from the bakery and asked them to dry it out into croutons. Then we crushed the croutons into crumbs and put them in sacks. Breadcrumbs don't take up much room and they don't go stale. Our landlord was a Muslim. He had a young wife who had been friendly with us. He had always been kind to us but one day he drove us out of the flat, saying his uncle was coming and he needed a place for him. We knew that no uncle was coming, that this was a lie. We told him our agreement was for a year and we asked him to let us stay until they agreed upon time. He complied but warned us not to stay a day longer. We learned the reason for this later. The Mullah (Muslim religious leaders) had ordered landlords to kill all their non-Muslim tenants.

Chapter 12

AKDALA

We left the city of Ghulja. We hired two carts; in one we loaded all our belongings and in the other we put sick grandfather Ivan. The carts didn't take us far. We reached the appointed place and then they went back. We hoisted our things onto our shoulders and walked from there. The area was steppe; we waded through rivers toward the place determined by God. We walked for a week. We went into a small town called Kuba. There, we sold our pillow-cushions and bought flour. We baked bread and went further in the direction of Kalmak-Kura.

The sun was already below the horizon. Two brothers decided to go, like lookout, to find out what village we were approaching. We sat down to rest from our long trip. It was already getting dark when our brothers returned. During prayer, God said: 'The Daryns are preparing a trap there; a wild beast. He is waiting. He sees people coming.'

We had to pass by this place and go around it. We weren't allowed to go at night so we prayed and then went to sleep. At sunrise, we passed through Kalmyk village. The dogs barked at us and the villagers started to follow us. We barely managed to get away from them. The Lord protected us from the followers. We were under His protection as we went further.

We had reached the mountains and walked alongside the tall mountain barrier. We had to pass to the other side of the mountain range of Tiem-Shan. After reaching the peak, we began to descend on the other side. The slope was steep and there were many cliffs; it was quite dangerous. We looked for a ravine and decided to rest there. It was so narrow that we had to walk in single file. We hadn't quite made our way out when we caught sight of two horse-men coming down our side of the mountain with ropes and axes. One of them had a rifle over his shoulder. Most of us had made it into the ravine; only our family and brother

Danchenko's family were left. Everyone stopped and watched the riders while they waited for us.

— 'Kaida barasm,' one of them yelled, 'where are you coming from?'

Then he took off his rifle and gave it to the other rider who then returned it to the first. Taking his gun back, he aimed it in our direction. One brother was carrying a bag on his front and back. He quickly threw them to the ground and shoved his hand into his pocket. The riders were taken aback with surprise. The brother whisked a pair of scissors out of his pocket, they glinted in the sun. The riders turned their horses around and cried: 'Malyk bar!' (There's a gun!) in panic and galloped off. They jumped up from the ravine and everyone looked at us with frightened eyes; we kept going. A shot was heard from the mountains but no one was hit. One brother was lingering back in the mountain but when he heard the shot he rushed forward and threw himself down into the stinging nettle. Due to his fear he never even felt the pain.

Another day came to a close. The sun began to set. The ravine was getting wider and we marched forward and came out. But now the riders were in front of us. They were afraid to get too close. We were once again walking in the steppe. One rider rushed past us in full gallop. The other followed quickly.

When it was totally dark, we stopped to rest. In prayer the Lord said: 'I'll keep you safe here.' A sister saw a vision of a wall around us. Praise the Lord! It was a good spot. We settled down to spend the night. After our dinner, we lay down comfortably and then rain started to drizzle. We lay under our blankets with our extra clothing under us and we were fully dressed so it wasn't that cold. It is difficult though when it rains on your journey.

We woke up in the morning and received the Lord's blessing to press onward. We continued in the steppe and stumbled across two shepherds. Then two more came. We had long sticks in our hands. As we walked, we prayed in tongues. Everyone was in the Spirit. One young boy, sitting on his father's shoulders, became quite frightened. He had not been baptized by the Holy Spirit, and he feared dying without being baptized by the

Spirit. He understood well that 'if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ,' Rom. 8:9. He recognized the severity of the moment and prayed: 'Lord, baptize me!' but the Spirit does not enter unrepentant hearts. There was not much time and he was afraid he would die soon. He prayed: 'Lord, forgive me and baptize! Forgive me and baptize!'

Their residence appeared. The shepherds changed their attitude to us and spoke in peace. They said they wouldn't touch us. This was the property of officer Punegin. These were his shepherds. The Officer came out to meet us. When he found out that we were wandering travelers, he brought us bread and milk. Then he told us how we could find the Russian village of Ak-Dala. He directed us to his relative, Sazontov. When we reached the village, we could see smoke. It was obvious people were cooking dinner. The evening was approaching. We stopped near the river. At the bank, under a tree, we started to prepare our dinner. We put some water on to boil, threw in some dried dumplings, fried a chunk of meat which had been salted and dried in the sun and then threw it into the pot too. Everything cooked together. It was a tasty lunch – the smoke gave it a special taste.

The brothers went to scout out a place for us to spend the night. They returned quickly and invited us all to the yard of Sazontov. He was a very kind man but drank excessively. His wife had died recently and he was left with a fifteen-year-old son and a ten-year-old daughter. Because of his drinking, the farm had been forgotten. The cows stood under an overhang with the chickens. The house was just one room. We settled in as best we could in the yard. Some people went into the house, others stayed under the overhang, still others set up their tents, sewn from coarse sheets and pulled across sticks. We had to crawl into the tents on our knees but it was a good place to sleep.

When the villagers found out that refugees from Russia were there, they were shaken up. They called everyone out to discuss it. Some of them threatened to give us over to the Chinese authorities. But our host defended us, saying we were his guests.

Soon, some of our group went to the taranchinskiy village of Kok-Terek to look for work. Grandfather Gregory returned and said:

– 'Anna, Liza, go work in Kok-Terek; they need teachers. It pays well.'

– 'No, grandfather,' I replied. 'I'm not leaving our group. Whatever they do, we do.'

When the others got back, they convinced us all to move to Kok-Terek. Sazontov asked us to leave someone to help him as a sign of gratitude from our group.

I decided to stay; Kondrat'evna stayed with us as well. Difficult times were upon us; we were separated from God's people. It was painful; we cried. We found comfort, however, in prayers, and the Lord showed us His mercy. Then we decided to leave Sazontov.

Liza and I got jobs at the school. We had two classes. Liza had first grade and I had second. By Christmas, they wanted to close the school. For our teaching, my sister and I each received a pood (16.3kg) of flour, a pood of potatoes, two pounds of pork. This was a month's salary. We had ten students.

By this time, our shoes were almost worn out. We had walked for many days, after all, through the desert, up mountains and along rocky roads. Liza and I decided to have some boots sewn. We placed our order with the shoemaker. For two pairs of boots, we had to pay with ten poods of flour. I decided to keep one pood of flour and give a pood of potatoes instead. We wanted to cook ourselves something after all. We only had ten poods of flour in total. We prayed and asked the Lord to soften the heart of the shoemaker. This was just before our departure to Kok-Terek. When he brought our shoes, I asked him to weigh the flour himself. He took ten poods. I asked him:

– 'Is that everything? Do I owe you anything?'

– 'Nope, we're even,' he answered and left.

What a miracle! We had three poods left in addition to what I had set aside to cook. We fell to our knees before the Lord and thanked Him for His mercy to us. Now, we had plenty.

Kok-Terek

We left our kind host, Sazontov, and went to Kok-Terek. It was freezing and as evening came, the temperature dropped even lower. On our way, we stopped at first at brother Danchenko's place. His room was lifted a little ways off the ground and the floor was made of wood. They fed us with hot borsch and drinks. The bread was still warm too – it had just come out of the oven.

We went to the service. The brothers gave us a place to stay with grandfather Tarasov. His house was near the mill. There were two rooms. In one slept his son with his wife and children, and in the other were the four of us with grandma and grandpa. There was also the eldest grandchild, Peter. Everyone slept on the floor. Later, Papa made us all beds. He bought logs, cut and nailed them, and then made the legs. Across the centre, we used branches and covered them with hay. We put more hay in sacks and laid them on top – that was it. We already had blankets and pillows. After all the discomfort we'd experienced, we could now sleep like kings – two people per bed. A metal stove gave heat to the room. Now we didn't have to fear the cold. In the first room, we cooked and ate. We bathed near the stove when the older people went to the meeting. And so, day after day, our life went by in this village.

About this time, in Gulja, the Dungans revolted. The authorities managed to chase them out so they came to Kok-Terek. The village leader, Jayn, was caught off-guard. He sent word to the Russians that he wouldn't be able to protect us from them. We prayed fervently to the Lord and He promised to protect us. The Dungans came, took all our food, and rushed on.

It happened just as the Heavenly Father had said in Ghulja, that we would not see the shedding of blood, only hear about it. He saved His people. Those whose faith was small, however, experienced great fear. It was as if they were in a fire. The women gathered in one house and the men went out to the barracks. A Mullah (Muslim religious leader) found out that there were Russians here and he told the landlord to bring them to the

mosque to be killed. The landlord had a good relationship with his tenants so he didn't want to betray them to death, so he kept putting it off. The Mullah made this demand for three days and on the fourth day he gave him this ultimatum: 'If you do not behead the Russian infidels by midnight, then we will destroy your house along with you.' Everyone was terrified of being executed. They cried out strongly to God. The Lord promised to help.

Midnight was coming. Suddenly, gunfire was heard. What was that? Where did it come from? Then it got louder and louder. It was unclear which direction it was coming from. The Dungans began to panic, they started to run. The shots were coming from the barracks and hitting them.

– 'You're safe!' said the landlord, coming back to the house were the women were. Re-inforcement came.

At that time the Lord said: 'When the snow melts from the mountains, it's time to move on.' We started to prepare once more for our journey with the Father.

Winter was spent at work or in daily cares. Grandfather Gregory and I were sewing, others embroidered, and still others whitewashed, cleaned, and built. Everyone had the means to provide for themselves in this village. We looked up at the mountains. Almost all the snow was gone. Although we had been living reasonably well here, the Father had spoken so we couldn't stay. We had to move on even if things would get worse for us. During this time, there were two weddings; sister Kondrat'evna's and Lida's. There were also baptisms with water. Finally, after Easter, the snow had completely melted in the mountains.

SHATY

The Father announced we'd be going to Shaty. He also said we wouldn't be spared from cold and hunger; frightening.

It's good to travel when you've been promised comfort and abundance, but when cold and hunger are ahead it is difficult to accept. How would we manage? Once again, we were trekking. We went to Shaty through the town of Chikirty. We walked

through fields covered in yellow grasses. Winter cress was flowering and it was already warm. When we reached Chikirty, some of us stayed here because they could work and provide for their families. We, however, exchanged bread for clothes and pressed on to the city of Shaty. In a wide ravine stood a few houses and there was a path along the bank of the river. The mountain cliffs hung over the path. It was a scenic area but we shed many tears at this beautiful river bank. All the stones were covered in tears.

When we got there, we settled in a small house. Dust covered everything in the house. We had to wash and sweep out the whole place. Then we pulled up some grass and laid it out so we could lay out our bedding for the night. Finally *dortuar* or, in other words, rest for now. The walls of the house were made of clay and hadn't been whitewashed. The only window in the house had been covered with paper. Sister Tsurkan started to set up the oven so we'd be able to make lunch. She dug an opening in the mountain, hollowed it out, and put smooth stones and sand on the bottom and sides. Then she wiped it down, it was ready to bake bread.

Each family made their own cooking area which fit the size of their pots and pans. Then they gathered wood and started to cook lunch. Lunch wasn't that good but since we were hungry it seemed very tasty. We always ate watery soups because no one had anything else.

And so we lived here for six difficult months. At first, Grandfather Gregory and I worked by sewing. This allowed us to earn some flour. We bought some bran and mixed it with the flour to bake bread that would last longer. When the flour ran out we had to make 'bread' from just bran.

The Muslims watched our lifestyle and decided that Russians only eat bran. One young Muslim wanted to get married but he was worried he couldn't afford to provide for a family. How convenient! He went up to Elena Prokhorova to propose and said:

– 'Kapor, (which means 'unclean; that's what all the Muslims called us), marry me, Elena. I have three sacks of bran.'

Such a proposal was funny, of course, but it hurt a little too. This became one of our favourite anecdotes; that's what the locals thought of us.

One day, the neighbours called Mama and Varya to help them cook. A celebration was coming.

For their work, they were given some tukach (the Uighur word for buns) and soured milk in a pot. When Varya brought it in, holding the white enamel pot by the handle, she looked quite proud but we went into total shock. The poor women had no idea that these pots were used at night for an entirely different purpose. But they used them instead of the cooking pot.

That is how we lived until the fall. When the weather changed, the Lord sent the first and the second group out again. The first group left. The day for the second group to leave came. Our family was in the second group. The local Daryn gave us a pass. While praying before we set out, the Lord warned us: 'Children, there will be thorns.' Our hearts were troubled but we had to go out and face it, for it was not God who put this thorn before us. After us, the third group would go.

Our group was moving. We'd already covered half of the distance. We spent the night in a forest and then carried on. When we reached the village of Arasan, our path was crossed by a guard on horseback. He stopped us just before we were to cross a river:

– 'Pass!' he demanded.

– 'We have a pass,' we replied.

At that moment the Daryn, who had given us the pass, rushed over and also yelled:

– 'Pass!'

– 'You gave it to us yourself, you know we have one.'

– 'Give it here.'

The brother took it out of his pocket and, without a hint of suspicion, gave it to the Daryn. The Daryn put it in his pocket and ordered:

– 'Return to Ghulja.'

– 'No,' we replied, 'we won't go there. We are going to Aksa, not Ghulja.'

Then the Daryn ordered the soldiers to chase us with whips. The Chirikuf (soldiers) followed his orders and started to beat us.

– ‘Our brothers and husbands serve as soldiers,’ cried our sisters, ‘and you are ordering them to beat us!’

The Daryn looked scared and spoke more politely:

– ‘I can’t let you go there. At the border the boss is a Tartar. He’ll have my head for that pass.’

– ‘Fine,’ said our leader, ‘we’ll negotiate with him ourselves.’

Three brothers and I set out for the post to speak with the Tartar. We walked up the mountain; up, up, up. We didn’t reach the security post until evening. It was so high up that in the evening snow fell. We saw two yurts (portable round tents). One was for the boss and the other was for the workers. The soldiers led us to the boss. Inside the yurt, all the walls were decorated with carpets. On the ground there was a large mat for warmth and on top of the mat was a carpet. In front of a couch there was a low table with pillows around it. A fire burned in the middle for heat. There was a small opening at the top of the yurt for the smoke to escape.

We told the boss about our situation, saying:

– ‘Give us a pass to go further. The Daryn took ours away.’

– ‘Get it back from him,’ he replied.

All our requests and persuasions got us nowhere. We stayed for the night in the workers’ yurt. In just a jacket and wet boots, I slept on one side of the yurt. The workers slept on the other. I slept very poorly because I had a headache.

In the morning we went back to our group and told them what had happened. Then everyone, both young and old, decided to keep walking even without a pass. When we reached the post where the Tartar was, he asked:

– ‘Why have you come? I said I won’t let you go further without a pass.’

We began to beg him, but he stubbornly refused our requests. When we came down the mountain, snow had already fallen. Right in the snow, we got down on our knees in prayer with tears, asking for His mercy. Watching us pray, the Tartar couldn’t take

it and went deeper into the mountains. We decided to go back to Shaty.

Our hearts ached. Some of us started to grumble and complain; perhaps against the Tartar, perhaps against someone else. At this moment, grandfather saw a vision of a blizzard of rocks. The stones flew in the wind.

Upon returning to Shaty, we got into a caravan⁶ at the edge of the village. Our brothers and sisters from the third group were there. Everyone started to pray. Through one sister came the words: ‘Do not think about Ghulja.’ ‘These words were for me,’ said the sister. ‘I’m thinking about Ghulja because my son is still there.’ In the morning we prayed again. Through the same sister we heard: ‘My blessing is before you and behind.’ This was because of the dreams of her heart. Many went back to Ghulja.

SEARCH FOR SUBSISTENCE

We desperately needed food and called to the Lord for help. The Father said: ‘Look around you.’ Grandfather, Liza and I decided to go to the village of Chikirty. We only had six buns left. We took three of them with us and left the other three for the rest of our family. Varya stayed back with the elderly. We walked through the mountains and then down into the valley. In the valley, they reap wheat. The reapers were singing happy songs. On the field, the wheat lay like a sea having already been threshed.

We walked past with hearts filled with grief. Against my will, words came forth from the depths of my soul: ‘Lord, the whole world rejoices in their positions on the earth but Your children are in poverty; they cannot understand Your plan nor Your will.’ Prayers flowed out to the Lord. Tears streamed like rivers from our eyes, washing the rocks but softening our hearts. Grandfather saw a vision of a large sack filled to the brim with something and tied

⁶ Caravan – a temporary living place for travellers or merchants in Asian countries.

with a knot. The strings smoke and smolder. 'Lord, where is this sack?' we asked Him.

By the evening, we reached brother Karpov in Chikirty. He was glad to see us and sheltered us at his place. He fed us what he had: dumplings in milk. Since we hadn't eaten for so long, this seemed very tasty to us.

– 'Tell us, brother,' grandfather asked, 'how can we get food here?'

– 'Go to this rich man,' he said, giving us the address. 'Maybe he can give you jobs.'

Grandfather went to him and got this answer:

– 'You can work for me but send them home,' pointing at me and Liza.

– 'No, if it's only for me and there's no work for them, then I won't stay either,' grandfather replied.

Upset, we returned to brother Karpov. Grandfather Gregory retold him the conversation with the rich man. – 'You know what,' said Karpov, 'those buttons,' pointing at the ones on our jackets, 'cut them off and trade them for potatoes.'

We had jackets and vests with pearl buttons. I cut them all off and said:

– 'It's true, just I can't do it – you exchange them for us.' We went to the Taranches, exchanged our buttons for potatoes and planned on returning home. It had already been two days since we left Varya and our parents. We said our goodbyes and once again, set out through the mountains and fields to Shaty. We carried a heavy load but our hearts were at peace. When we went by the yard of the Porkulov family, we smelled the scent of fresh baked bread. We decided to stop in on them and say goodbye to them as well. We talked about our worries and needs and our journey back home and then made our way to leave. Brother and sister Porkulov didn't even offer us any bread. They just boasted about how much they had earned and how much flour they received. They were very satisfied with themselves. We left, hungry, to go back home. We had to walk about thirty miles, maybe even further.

As we walked, we thought about how our parents were doing without us. If they go hungry for just one day then they're probably fine. We'll come, cook up some soup with potatoes, feed them and fill our bellies while we're at it. It was a long way home and it would take all day.

Dusk was approaching when we reached the first turn into Shaty. There was just a little way left to go. Our whole bodies were tired, but our feet hurt the most. The sack was digging into our shoulders as our strength ebbed away. I kept telling myself: 'just a little bit further, a few more minutes, and we're home. Shaty is right there!'

When we turned the last corner into the Caravan it was totally dark. Light was coming through our window... but from what? It smelled like bread baking. Or had we brought that scent with us from the Porkulov's place? We opened the door. Varya was rushing around and Mama stood at the stove stirring something in the pot. On the shelf, like tall soldiers, stood five big loaves of bread. And they weren't made of bran either, risen with yeast; that was the bread we'd been eating. It was difficult to bake that bread. You'd mound it up on the wooden peel but it just crumbled.

Papa was putting cups around the table he'd made. It was clear they'd been anxiously waiting for us. Now we were home. We were all overjoyed to be reunited. They started to talk all at once but we couldn't understand a word. Finally we figured it out.

The local Daryn had ordered that the Russians be given ten or fifteen gin (local measuring amount) of flour for each person. He did this so that the Russians could bake their bread to last for their trip back to Gulja. Some of us did just that.

We ate as a family and thanked God for His care and mercy toward us. He tests His children but also gives sustenance from His generous hand at just the right time. Full and joyful, we fell into a deep sleep on the mattresses Papa had made us. We felt like kings. No, that's not right, kings can't sleep so soundly; they live in fear of losing their wealth, but we had no such fear.

We heard that the Russian soldiers from the battalion in Maralbishi would be heading home on their holiday to Gulja and

they would be coming through Shaty, where we lived now. And so it happened; in the morning, the soldiers were in our village. So now we had work – we washed their clothes and were paid with tukach. We had enough tukach to last a month. Then, the soldiers wanted to hunt here for mountain goats. They consulted with our grandfather about which road to take to go hunting. They promised to bring back meat if they were successful. In the evening they gave us meat. We had a glorious dinner!

Soon, a messenger came from the djudjan⁷, inviting us to work in Kalmak-Kura; Varya and Liza would embroider, and grandfather and I would sew.

The soldiers got ready to leave Shaty. During this time, one of them had proposed to sister Natasha. We sent her off with them back to Gulja.

We were preparing to go to another city so we went to ask for horses. He loaned us three horses with bridles and reigns made of broken ropes. While Papa got the bridles in order, we asked the Father what we should do. The answer was: 'Seek sustenance around you but the group must stay where they are.' It was time to part ways. Oh, how bitter separation was! Tears and disappointment were in the eyes of our relatives. I went to see if Papa had prepared everything. He said:

– 'Anya, we'll go with you. Whom could you leave us with?'

My heart was grieved and these words were like an arrow piercing through me.

– 'Papa, all the brothers and sisters are here. You stay with them too. You have enough food to last a month. The Lord will do something in that time and we'll be together again.'

– 'No, don't leave your parents,' he said.

– 'No,' I said strictly and quickly left because it was more than I could bear. I went to the barn and fell to my knees with rivers of tears streaming down my face: 'God, my God! I'm leaving

my parents in Your hands, like small children. Keep, help and protect them!'

Mama handled the separation bravely. I know she wept many tears in secret. She tried to persuade Papa not to upset the children. She only asked that we would write and let them know how we were, so that Papa wouldn't worry. She told us not to worry about them.

At midday, we left. Varya and Liza rode on one horse; grandfather and I each took our own horses. It was a clear day and sunny too; the fields were scattered with flowers. The scenery around us was splendid. Our hearts were heavy though.

Our horses were in the habit of stopping at each incline. This annoyed us. Liza's horse stood still once again. She pressed her heel into his side which made him dart forward suddenly, shaking her off and leaving her in the grass. We chuckled and cried at such a 'tragedy.' Liza tried to get back on but the horse galloped away, jumping up, not letting her grasp the reigns. A Muslim was riding towards us. He helped Liza get back on again. Then grandfather found himself on the ground. He had fallen asleep along the way. It's hard to get on a horse when you're standing on the ground. We didn't have the knack, as soldiers do. Grandfather led the horse by the reigns. When he saw a large mound, he led the horse there and managed to get back on from the top of the mound. We trotted on.

Evening was approaching. At first, dark clouds streaked the sky, and then it started to rain. The ground was wet now and it was hard for the horses to walk in the solonchak (salt marsh). The further we went, the harder it rained. We were soaked and the unshod horses slipped and tripped. You had to be an acrobat not to fly head over heels into the muck. We weren't even horse-riders. If you didn't pay sharp attention, you'd find yourself upside down. Grandfather managed to fly off his horse a few times, but you couldn't count how often Varya fell.

At the side of the road we saw a yurt. A caravan had stopped due to the rain. We rode up to it. When they saw us, they invited us into the yurt to dry off. We were so glad. We went in.

⁷ Djudjan – city mayor; having high authority

Around the yurt we saw crates with goods; we sat down. There was a woman sitting on a crate near the fire with her child. We started to make small talk: 'Where are you from? Where are you going?'

It turned out that they were on their way to Aksa. We asked them to post a letter for us to our parents in which we had described our sad but funny trek. They said they had seen some believers there and know who they are. I had also written a little note just for Mama.

The people offered us some soup cooked over the fire. We spent the night sitting on the crates, but we slept in warmth and were no longer wet. God took care of us here too.

In the morning, once it was clear, they brought us our horses who had been hobbling around grazing in the night. We said our goodbyes, thanking them for their hospitality and set off. They started to load the crates onto their donkeys. Since it was morning and it had rained all night, it was fairly cold, our whole bodies shivered.

We spent the next day traveling as well. The sun was already on its descent. The horses refused to go another step. No matter how much we prodded them, they didn't budge. There were only five miles left and we could have made it to the mill where Kondrat'evna and grandfather Sherbakov lived. Their place was warm and we could have had dinner but the horses wouldn't move. We had to get off and lead them by the reigns. Even that didn't work – I guess they wanted to be carried... we decided to spend the night here. We chose a hollow between the mountains, said our prayers, put out our saddle blankets, tied up the horses and lay down in a row under grandfather's big blanket. We put a *koshma*⁸ over top.

When we woke up, it was already light. My first thought – where are the horses? At the foot of the mountain, snow had fallen. Grandfather and I went to look for our horses. The grass was as high as our waists and wet from the snow. We looked for where

they might be grazing. Finally, we found them and led them back to the hollow. Liza and Varya were like sparrows in a nest; sitting covered by the *koshma* and looking around with concerned expressions – Where are they?

We quickly mounted our horses and rode to the mill. Kondrat'evna welcomed us warmly and, after asking about our trip, scolded us for not coming to spend the previous night. Then she fed us, and as we parted, said:

– 'If you come again on your way to Aksa, don't pass us by.'

They considered themselves to be part of the group which the Lord would lead further.

By midday we had reached the river Tekes. We needed to cross it, but how? The current was fast and the ferry was on the other side. We started to yell so they would come take us across but the ferrymen weren't on the boat. The evening before, they had taken the soldiers across and gone home. We would have to wade in but we were afraid. We sat on the bank and waited. The bank on this side was shallow and sandy; the other side was steep, although there were places which we could climb up. Who knew if there is a place to pass?

On the other side, we saw two Uighurs with bulls. They asked:

– 'So, you need to cross?'

– 'Yes, we are going to work for the *djudjan*.'

But they just kept going so we sat back down. We prayed to the Lord for help. The Father comforted us and promised to help. But doubt certainly kills faith.

In the evening, the Uighurs were going back home.

– 'Do you want us to help you cross?' they asked.

– 'Of course we do.'

The Uighurs cut some branches, tied them to the bulls and said:

– 'Who is afraid?'

– 'I am,' said Liza.

– 'You can sit with me on the bull.'

⁸ *Koshma* – felt blanket made from sheep's wool.

Our heads were spinning from the fast current and we were still on land. I said to the Uighur:

– 'I can't even get up on a horse.'

The other Uighur led his bull over and helped Varya and I get on. There was something like a dock for us. We held on as tight as we could to the ropes tied to the branches. The Uighur got on my horse and grabbed the rope tied to his bull. Grandfather led Liza's horse. Liza sat behind the Uighur on the bull, holding onto his waist. We went down into the water.

– 'Close your eyes so your head doesn't spin,' the Uighur advised. Then he started praying in his own way. The bulls carefully waded into the water. They knew the river well because they frequently had to cross it. We went deeper and deeper into the water. The bulls started swimming. The Uighur told us that the current is very dangerous in the evening because there is more water but the animals know how to handle it. Tekes River is wide. I thought we were about half-way but I was too scared to open my eyes; you take a glance and the shores seem to swim away. It was as if everything was in motion. You could fall into the water if your head was spinning. This was a place of fervent prayer to God. The Uighurs prayed to Allah. We felt the bulls get their footing. Now we knew the shore was near. The bulls started to come up out of the water.

I opened my eyes and we were on the bank. Praise God! We got off the bulls, paid the men for helping, and then got on our horses. We were on our way to Kalmak-Kure.

Chapter 13 KALMAK-KURE

We saw some yurts ahead of us. This place was called 'Djilyav' which means summer pasture. We got off our horses. After riding a horse for such a long time, it was difficult to walk as we normally do. For three days we had only dismounted the horses to sleep. We were welcomed here. We saw a yurt for temporary stays. The ground was covered with a good koshma. In the middle of the yurt, like always, there was a fire. They brought us something to eat and took the horses back. In the evening, they brought us a blanket and pillows. Finally, we could rest as we used to at home. It was a Saturday.

On Sunday, we went to look for our brothers and sisters who had returned this way. We saw sister Aleksandra and brother and sister K... at the home of the local doctor. They were receiving flour for their sons who were serving in the army.

– 'Come in,' said sister Aleksandra, 'we'll feed you some bread. Sister K... just baked it. I'm fasting today but you eat as much as you like, you were traveling. The K...s and I share our food.'

To be courteous, we turned down her offer, even though we were hungry. We hadn't been given anything to eat at the yurt that morning. Sister Aleksandra eventually persuaded us to eat. We went into the annex; there stood a Russian stove and on it was a pot of borsch. On the table, they had a pile of fried rolls. The smell of the prepared food was so delicious that our mouths watered and there was a tickle in our throats.

Sister Aleksandra called down the hallway to sister K... and asked her to dish up some food for us. Sister K... called her husband and told him about the invitation to unexpected guests, that is, to us. We felt there was some tension between us. When Aleksandra turned to us to offer something, saying:

– 'Sisters, brother, have a flat bread, eat.'

Then brother K... interjected with:

– 'Did you have tea with your bread? If not, then have a roll.'

It was clear that he wasn't so happy to have 'guests.' We started to turn down their offers. We took just one flat bread and shared it between the four of us.

Sister K... remained silent, watching and taking it all in. She saw and heard everything, but left a little later silently. We talked a little, asking them when they planned to leave; then we hurriedly said our goodbyes. We could feel that brother and sister K... were waiting for us to leave so they could sit down to lunch.

Sister Aleksandra, bothered by the behaviour of the K...s, came outside to see us off. In the yard, sister Aleksandra's landlord blocked our path and invited us in for a visit. We started to decline since it was inconvenient for us. She was so insistent; she even asked Aleksandra to help her. We had to accept. We came into a big room. By the wall there was a table and on the table was... butter, jam, fresh bread, honey - what wasn't there!? She also had tukach, roasted pork, holodets (aspic – a dish made from boiling bones to create gelatin) and a boiling samovar. She invited us to eat as if she had been expecting us. In the room, by the other wall, there was a bed, a chest of drawers and some chairs. Clean rugs lay on the floor.

We started to eat. The kind landlord said:

– 'Eat, don't hesitate. There is nowhere else for you to get any food right now. The place where you're going to work will not feed you well, and if you do not work – they won't feed you at all.' And so, we spent the day like that, eating and talking around the table. We were glad to have the opportunity to witness to at least one person about the strength and love of the Lord Jesus Christ and about His salvation.

Happy and with full bellies, we returned to our yurt in the evening. There was a samovar waiting for us on a low table. Beside it, there was a teapot with brewed tea and some drinking bowls. There was also some salt (a crystal) and stale dried tukach. A fire was burning in the middle and a lantern hung over the table. It was warm and homey. It was nice to be able to sit and reflect on

the day. And it hadn't been spent in vain. After saying our prayers, we lay down to rest. We three girls slept under one blanket and Grandfather Gregory slept under his own.

An old Kyrgyz woman was brought to our tent. She slept separate from us, but parasites (fleas) can get around. In the morning we were itching. We had a look and found the unwelcomed guests on our sheets. We gathered them up like peas; they multiply very fast. We lifted up the edge of our skirts like baskets and found another three or four. They crawled up our stockings – totally unashamed. We could do nothing but accept our circumstances. This was our life in China.

The boss we had been invited to work for arrived. We discussed the terms and conditions of our jobs. She said we would be paid with flour.

Two weeks passed and autumn was in the air. We called out fervently to the Heavenly Father, asking for His guidance. He promised to lead us forth, but He didn't say how or when. We just lived with hope and relied on His mercy.

A letter came from Shaty. Papa wrote that everyone was splitting up and going in different directions, so he asked us to take him and Mama in. There was no one left to help care for them. Liza, my sister, saw in a dream that our boss put up a wire barrier between us and our brothers who had gone to Aksu. Our brothers were calling us from the other side.

Sometime later our boss's son came to us, asking us to teach his children. I consulted with my sister about it and then we consulted with the Lord. He said: 'I shall do it myself.' He consented so we agreed to the work and negotiated our pay. We just waited for the boss to sign the contract. We were given a room to live in, and at our request, we sent horses to bring our parents here. According to Papa's letter, everyone was leaving Shaty.

We hurried to prepare a stove in time for their arrival, so we would be able to cook. The evening arrived and we were still fussing over our stove-making. We still needed to cut a hole in the ceiling to put the chimney through. They didn't call us to breakfast, but they called us to lunch.

Grandfather Gregory, whom we'd traveled with without once separating, told me that the boss didn't like the new agreement we'd made with his son.

– 'And what did you say to him,' I asked.

– 'I told him: If you don't like our agreement, then we'll leave. We've been offered jobs in Ak-Dalu.'

Suddenly, I was summoned to come out immediately. They said Papa was here. I ran and then started to worry: where was Mama? It was true, Papa stood at the gates; without Mama and without any bags. Immediately a picture flashed before my eyes: Mama had slipped off the horse and into the stormy waters of the river and drowned.

– 'Where's Mama?' I asked in desperation. 'Did something happen to her?'

– 'Mama stayed back for now,' he replied, 'here is a letter.' I grabbed it from him and tore it open. It read: 'We received your letter. We were at the Daryn's, we'll get the pass.' Grandfather Taras had written this. After reading the news, Liza and I jumped for joy. Finally the call to move on was coming. No one can hold us back from our journey now.

The boss called us for lunch. They also invited Papa to eat. They gave it to us in the corridor, not far from where they were. The first course was soup and the second course had meat which hit the spot.

Turning to the boss, Grandfather Gregory said:

– 'Boss! You didn't agree to the terms of our new positions so we're leaving. We've been given visas to Aksu.'

He looked at the visa and said that it needed to be notarized in Gulja by the administration.

After lunch we squared up. Instead of flour, as we had originally agreed, he gave us wheat, and not even in the full amount. We barely managed to get a pood (16 kg) out of him. They also took our horses back. We decided to go on foot. We prayed to the Lord, asking for blessing on tomorrow's journey. That night, grandfather Sherbakov came to us. He brought a letter

and some taranchinskiy tea to give to the Tartar who hadn't let us pass previously. As we said our goodbyes he added:

– 'If they don't let you pass again, will you come back to us?'

– 'Of course,' I replied, 'just clean up our room and leave it as it was.'

We were grateful to God that we hadn't yet cut the hole in the ceiling for the chimney. We had been working so hard to get that done but the Lord held us back. We don't always understand His plan.

The next morning, the boss called us to his office. He regretted not giving his consent to our new condition. We were in his hands – he only had to sign the contract. Our sister's dream came true; the boss put up a wire barrier but God broke it down.

We got our money and horses; the boss took pity on us. The Lord had inclined his heart. We left early because there was not as much water in the river Tekes at that time. We rode on four horses. Papa was the chaperon. Varya and Papa led one horse. Liza with brother Sherbakov led another horse. They crossed the river and Grandfather Gregory and I were still on the bank.

– 'Don't come back for me!' I yelled after Papa. 'I'm afraid of crossing the river with you!'

Brother Sherbakov came back for me. I sat on his horse and prayed fervently. We crossed the river successfully. We traveled to Sherbakov's parents at the mill. Kondrat'evna was waiting for us. She had made something for us to eat. Also, she had already prepared for the rest of our trip.

When my Papa was passing their mill, they saw him and invited him to their place but Papa didn't hear them and kept going. They had already received the news that the group was setting out.

We ate and prayed at Kondrat'evna's and then set off. By the evening we reached the spot. Mama wasn't at the caravan where they'd left her. She was in the village with Pavel Lyashenko's family. She had baked bread and washed her sheets (which couldn't really be called sheets anymore as they had worn

so thin from use in all our travels in China). Dinner had also been made by Mama's loving hands. She was waiting for her children with great joy after such a long period of separation. We all really wanted to share in our joy at how we had all received passes at the last minute. She told us that Pavel Lyashenko had gone to Chikirty to see Ivan. He also wanted to come here. Papa had just saddled the horses so we could leave for Kura. I was in such anguish: How could this be? The group was supposed to stay together, and they had left! Mama came to tell Father her concerns and she saw a Tarancha ride up. He was a messenger and came up to the fence to give Papa an envelope. Mama ran over to him and grabbed the envelope. She opened it. There were two pieces of paper inside. 'It's the pass!' she thought and pressed it to her chest as she read the other paper. She ran joyfully into the house to Polina Lyashenko to give her the news.

We decided to send Mikhail after them so that when we returned, everyone would be ready to go.

Polina asked Mama to watch her children as she had decided to go herself to Chikirty to get her husband. It was thirty miles. She'd only get there by evening. She started to run and saw a Tarancha (Uighur) running after her. She thought he was chasing her. Glancing back, she saw him coming and picked up her pace. Instead of getting there by evening, she'd covered the distance by midday. Here, she found Ivan Lyashenko, grandfather Mitrophan, Maria and Pavel. She said they'd received the pass. Everyone got to their knees and prayed. The Lord said: 'Hurry, My protection is with you.' They all got back to Shaty that night.

In the morning as we were praying it was said: 'I bless you.' One of the brothers said:

- 'No, let's go to the Daryn for his signature.'
- 'But the Lord said: 'My protection, My blessing.'
- 'We need to pray more,' said the brother *doubting-*

Thomas.

'Go to the Daryn,' said the Lord, 'but what will you get?'

That's what God said at one point to Valaam. I listened and listened to these contradictions and said:

- 'If you don't want to go, we'll leave without you.'

- 'No, we won't be left behind, but we're going to the Daryn.'

I refused to go with the brothers. Grandfather Gregory and Mitrophan went. Soon they returned with worry and fear, saying:

- 'Let's go, let's go! Hurry! The Daryn is sending people to Gulja. He'll try to hold us back if he finds out we're gathering.'

So what did the brothers get from the Daryn? Worry and fear. We left the village immediately.

When we got into the valley, we saw a rider coming. He was catching up. We were all greatly afraid. He must be coming after us! But... he kept on going right past. Praise the Lord! He must have been in a hurry for his own reasons. We walked until late in the evening so we could cover as much ground as possible. We had to get to the muzdavan (glacier) as early as possible. Soon, we had come to the forest where we set up camp. We ate some salted and dried-care bacon and went to sleep.

MUZDAVAN

It was early in the morning, and we were already set to go. We asked for blessing from the Lord. The Father instructed us: 'Children, less talk; yes, yes, no, no.' We reached the post where they check documents. The man who met us at the post looked kind. He was wearing large glasses. Our grandfather Gregory had seen him before in a vision. The Tartar was nowhere to be found.

- 'Hat bar (Got the pass)?'

- 'Bar (got it),' he answered.

- 'Balahcha ketti (families can go),' he said with a wave of his hand.

He led grandfathers Mitrophan and Gregory to a little hut. There was no way to measure our joy. We hurriedly set off in the direction of a mountain ravine; praising and exalting our Lord all the way for the pass. The two brothers caught up with us quickly,

and we continued our journey into the mountain. Everything happened as the Heavenly Father had promised. Praise Him!

We walked until evening, going up and up the mountain. We saw a caravan stop ahead of us. We decided to stop here as well to rest. The weather in the heights of the mountain abruptly began to change. We could feel the snow coming. The most fearful thing on the muzdavan was a storm. Dark clouds covered the sky and the snowfall began. The wind blew stronger and stronger. Unloading the donkeys, we put up our tent and covered the ground with the felt mat, we had earned back in the village. We took a blanket out and sat down to eat our lunch. Lunch was bacon and cold water. Then we prayed and went to sleep. The Lord promised to protect us so we slept peacefully. The ground beneath us was frozen solid; only the thin felt mat spared us from the permafrost. We slept like kings despite the cold, because we were so tired from the difficult climb and the anxiety over the passes.

In the morning it was mainly cloudy; the clouds constantly covered the sky. We started to think – should we go or not? The caravaners warned us that when it's cloudy, it's best not to move from the camp. They get their orientation from their experience but we had the One Who is in charge of the weather. The Lord said: 'Go with My umbrella!'

Confidently, in spite of the warnings, we set out. We reached the icy terrain. Icicles hung from the cliffs; they looked like lace. The sun peeked through the clouds and made them sparkle like diamonds. It was hard to tear your eyes away from the beauty. The ice under our feet had a green tint to it. It looked like the green glass of bottles. Amazing sights surrounded us on all sides. If a small rock was sticking out through the ice, a huge lump of ice covered it. Our donkeys slipped and slid – and so did we.

We reached a crossing point at a narrow bridge without railings; deep chasms threatened on both sides. But we had to cross. The donkeys sensed the danger and stubbornly refused to walk. We pulled them by the ropes and pushed them from behind. A few of them started to cross. Our mouths lifted constant prayer.

This was not a place for conversation. We reached another steep climb on the next mountain. The whole mountain was covered in ice and there was no way around it. We lugged our bags and almost didn't make it. Praise God! Everyone survived.

The next part of our journey was on the highland plain. The air here was thin, it was difficult to breathe. We were so tired that we could barely lift our legs. My Papa decided to take a rest. He told us to keep going while he rested; he'd catch us later. If we left him, it meant we'd lose him. We mustn't stop here. We persuaded Papa, saying we'd lessen the pace. We would feel rested if we just slowed down...

Dusk approached. We had reached the edge of the mountain. We couldn't see anything in front of us; perhaps it was a cliff. In order to avoid a fall, we decided to spend the night at the top of the mountain. We got our tents out along with our koshma and blankets. We had to sleep on the eternal ice. Suddenly the wind started to blow our pot away. I ran after it since we had no other and how would we survive if we had nothing to cook in. Finally, the wind settled down. We could rest, giving ourselves over into the Father's hands.

When morning arrived, we saw a gentle slope on the other side. Had we known it was there last night, we could have sheltered ourselves from the wind.

We started to make our way down the mountain. We could see the road with markers set up to show the turns. The people who pass by these places put up markers for other travelers; sometimes they make a pile of rocks, other times they use animal remains.

After leaving the muzdavan, we also saw human bones. Many people had frozen to death in the storms; others had fallen off the cliffs due to carelessness. The muzdavan was a frightening place.

We reached another group of caravaners. The ice just split and there was a crack. When the ice splits, you have to fill the gap with whatever you can so you can cross. Our path had now reached a well-known slope down an icy ladder cut into the ice

itself. When I was coming down the ladder, the Muslim caravaners pushed a big rock down on me. If my mother hadn't shoved it away with a stick, the rock would have run over my legs and I would have fallen down, off the steep ladder; meaning, I would have died. The caravaners had done it intentionally. It is their law to kill the *kapors* (unfaithful, unclean); then they receive a great reward from Allah. They get many wives in heaven...

So many prayers had been uttered by us as we crossed the frightening muzdavan. Soon we reached a yurt. At that moment a sound was heard through the mountains; it was like a cannon-shot. Everyone jumped involuntarily and looked up toward the mountain. The sound came from the ice splitting. A black mist covered the muzdavan and a storm was starting. Praise God, we were already in safety! The 'Umbrella' of the Lord had been over us while we were in the mountains.

The yurts here had been set up especially for travelers to rest and spend the night. In the morning, we set out again. A river appeared before us. We had to cross it. When we reached the bank, the river was covered in ice. We ended up crossing this same river several times because it twisted back and forth across our path. At some points, there wasn't any ice so we had to wade across. Since the water was so cold, we decided to ride the donkeys. We had just two donkeys – a big caravan-type one named Shaloon and a little one named Kootsie. Shaloon was very devious but Kootsie was a calm animal. One brother sat on Kootsie. His feet almost touched the water. Kootsie crossed the river well but Shaloon reached the middle and stopped. We called to him and the brother prodded his sides – he wouldn't budge. What could we do? Grandfather Gregory solved the problem. He threw a rope to the brother who tied it around the donkey's neck in a noose. The brothers on the bank began to pull on the rope and it tightened around the donkey's neck. He had to move against his will. And so, we crossed the river; the barrier to our path was gone.

We walked along a rocky gorge. By this time, our shoes were old and thin; holes and cracks had appeared in places due to all our walking. We tied pieces of the *koshma* to patch them up.

After all, we wouldn't be able to walk barefoot on the sharp rocks for long. This was our eighth day of walking. Our food supplies were almost gone; our feet were swollen and our strength was running out. We hadn't been walking on flat plains but from mountain to mountain.

Finally we reached a village. We had no money to buy anything. We had sent word to our brothers with the caravaners who were ahead of us. And even if we hadn't used the 'rope' phone, they would still have known we were coming. People here have the custom of telling about their journey and reporting about everything and everyone they saw along the way.

The sun was setting behind the mountains and we still had about five miles to go. We prayed to God for help. At one of the turns in the road, we saw a caravan of donkeys headed toward us. Two people drove them with an empty cart. When they got closer, we realized, to our joy, that they were two brothers coming to help us. God had heard the pleas of His exhausted people. What joy! We stopped to rest – the brothers had brought us apples and *tukach* to give us strength. After resting and regaining our strength, we put the elderly and the weak on the donkeys, and headed for the village.

For the first time in ten days, we spent the night in a caravan-type barn; under a roof. In the morning, we had breakfast; *tukach* and apples again. We set off for Aksu, where the Father was leading us. During our prayer, the Lord warned us, saying: 'Go, go, go; the children are waiting for you.' The brothers who were waiting for us in the village were in a hurry: 'We were waiting for you. We've also been told to go to Aksu.' We thanked God for being the same, both here and where we had lived before. His Word does not change. Praise Him! Alleluia!

Chapter 14

FROM AKSU TO UQTURPAN AND BACK

In the city of Aksu, we split up to live with the brothers and sisters there. They made us borsch and tukach buns. We ate and ate; it seemed as if we would never be full. We were embarrassed at how much we could consume. After we had eaten, we found a piece of mirror – oh how scary we looked! Our skin was dark from the sun, cold and wind. We were skinny from eating only bran for six months. The indigenous sisters here were pale and beautiful. This is what it means to live under different circumstances over the course of our journey but it was the Lord's plan. We couldn't complain.

We stayed in Aksu for only three days and then went to Uqturpan. It took three days to go 100 miles; but no one was weary and none of us had swollen feet.

– 'Let's pray,' suggested brother Danchenko, the leader of our group. The Lord said: 'You will not be here long. Do not get accustomed to this city.' We occupied a few rooms in the caravan as our dwellings. We started to unpack our things and settle in. We made a table from bricks with plywood on top. Now we had a place to eat. In the morning we went out to look for jobs. We found jobs paying two Lanas a day – we had to work with wool. Here, one Lana would buy as much tukach and meat as you could eat in a day. Fruits and vegetables were very cheap since there was an abundance of them. It was a rich city.

We spent a month like this. It was a good time of resting and we became stronger as a result. Everyone was full and satisfied.

One day at the evening prayer, the Lord spoke to us about continuing our journey. Was it true? We went to another prophet to ask about it so that we might be certain of what was said. We received confirmation, which meant the revelation was true. We warned brother Danchenko of what had been said, but word had been spread that he had become enticed by the lifestyle here. He

had opened a shop to repair gramophones and he drank magarych⁹ while listening to the music. When he was told that God wanted us to go further, he interpreted the prophecy to mean the opposite which confused the vessels and spiritually wounded some others. This had never before happened among us. The leader stopped us from moving on. God grew angry as a result.

A week later, after the Lord had told us the date for departure, all the brothers were arrested and sent back to Aksu. One week later, all the women were rounded up, their things thrown in a cart, and were forced to walk back to Aksu.

That is how the Lord displayed His anger in order to teach us obedience. The trip we had taken two months ago after passing the muzdavan, which had been easy, was now quite difficult. Our feet were swollen; it was hard to bear weight on them. Everyone felt as if they were being dragged along very slowly. The donkeys were ill and fell down on the way. We could feel the Father's anger against us. But He never displays His full anger for He is merciful. He teaches us humility and obedience in all we do. It took us four days to get back to Aksu (white water). We were all back at the places we'd left.

We were back in the city and had no idea how long we'd have to stay living here. We rented rooms in the caravan again; deciding who would live where. The walls were made of clay and hadn't been whitewashed. A kan stood across the whole width of the room. It was a metre and a half from the kan to the door. A kaganets (type of lantern) hung on the wall to give light to the room. Papa and Grandfather Gregory made a stove for Mama to cook lunch. Our room became warm and comfortable.

We began to work; we worked, we prayed. Winter changed to spring, and then summer arrived. Autumn came next and we were still in Aksu. We spent a year like this. Our travels had been frozen. After a year, we'd really settled in; we'd even whitewashed our walls. We had also improved our room. We glued new paper on the window, and we put a new koshma over the kan.

⁹ Magarych - a treat for completing an order (wine, vodka)

With the money we'd earned, we bought new clothes and ordered new boots because there was nowhere to buy them. The shoemaker turned out to be a real pro. He did a fantastic job. We sewed up Papa's and grandfather's shoes.

Winter came again. Grandfather Gregory and I were working together but when summer comes, there would be no work for him. In summer, he went to the river to catch fish; although, grandfather is not the most talented fisherman. I was sewing silk dress shirts for the rich Bais¹⁰. All the orders were for silk. One of the Bais gave me an old sewing machine and table; and so I sewed for him without charge. The sewing machine rested on the table and the table was on the kan. I tucked my knees under myself and sewed all day long. It was difficult to sit like that. At first my feet would ache but then they got used to the position. Asians always sit with their legs tucked up and it doesn't bother them. I sewed and Liza put in the loops and cut the loose strings. Time continued to pass and our whole group stayed together. We were not told to move on. We waited.

One day, the Russian regiment came to the city. The young guys wanted to get acquainted. They brought us orders to sew things for their regiment. We had so many orders that I fell ill from the work. I was so sick I couldn't even get out of bed. The regiment's doctor, under the captain's orders, started to treat me. He went to one rich Bai named Osman and asked for pears. They weren't being sold in the city. Osman sent a whole case and the doctor brought pills for insomnia and a box of candies. His helper, under the lieutenant's orders, also brought a box of candies. He was one of the Baptists. I learned later that there was a conflict between the doctor and the lieutenant over me. Both of them had planned to propose to me. I, on the other hand, hadn't given either of them any reason to believe I was interested. The doctor, being higher in authority, got the lieutenant demoted to a lower rank

¹⁰ Bai – rich, important person

soldier. In the time of the Tsars in Russia, a lieutenant was a soldier of the 12th class.

I was ill for thirty days. I could barely eat or sleep. Many of the soldiers came to our meetings. After our services we had lunch. Some of our brothers were in this regiment as well. They would come for the prayers and discussions. It was a joy for us to see them at the services.

I always lay on the kan fully dressed because people kept coming and going. When the doctor came to us to check on me, I gave him back the pills for insomnia and said: 'Give this medicine to someone who needs it; it's not helping me. You told me to take just a half but I started taking a whole one and it still doesn't help. I don't need any medicine. God's hand is upon me.'

– 'Perhaps that is so,' said the doctor, 'But God does heal as well.'

And he told me about an event from his life when he had been a cadet and sang in the church choir. It was Easter and he was very ill. They had put him in the infirmary in the cadets' corps. It was Good Friday. He stood at the window with his face pressed against the glass, watching as the service was held at the church. He thought about the next evening when they would be singing 'Christ is risen!' They would carry the cross around the church, but he was in the infirmary; even though he was the best singer in the choir. 'I was so upset,' the doctor said, 'that tears began to trickle down my cheeks. I started to pray and I asked God to heal me so that I might sing with the choir. God heard my prayer. On Easter night I sang 'Christ is risen!''

– 'God heals,' the doctor confirmed.

Soon, I was on the mend. The Lord removed His punishing hand from me. I could walk now. The soldiers and officers continued to visit our services. We tried to win their souls over to the Lord. We lived in Aksu for a year and a half.

WEDDING

It was the year 1936. My sister Liza and Vanya Shevchuk had fallen in love and decided to get married. During the time of their engagement I asked them: 'Would you give me a child, even your tenth girl?' They promised to do so.

Not everyone from the regiment had been allowed to come to the wedding. Only afterwards, some were let go to come visit in the evening. It was a modest wedding, but very blessed.

The days that followed were all the same. We waited for the will of the Father. We went out into a field to pray. No one stopped us from praying at home but prayers outdoors are even more fervent, and it seems that when you are in nature, you are even closer to the Lord. The Lord told us about the events in the world; he listed many countries; but we didn't understand. We hadn't been keeping up with the news. Our leading brother Danchenko, had not improved. He even devised a plan of how he might betray us. One day he also came out to the field to pray. The Lord was instructing us but he interrupted us, saying: 'What God? I'll crush you all into a ram's horn.' Such a great fear came over us at his blasphemy that we began to cry out to the Lord with all our strength.

'I will eliminate and punish!' said the Lord. Soon, Danchenko was summoned to the police headquarters.

— 'You know,' he said to me, 'all the department heads have left, that's why they've called me.'

— 'And you think you're going to be made shertiff?' I asked.

— 'Yes, now I'll be a Russian shan'ya¹¹.'

I shut my mouth. We didn't know about his ranking in the police. He left us once and for all. We didn't see or hear him again.

¹¹ Shan'ya — a level of rank in the police

SUZY

A new member of our family arrived. Liza and Vanya had a daughter. At first they called her Devorah. For a whole month she was Devorah and then Liza wanted to call her Susanna. She became Susanna — both Liza's and my daughter.

During these days, hostility began to arise in the city. Planes began to fly overhead; nine planes in three rows. We could feel tension all around us. The Lord testified about it but we didn't understand.

At this time, we also had a division in our group over the understanding of the thousand-year kingdom. The brothers who separated from us based their understanding on 1 Thes. 4:16-17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." And they left us for the city of New Aksu. They requested a pass to Kashgar but were denied so they stayed there.

We understood that there would be saved ones on the earth as well, as seen in: Rev. 5:9-10 "And they sung a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

NEW AKSU

'I'll send My angel,' said the Father. That evening, brother Alexander Makhovskiy came to us from the city of New Aksu and said:

– 'The Muslims are protesting and they're going to Old Aksu and to the airport. The Colonel told the Russians to evacuate to New Aksu. In the morning, the regiment's carts will come for you.'

After hearing the news, we started to gather our things. And truly, in the morning the carts arrived. Putting our things on the cart, we walked on foot to the new place; it was June. The sun was scorching; the sand burnt our feet even through our shoes. This was in the desert Gobi.

My princess (Suzy) was only five weeks old. She had to be held in such a way that the sun wouldn't burn her and she wouldn't be crushed. I had the difficult task. I used some branches to make a kind of hat around her head. It covered her head and there was a small brim at the front. It looked more like a canopy. It kept her cool but was torture for me. We had to walk twelve miles and she had to be held at arm's length in order to keep her from over-heating. Even though it was difficult, God gave the strength needed. Before we had reached the city, a car from the airfield caught up with us; it picked up all the tired walkers. Vanya stayed back because one of the carts was broken, and needed to be fixed.

The car reached the tower gates. They opened the gates for us and then locked it up again to keep the rebels out. They led us to the army regiment who met us with joy. They thought we had been killed. It turned out that the rebels used the same road we had been walking along to get to the airfield. They had turned in a different direction at just one of the turns. Our Lord had led them away from us so that His children would not be beaten. Even the non-believers were shocked at this miracle; seeing the hand of God. We spent three days with the regiment, camping out in their

cafeteria. The regiment couldn't give up their cafeteria for long, though, so we had to look for somewhere else to live.

The city was located within a fortress since it was dangerous to leave the fortress grounds. The Russians who had come here before us had moved into all the available empty rooms. By the time we had arrived, there were no more rooms left for us. On one of the fortress street there was a cafeteria with a cart sitting in front of it without wheels and a bunch of chickens sitting on the kan. It was a large building. There was a kitchen in which new arrivals set up their stoves to cook. The believers living there had turned the hall into a room for services. We found ourselves living temporarily in the corridor coming off the hall.

It rained at night; since rain leaked into the corridor, we got wet. We didn't know where we could go. All the refugees had occupied the other rooms. Our family was searching. I went into the cafeteria to see if we might be able to settle in there. The sunlight coming through the window in the roof lit up the room. I liked what I saw but there was a lot of work to do to make it livable. In one corner, there was a mountain of clay. In the middle, over the kan, a big hole went right up through the roof. There were two windows whose shutters could be closed from the inside. If we worked hard and tidied it up, we'd be able to live here.

Sonya and Varya came by. They hadn't found anywhere to live either.

– 'Let's clean this place up,' I said.

– 'Sounds good,' they replied.

– 'I like this place too,' said Liza's husband Vanya, walking into the room.

– 'Let's get to work then,' I suggested.

We asked the building's owner to remove the chickens and the cart. We started to sweep the ceiling, which was black from soot and it shone like it had been polished. Then we washed it. The clay, which we had found in the corner, was used to fill all the holes. We bought primer to whitewash the walls and then we wiped down the floor with clay. We put a stove in front of the kan. The run-down building had turned into a habitable dwelling.

Papa made panes for the upper windows and put glass in them. The panes opened 'automatically.' Instead of hinges, we made loops from leather and the latch was just a spool from thread. It's like they say; necessity is the mother of invention. We brought all our things here and settled in. Over the window, which was in the roof, we put a hood so the rain wouldn't come in. In front of the window facing the street, our men made an oven/boiler for heating and baking bread. Papa made a bench near the oven so we could sit with our backs to it to warm up. Varya and Liza took orders for embroidery. To the right of the door, we made a table for my sewing machine. Along the wall on the other side of the table were my bed and a bassinet for Suzy, my princess. Sonya and Varya's bed was nearby. In the corner we shared a wash basin. Opposite the stove, Grandfather Gregory set up his bed. The kan was quite wide – about twenty people could fit on it. We always prayed together on it. Papa and Mama, Liza and Vanya slept on it.

All of our beds were separated by material. Nails in the roof held ropes, which supported curtain walls. We cooked lunch and dinner together on the stove. In the centre of the room was a large table and benches along both sides. We were happier about these primitive conditions than we are now about big houses and beautiful cars. The kan was covered with koshma and with fabric over that. We lifted up immeasurable gratitude to God for this shabby hut; so many prayers and petitions were raised sitting on this kan. Our spiritual bread was the discussions, reflections and revelations from the Lord. We brought joy and grief and many tears to the Lord in this place. I've written about the reasons for our grief and tears below. But at this time, it seemed we couldn't be happier. We had no physical needs, although we lived poorly. At times we lacked funds for living, but the Lord always provided at just the right time. We were richer in spirit than the richest people on earth.

Of course, we also worried and were often sorrowful that we had to stay in this place for so long. We knew we would move on eventually. We had never stayed in any other place for such a

long period. We didn't know what God's will for us was at that time.

One day, feeling guilty about wasting so much time, we prayed and asked the Lord about our freedom and the further journey. The Holy Spirit spoke to us saying: 'IRA will help!' We couldn't understand who IRA was or how she would help us. For now, this was a mystery to us.

Christmas had come and gone. It was now 1938.

Chapter 15

VANYA'S ARREST

One day, a knock came at the door. When we opened it, an investigator from the control was standing there. He asked Liza's husband, Vanya to come outside for a minute to speak. He wanted to step out in just his house clothes, but the investigator told him to get dressed. They went out and the door closed. We waited for Vanya ten minutes, twenty minutes, but Vanya didn't come back. The administrative department was located just at the corner nearby. We looked outside but Vanya was gone. We started to pray. Word came to us: 'There will be arrests here.' We understood that Vanya had 'stepped out' for a long time... for fifteen months.

How we cried out to the Heavenly Father. Only He could have given us strength to withstand such trials. This was baptism by fire for the Russians. Many were arrested and put in prison in those days. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter three, verse eleven, the prophet John said: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Vanya had been baptized with water and with the Holy Spirit but now came time for baptism with fire. It was hard not only for him and the other brothers, but for all of us; especially my sister. Her husband had been taken away. Apostle Peter in his first letter 4:12-13 says: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Man is weak on the earth. We couldn't rejoice; Liza was the most upset. But the Father was still our comfort. He had allowed this, but even in our troubles He gave us comfort and instruction. He revealed mysteries to us, saying: 'There will be three paths; to the North is

death, to the East are trials, but to the South are blessings.' This revelation became a guide for us.

I took care of Susanna myself. Liza had enough torment; she was also expecting. I had a crib made for my princess. I sewed the mattress and blanket myself. Grandfather made nets for the sides so they could be lowered. I braided bands for the bottom of the crib; they were like springs. Now the baby could sleep softly. Suzy was curly-haired and quite clever, but she was also fragile and frequently got sick. When she was about a year, she came down with smallpox, which I had feared greatly. The doctor couldn't do anything to help. We prayed fervently to the Lord, that He might send someone to advise us. God heard our prayer. Sister Taras... learned of our troubles and inexperience and came to us. She had many children and grandchildren. She was already quite old herself, but she had seen many things and had much experience with children. She looked at Susanna and advised us, saying:

– 'Anya, get a goose feather, water down some alcohol, like vodka, and use the feather to wipe each spot. Once you've covered the spots, they will shrink.'

I did just what she said. Although before I wiped her eyes, I tested it on myself first. Praise God! Little by little the smallpox went away without any further complications ...

One day passed as another, but Vanya still didn't come back. He could only receive some deliveries from us. At this time, the regiment was transferred to the city of Maral Bash.

We knew the prison administrator well, because I had sewn all the clothes for his family. When the celebration of Annunciation came, I went to the administrative office to see the official. He asked me:

- 'What do you want?'
- 'Let us make a general delivery.'
- 'To whom?'
- 'I don't know who is there; to everyone.'
- 'What do you want to give them?'
- 'Borsch, meat patties, bread.'

– ‘They have enough bread,’ said the investigator who had arrested Vanya.

– ‘It’s because of the holiday that they want to send a package,’ said the official. Then he turned to the investigator and ordered: ‘you accept the package.’ Then to me he said: ‘Do you want to give them apples?’

– ‘Yes, but where could I get any?’

– ‘Go, gather some from my garden. When your package is ready, bring it to the prison; they will accept it.’

All the regiment’s officers were sitting in prison. I didn’t know what they had been accused of. And who would tell me the political nuances of the local authorities?

I was pleased the official had given his permission. I ran home, lifting praises to God, to bring the good news to my family. Everyone was overjoyed; they ran out to buy meat and bread. I gathered the children together with brother Peter, who took the stroller and some sacks, and we went to the garden to pick apples. The garden was two miles away. Our bags were quickly filled with apples and apricots. We went home and found everything else ready to go. We set out for the prison.

A big procession made its way to the prison. Many people watched us. In huge cauldrons we carried plov (pilaf), in three big pots we brought borsch; we had trays of meat patties and sacks of apples and a stroller filled with apricots.

The prison guards took our ‘package’ and gave it to the arrested; we watched through the slits in the walls and the small window at the gate. One Russian ran out, took off his hat and scratched his head. This was a greeting. Another, slipped away for a minute and risking punishment, ran over to the gate and whispered: ‘We are all grateful,’ then ran back.

Our Vanya received his own separate care package because he hadn’t been moved into a separate cell. From that time, we started to send packages more often.

ARAM

In August, Liza gave birth to a son. He was named Aram at Grandmother Sophia’s request. A long time before his birth, the Lord had said in prayer: ‘There will be a great Aram here.’ We expected someone to come to us, particularly an Armenian. The name Aram is not common among Russians. We were all expecting him, wondering where he’d come from.

When we looked back and remembered the revelation we’d written down, we discussed this name. One of the sisters said: ‘What do you mean ‘it hasn’t been fulfilled?’ What about your Aram? He is an Aram, isn’t he?’

Liza was recovering from giving birth, so I brought the news and a package to Vanya in prison. I looked through a slit in the gate. Suddenly I saw Vanya stop in the yard; taking off his hat and glancing all around, he then scratched his head, turned toward me and then left. Such signs were how we communicated with the arrested. I could barely wait to get the dirty dishes back so I could give Liza the news; Vanya was out in the working zone, which meant they were treating him better.

We continued praying, not giving our Heavenly Father a rest on this issue. Will Vanya be freed soon?

‘A year will pass and he will come,’ said the Holy Spirit.

The year passed and we were waiting for Vanya, but for some reason, they still hadn’t let him go. Doubt started to creep in. One of the prison wards came to us with an order. We asked him:

– ‘When will they let him go?’

– ‘They already sent him to Urumchi,’ he lied.

Liza was filled with worry. He left; but when he came back for his order, Liza was lying down with great pain from a tooth.

– ‘Look what you’ve done!’ I said, ‘you killed the mother of his children.’

He seemed to feel guilty and said to her:

– ‘Don’t worry, sister, they will let him go in April, just don’t tell anyone.’

He took his order and left. Around this time, the prison official came to speak with us. He had seen the prison ward at our place through his window and called him over. The prison ward was so afraid that the colour had drained from his face. But the djudjan just gave him some kind of order and sent him off. After the djudjan left, the prison ward came back to find out if we had told what he had shared with us. He thought we might have slipped up and told the djudjan what he'd said about Vanya's release.

Chapter 16

FREEDOM AND THE NEXT JOURNEY

The long-awaited day of April 12th arrived. This was a government holiday in China. They freed some of the Russians from prison. Now they could walk freely in the streets and work outside. They came to visit us in the evening, but Vanya still hadn't come. During our prayer, the Father said: 'The parade will go by and then he will come.' Our Mama had a dream and in it she was walking with her granddaughter and met Vanya. Then she opened the door and said: 'wife, come meet your husband.'

We waited. We made lunch but couldn't eat. Around this time, Mama went out for a walk with Suzy. She saw Vanya walking home with his things. She hurriedly opened the door and said the exact words she'd heard herself say in her dream. Vanya entered the house and dropped everything he was carrying; Suzy grabbed my knees and started to cry, saying:

– 'That guy fights.'

– 'This is your Papa, Suzy! He doesn't fight,' I said, comforting her.

Vanya took his son into his arms. Aram was already eight months old. Then he greeted all of us.

He told us many things about his life in prison. The djudjan's wife had heard that Liza's husband had come home now and she came to visit. Her husband had great authority at the prison and had told her much about Vanya. Another year passed after Vanya had been freed.

UQTURPAN

The Lord announced our journey. A few weeks were left until we would leave. We were ordered to clear out the house because it was going to be demolished.

We found a caravan on the other side of the fortress; we each got a room and started to clean them up so we could live there. Our family had two rooms. After everything had been cleaned it was very homey. One room was our kitchen and dining room. Mama and Papa also slept there. Liza and Vanya slept in the other room with a crib for Aram. My bed was near the door and Suzy's crib was nearby. This room also had the stove which we used as an oven and baked bread in it.

Mama, Papa and Vanya would go to someone's place for prayer while Liza and I put the children to bed. The two of us, sisters, would then sit by the fire and discuss what the Father had revealed and what His Word said.

Finally the day of our departure arrived about which, the Lord had spoken to us about. We had to go ask for a pass. The Chinese, Uighurs, Dungans and other inhabitants of China don't need passes to move from one city to another. But they watch us Russians very closely to make sure we don't run away to India or somewhere like that. We had to show our pass wherever we went. If we didn't have a pass when we entered a city, they would send us back or arrest us.

Vanya and brother Peter were shown by the Holy Spirit to 'take charge' of getting the pass; while they went we didn't get off our knees. We stayed like that, presenting our petitions on their behalf to the Heavenly Father. We saw them return with happy expressions on their faces. The pass was in their hands. The Lord gave it to us without any delay. Praise Him forever!

We hired some carts and loaded them with our belongings, although there wasn't much because we were always traveling. The Lord had instructed us in this. We were always on the ready. We had only lived for a week in the rooms we'd cleaned up; actually they had taken a whole week to get them in good shape. We didn't want anyone to suspect we might be leaving soon.

We went one hundred miles in three days. The road had gone soggy after the rain. Everything was mucky, but the eleven of

us were sitting in the carts. There were twelve with the Arbakesh¹² included. When we reached the city, we went to rent a room in the caravan. The men went to look for work as whitewashers and oven/stove makers. Grandfather and I started taking orders for sewing.

We knew the Lord had led us here for just a short stay. Our baby Aramchik, started to walk while we were here. It was May, 1941. Then the word came to move on to the city of Hotan in the South. We started to worry again – going to ask for a pass was not a safe task, but the Lord Himself was in charge. We got the pass but then it was said: 'Hotan is a fire for my people.' These words set fire to our hearts. He was commanding us to go into the fire. What would it be like? Our hearts ached; would prison be in our future again?

The day for departure arrived. We hired three horses with carts. I packed up the carts myself. At the back of the cart we put a barrel of water and other provisions. I packed up Aram's bassinet and Suzy's bedding. At the sides of the cart, I put our things like benches so we'd be able to sit on them facing each other. The Rybalchanko family traveled with us again. Again, twelve with the Arbakesh included.

This would be a long trip. We hired the carts to the city of Yarkand. The road wound through Gobi desert. All you could see was sand and sky. The sun was not merciful in shining its burning rays, and the sand was so hot it created unbearable heat from all sides. There were no plants of any kind for at least ten miles. Once in a while, we came across a small oasis: a few trees, water, and a caravan-barn. From there, we looked ahead but all we could see was the depressing image of desert. Not even the birds risked flying around here.

As soon as we arrived at the caravan, everyone there came out to look at the Russians. The head of the police came to chase

¹² Arbakesh – hired drivers for transporting people and things

them away. He closed the doors to the caravan and warned them that we were guests in transit.

I can't remember the names of all the villages we passed through. We left the villages at dusk as the sun was going down to avoid the burning sand, and by morning we would reach another village. This is how we traveled on and on; but in the end, we actually hadn't gone very far. At the horizon, we could see sand dunes. We saw three heads sticking up from one of the dunes; they were looking at us. We felt in our hearts that trouble was coming. We had three carts and our family was in the last one and for some reason, it started to slow down.

– 'Don't slow down,' Vanya said to the Arbakesh.

– 'The horses won't go any faster,' he said, lying.

We looked back and saw two of the riders coming towards us. We yelled to the cart in front of us so that they didn't ride ahead too fast. That cart yelled to the one at the front. We started to pray. The Lord said: 'I will keep you.' We understood that this Arbakesh had some kind of agreement with the riders. The first cart came to a stop. Now we were one behind the other.

The riders caught up to us, looked in our cart and asked for matches. But we said we didn't have any. Then they went to the second cart, then the first, then road off. The Lord protected us. Vanya started to reprimand the Arbakesh:

– 'Why did you do that? You signed a contract at the police station, after all, saying you'd take us safely to the city. You would be in big trouble if something happened to us.'

The Arbakesh apologized and promised no one would touch us. It turned out that the riders were local bandits from the town we last left. Some locals told us this later.

Another great danger stood before us – crossing a river, which had no water. It was very wide and the water could come at any minute. That's how it was in that place. The water came unexpectedly with high pressure. The current was so fast it would wipe out anything in its path; you couldn't run away if it started. That's why all three carts flew across it like the wind. The Arbakesh whipped the horses; all three of them praying to Allah.

The road at the bottom of the river was better than walking on the sand. Finally, Yarkand stood before us. We had made it.

YARKAND

It was a very rich and beautiful Eastern city. It was surrounded on all sides by castle walls. At night, the gates were bolted to protect it. In the day they were open for travelers and caravaners to come and go. The architecture was the typical Muslim style; meaning that only the gates and bare walls can be seen from the outside. All the windows in the houses face the yard because the women are curious and the men want to stop them from looking at the people walking by their houses, especially at other men.

We went to the market. There were kiosks there with provisions and a café called 'Obzhorka' where you could eat.

There were many doonkans¹³ here too. If the opening between the doors was covered by a curtain, it meant the doonkan owner wasn't in; he had gone to the mosque for prayer. Kashkarlyki¹⁴ sat in chapans¹⁵ and hats. The women here kept their faces covered with a veil. They'd raise their faces, glance suspiciously at someone and then lower their face again. Donkeys were loaded up with wood or clover or some other burden, as they bustled here and there. Mullah's sat on donkeys with wide belts in

¹³ Doonkan – building where different products are made, factory

¹⁴ Kashkarlyki – goods or Uigurs from the city of Kashk(g)ar

¹⁵ Chapan – long Eastern clothing which touched the ground, made from ram's leather with fur inside.

their hands to beat the women who removed their veils. This was forbidden in their law.

We stayed in the caravan-barn. We had to hire some carts again. It was hard to find one. We'd been here for ten days and had to pay for our accommodations. Our funds were running out, as we hadn't earned that much in Uqturpan.

We cried to the Lord for help. The Lord rebuked us: 'Sin of effeminacy, repent.' And the Father showed who was guilty, but He also allowed for repentance. The Holy Spirit also promised to help and announced something we couldn't understand: 'Manila, manila.' We had no idea what or who *Manila* could be. Only sometime later it made sense to us. Soon we found some carts to travel in. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough money to pay for the trip. We started to sell our pillows, pieces of fabric, and dresses made from sacks.

We set out; it was the same depressing picture – Gobi desert – sand and burning heat. No bushes could grow there; only the wind shifted the sand, whirling it about like toy twisters. Sometimes it was better to walk on foot than to ride in the carts. We got tired of sitting for so long. We lay the sleeping children down and left Mama and Papa to keep an eye on them while we hopped out and jogged alongside the carts.

It was impossible to travel in the day, but the late evening was quite cool. The road had deep ruts dug by all the wheels – it was like train tracks. You couldn't turn in any other direction because the ruts were too deep. The carts couldn't get out of the ruts. The wheels of the carts were as tall as us.

We walked ahead of the horses, which went *tsoogum*¹⁶. As we walked we discussed what had been said. Our souls were troubled. *Hotan is a fire*. How would we avoid being burnt up in this city? It was obvious that difficult trials were waiting for us. How tired we were of such testing. I guess that's how the dice fell.

¹⁶ To go *tsoogum* – six horses in harness with a double carriage/cart

Whenever we stopped to rest, we would go ahead a little ways from the carts, lay down in the sand and sleep. We knew the horses would wake us. But one time it didn't work out that way for brother Peter. We walked far ahead of them and lay down to sleep on the road. If we didn't wake up, the horses would step on us. Brother Peter lay down beside the road and no one noticed him. The carts make a ringing noise. Whoever was on the road got up and started to walk, but Peter didn't hear the sound and slept deeply. The village ahead of us was not far off. When we arrived, the carts pulled up behind us and it wasn't until we reached the caravan that we realized our brother wasn't with us. What had happened? Where should we look for him? Everyone was worried about him. We prayed and the Father comforted us, so we knew Peter would come to us. We went about our business. When Peter had woken up, he was facing the opposite direction. He started walking that way and couldn't see any village; he no longer heard the dogs barking as we'd heard them before. He turned around, started to walk, and then he heard some barking – he had found the right road. He arrived two hours after we had.

We started to make lunch. We ate and... got to work on a thankless job – killing the parasites. The Arbakesh had spread out his chapman over the roof of the cart and the fleas dropped on us like rain as they were shaken out.

After this 'work' we went to sleep. We slept until the evening and then set out again. After fifteen miles outside of Hotan we came across a water source, to which at one point, direction to lost travelers was given by pigeons. The locals had built them a barn and put up many perches for them to sit on. There were many of them; on the sand and in the barn. We had to walk carefully so as not to step on one who was sitting on her eggs.

Travelers who pass by this place often throw them some seeds or even money, as they consider them to be holy. We went into the barn to take a look. It was already long past midnight. The doves made such a noise that they woke up the guards who came running to find out what was causing all the racket.

The source of water was surrounded by an old wooden fence. We collected some water and then hurried to catch up with the carts, which had already passed us by. Eventually we caught up with them. Soon, it was dawn. We hurried to reach the next town before the heat of the day rose.

Chapter 17

Hotan

Finally, we were approaching the city. Hotan is divided into two areas - 'old' and 'new.' After the monotonous scenery of the desert and sparse villages, Hotan amazed us with its beauty. The Arbakeshes took us to a caravan-barn where we lived temporarily. Now we had to look for a more permanent residence. Trusting the Lord from the first days of our life in China, we asked Him about our needs. The Holy Spirit directed us to look for a flat in the old part of town; so that's where we went. We went from house to house, asking where we might find something to rent.

Finally we reached a house with open gates. We went into the yard, which looked huge to us. As usual, there stood a house with plain walls to the street. There was a veranda and two rooms. The first was large and the second was smaller. Besides that, there was a kitchen and a row of rooms on the other side of it. To the other side of the gates, we saw another house with a few rooms. Deeper in the yard, there was a fenced house. Here, the owner/landlord lived.

We went up to this house and knocked on the door. A handsome, tall, young Muslim man came out. He looked like a man of good character. His name was Advakas.

Greeting him and introducing ourselves, we asked if we could rent some rooms. He asked us where we were from and who we were; then he agreed to let us live in his house. We went back to the caravan to get our things. When we went into the rooms we had been shown, we saw the walls had not been whitewashed, but were just wiped down with black clay. The ceiling was of paper, which was torn in places.

Once again we had to get to work, putting our residence in order. Our men went to the market and exchanged our last warm clothing for candles, flat bread and white paint. We ate dinner in the kitchen; we cooked noodles on the stove we'd brought. Dinner was delicious as we were starving. We lay down

to rest because even when we rested during our travels we constantly felt tension. Here, however, we could really relax.

In the morning, Vanya and I got to work. We pulled all the paper off the ceiling and used pieces of brick to fill in the holes on the ceiling and walls. We used clay to fix them into place.

At midday, Liza came and asked:

– 'What shall we do? We have no money and you're here working on the ceiling and walls.'

– 'Oh Lyushenka, don't worry! God will provide, He'll open a window,' said Vanya with a laugh.

– 'You think He'll throw you something from heaven?'

– 'First we have to get our dwellings in order. We cannot live in this filth. Then we'll go look for jobs. Don't worry. God knows we have nothing and that we need food.'

– 'We'll see if He throws you some money through the window,' Liza said as she left.

We continued to work. We prayed silently as we whitewashed the walls. A Muslim came in as we were working to have a look at what we were doing. He was curious to take a look at Russians.

– 'Hello!' he said.

– 'Hello,' we replied.

– 'Long ago you come? What work you do?'

– 'We can sew, build, whitewash... we can do anything.'

– 'Oh, good, good, here is much work. I gives you job.'

– 'Thank you for the work,' we said, 'we need to earn some money.'

Suzie and Aram came running into the room.

– 'They your kids?' the Muslim asked. 'Good kids... need to give treat.' Then he took a small coin from his pocket and gave it to them.

Seeing a hand stretching out toward them, they quickly hid their arms behind their backs; as if on command.

– 'Why they not take?' he said with surprise. 'You buy zimotan,¹⁷ is good.'

– 'They won't take it,' I said as I thanked the kind Muslim. 'They never accept things from strangers.'

– 'It's no good. Kids need treats,' he said as he put the coin back in his pocket.

Then he took out a Lana and threw it on the cot, saying:

– 'You buy kids treats.'

We thanked him and carried on with our work. A short time later, Liza returned to see how our work was coming along.

– 'Lizuta, God gave us money; He opened a window for us,' Vanya said, jokingly.

– 'He threw it from heaven to you?'

– 'It's true, take it!'

– 'Where?'

– 'Over there on the cot.'

– 'Where did it come from?' Liza asked in amazement...

When we had finished our repairs, we had a feast fit for a king. With the Lana we managed to buy noodles, flat bread, nuts, raisins and grapes. The market in Hotan is full of nuts and grapes.

Now, we have jobs as well. Orders started to come in. We sewed, whitewashed, did laundry, ironed, built and made ovens. We bought a table and some benches. We had brought with us only a few benches, which we'd made ourselves.

Papa once again made some beds and grandma walked with the children. She took them to the zoo in the new part of town. In addition to her own two grandkids, she took three others from other families in our group. At the zoo, the kids saw foxes, monkeys, and other animals. The monkey loved the small children. When they went up to have a look at her, she waved and called to them. One day, she tore the shirt of one of our brothers who hadn't let her touch his child.

¹⁷ Zimotan – a treat, small gift

One day the kids were playing on the balcony. They had made their own carts by turning the benches over. They did this behind grandmas back when she wasn't looking. She didn't notice them there and went to get something she needed. She tripped and her chest hit one of the legs, which hit her lungs. She could barely breathe. Running over, we picked her up and lay her in bed. Grandma stayed there one, two, three days... and still wasn't getting any better. Her breath smelled of infection – very unpleasant. We prayed for her healing (we gathered four times a day around her). The Father told us to call Sophia. We ran to this sister and brought her back to our place. The others had stayed there and were praying. This Vessel of God touched her where she had been injured and Mama began to lift triumphant praise to God. She had been healed.

Brother Yakov had been instructed by the Holy Spirit to carry out Holy Communion along with the washing of feet. But brother Yakov was in bed with injured legs. He couldn't walk. The time for Communion was coming; who would carry it out? We kneeled in prayer and the Lord said: 'Go to my son Yakov and tell him that he shall carry it out.' We ran and told him. We prayed again and he got up and came to the service. We asked him: 'Don't your legs hurt?' He tapped his heels on the ground and said: 'Nope, they don't!' He carried out communion. Everyone went home and brother Yakov returned to bed. God had accomplished His plan but had not removed Yakov's punishment. I don't know what he was guilty of.

ZVYOZDOCHKA

In September of that same year, Liza gave birth to another daughter, Zvyozdochka, which means *little star*. She shone brightly and then burnt out. Before her birth, Liza had been told: 'she will come and go. But you say *Praise God*.' And that's what happened.

We buried our little girl here in Hotan.

Our peaceful life didn't last long in Hotan. The local authorities began to pester us. They were afraid we would run away to India because the border was nearby. They ordered us to go back to where we'd come from.

We begged with the Father. We had not yet needed to return voluntarily. God answered us: 'Stay here until it is time.' But we didn't understand what this meant. We had finished all our renovations; we'd put glass in the windows, made beds, found jobs for everyone – life was good. We'd spent a pretty penny on it too. The market was nearby – so convenient. There, we could buy grapes, peaches and apricots, Swiss cheese in large wheels, nuts, raisins, pastries, meat and clotted cream. In other words – everything your flesh desired. But... God didn't want us to live according to the flesh. We must always work, but as long as we have food and shelter, we should be content.

Christmas came. Brother Andrei came to visit. His group had moved to Kashgar. He told us he was planning to get married. After spending the holidays with us, he went back and then the local authorities started to put more and more pressure on us. They demanded we go back – this is where the fire started.

One day, just the women got together to pray. We complained to the Lord about the persecution from the government. The Lord said: 'Stay here, don't fret.' Then we went to the local governor and said:

– 'We spent all our money just to get here and we have no reason to go back. Where could we get money for such a long trip? Plus, it's winter now; our children might freeze to death along the way.'

After listening to our complaints, the governor said nothing, so we went home. The only thing left to do was pray. The Lord instructed and comforted us. Many things were spoken of in tongues and it was said that our journey would continue to the South-East. These words came from God: 'Though you don't know, children, you will go there.' For now, this was just a mystery to us. Nevertheless, we firmly believed it would happen as He said. Of course many things would happen, but we didn't know what,

and in any case, we'd go. Nothing and no one could hold us back. Our hearts were overcome by the words of the Father and peace came over us. We turn to Him about every question for we are in His hands.

It was now February 1942. For now, each of us continued to go about his business. Some of us laundered, some baked bread, some sewed; others worked in construction. Everyone was busy with something.

But since we were expecting to move, even if it was involuntarily, we had some things already packed. We just didn't know the day we would be driven out of Hotan.

Suddenly, some carts drove into the yard and the police arrived. They gave us two hours to pack up and leave the city. The police helped us load our things onto the carts while our men were still returning from their jobs. We had everything ready by the time they got home.

I asked one of the policemen to check that everything was in its place so that nothing would be stolen. All our Bibles were carelessly thrown in a pile under a tree. The Uighurs were also shocked at the disrespect, for Bibles to us were like the Koran to them. We were also pained to watch this happening.

Everything was loaded onto the carts. Under the close watch of the guards, we walked to the police station where some cars were waiting for us. After all the necessary procedures and checks, our whole group was loaded onto trucks. Each of the trucks' trailers was covered with a felt mat. It was cold. Although it wasn't a crackling frost, it was still freezing outside.

As we rode, we prayed and discussed what was happening. We were told to stay here and yet we were being driven away. Wherever we would be taken, the police would be watching us. We were numbered like criminals, although they didn't put us in prison. Some rooms were freed up for us; we put our things on the floor and then went to sleep ourselves.

KASHGAR

As they drove us, they didn't pay any attention to us – it was as if we were a load of wood. Wood could fall off the truck, but people... before we reached the city of Kashgar, we hit a ditch and many of us bumped our heads. Some of us had goose eggs, others had their noses cracked. But my Mama had it worst of all. She had been sitting with her beloved grandson Aram in her arms. She was thrown straight up, then came crashing back down. Mama kept silent and didn't tell anyone how badly she'd been hurt. But who could have helped her then anyway?

The next day, we reached Kashgar. As usual, they took us to the police station. When we started to unload, my Mama also took a bag to bring it to the appointed room. She wanted to go back for another one but she couldn't; a terrible pain shot through her hips. I lay a blanket out for her and got her to lie down. When I got back after unloading the bags, I checked on her condition. She had a high fever. In the morning I notified the department head. He said:

– 'Take her to the hospital.'

– 'She cannot walk, she'd never make it,' I replied.

– 'Just try.'

I lifted Mama to her feet and tried to guide her. She took one step, then another, but couldn't move any further.

– 'Carry her,' he said.

They gave us a plank which was usually used to carry sand. We had four brothers help carry her. Mama sat on the plank with her feet dangling. Papa held her head as they took her to the hospital. She was taken in by a cute Muslim paramedic and a doctor, a Russian woman. They made a warm bath for her. The warm water helped relieve some pain. The doctor determined that the blow had impacted her kidneys and caused an obstruction to her bladder. For two days, Mama saw no improvement. The urine began to poison her. The doctor gave her a diuretic and told her to drink lots of fluids; this would save her. But her condition only

grew worse and worse; even the doctor lost hope that she could recover. But Mama comforted me, saying:

– 'Don't worry, Anya, I'm not going to die. The doctor thinks that might happen but it won't.'

Three more days passed. They brought the trucks to us again. The driver came and told us to load up; it was time to travel further.

– 'We're not going anywhere,' I told the driver. 'You treated us like wood and slammed us around. Now Mama is in the hospital in a terrible state. We won't leave her here alone.'

– 'And just what shall I tell the Shen-Dooban?'¹⁸ asked the driver.

– 'Tell him you debilitated her.'

The driver got angry and went off to inform the head of the department. The boss sent Askys¹⁹ and came after them himself. Varya, Liza and I went out to meet them and stood in front of our bags. Seeing the head of the department coming after them, I went to meet him:

– 'We're not going anywhere,' I said. 'Our mother is in the hospital and feels terrible. And we won't leave her all alone.'

I took a step toward him and he stepped back. When I had him up against the wall he said:

– 'The command comes from the Shen-Dooban.'

I put my hand on his shoulder and said:

– 'The Shen-Dooban also has a mother, and he does not teach us to arbitrarily abandon our mothers.'

– 'We will look after her for you and then bring her to you.'

– 'No, if she is able to travel, then we will go. But if not, then we will remain here until she recovers.'

– 'Your mother will be brought here now – you load up,' the head of the department demanded, and then he sent some Askys to the hospital and told the others to help us load the trucks.

¹⁸ Shen-Dooban - governor

¹⁹ Askys - soldier

– 'No, don't touch anything. When our mother has been brought, then we will load up. Even if you take all our things away, we won't leave.'

The ones who had been sent to Mama came back without her. The Askys had ordered the paramedic to discharge Mama but he told them:

– 'I can't. The doctor won't allow it. She is very ill and cannot travel. When the doctor comes to check on her, we will slowly try to lift her.'

The Askys demanded they be shown in to her room. When they saw her there lying in bed, they decided to test her, saying:

– 'Get up, quickly! They're going to leave. Your children are already loaded onto the trucks. They're waiting for you.'

Mama opened her eyes. She understood that she would be left here all alone. She passed out from the horror...

They returned and confirmed to the boss about Mama's condition. The head of the department softened, saying:

– 'Fine, today just clean out your room.'

– 'We'll leave right away.'

– 'And you get a mapa²⁰,' he said to Vanya, 'and leave.'

Vanya obediently wanted to leave. It was against the law to disobey. They could arrest you.

– 'No!' our three voices rang in unison, 'we'll go get one ourselves, but tell the truck to leave.'

Not knowing what to do with us, the head of the department returned Vanya to us. This whole 'war' took place in the hallway of the police station in Kashgar. It was a long hallway; it was about three blocks long. Little by little we advocated for ourselves with God's help.

Finally, the truck left. Vanya and I went to get a mapa. We wanted to load it up but the head of the department made another demand:

²⁰ Mapa – a light-weight wagon

– 'No, leave us someone as a guarantee. Not all of you may leave. Tomorrow morning, bring someone to me that I may vouch for you. Otherwise you will all run away and I will get the blame.'

Papa, Varya, Liza and Aram stayed back as the guarantee. Vanya, Susanna and I left. We were a little afraid of travelling through the steppe by ourselves. I sat in the mapa alone with the child. Dusk was approaching and there were still twenty miles left to the next city. The mapa bumped us along. Suzy was tired, she wanted to sleep. I lay her down on my lap but she couldn't fall asleep. It seemed she understood the situation and was worried. Her mama wasn't with us, nor her brother, nor grandpa and grandma...

Finally we caught sight of the city. Praise God, we had arrived! We went to the Caravan Inn where the rest of our brothers were staying. The Father had sent us to Hotan and them to Kashgar. Grandfather Gregory was with them; he came to visit us at the police station. Vanya's father, mother and brothers were also here. We were traveling to them. We went there and they took us in. Andrey helped us unload, sister Anna fed us; everyone else wanted to talk to us. We were tired and had undergone much over that period. Mama was in the hospital. I hadn't even had the chance to pop in for a visit before I left. I was worried about her. Liza and the rest of our family were being held hostage. And so I wasn't in the mood for conversation; it was already past midnight but the conversation kept going.

– 'Brothers,' I said to them, 'do you know how tired we are? We had such a battle and now our hearts are troubled. Mama is in the hospital in bad shape, do you think I'm up for chit-chat?'

Sister Anna also backed me up: 'It's already very late, let's let them get some sleep.'

Finally everyone went back to their beds. I don't remember if I slept comfortably or not, but Suzy was tucked up against me with my arm under her head so it must have been OK.

In the morning, Vanya and Andrey went back for our hostages in New Kashgar. Andrey went in secret from the other brothers. Soon, they had brought everyone back. Andrey let us

into the room of his friend. His friend was away he worked as a driver. We stayed there for now while we looked for our own flat. We didn't have to look long but the room we found, once again, was in need of repair. We spent three days cleaning it up and fixing it so that it might be ready for Mama's arrival. We still hadn't even had time to go visit her in the hospital.

Poor Mama! She had suffered so much. When she finally came back to consciousness, she found out that her family had been moved and she was left alone. She cried a lot. The paramedic comforted her and promised to find out about us. Later, he told Mama we were waiting for her in Old Kashgar.

Sometime later, Mama started to improve. Over the three days it took us to get our dwellings cleaned up, she had gotten better and we were allowed to bring her to live with us. The doctor was ready to discharge her but we hadn't come for her yet. They sent word that Mama must be picked up immediately. An Askyar came and told us the hospital wanted us to get Mama.

Early in the morning, we rented a mapa and went to the hospital. How glad Mama was to see us and be near to her children and grandchildren once again.

We had our own little corner now. Although it was temporary, it felt good. We prayed to the Father, desiring to receive from Him comfort and direction. The Lord willed us to join as one group, saying: 'It will not happen the way you think.' In the evening we all gathered together for service but I stayed home with the kids. At the service, they were united, after three years of separation. Everyone rejoiced and prayed fervently, praising God. I was automatically included in the group.

We lived here for about ten days. One morning, Aram woke up, sat on his pillow and cockled: 'cock-a-doodle-doo!' We decided we would have news. Not even an hour had passed before a cart was wheeled up to our door and we were ordered to pack up. The authorities wouldn't leave us alone. It was time to move on. We had dough made for bread that we hadn't had time to bake. It was just like in Egypt with the Israelites. When we asked

them to wait so that we might bake our bread, the department head said:

– ‘You don’t need to bake. Everything will be made for you. Here is some money, put it in your pocket. As many carts as you need – we’ll give you.’

Two carts were enough for us. We loaded our things into them and then sat on top of them. They sent a chaperon with us, a Chinese man, who was responsible for keeping an eye on us as we traveled. They gave us flat bread to eat on the road and we set out. At first, the chaperon counted us carefully, but as he got to know us, he stopped counting. He even made friends with the young brothers. We were able to go freely to the market in the villages and towns, as long as we were all back by the time we were to leave.

They prepared Caravan Inn for us. They had kicked everyone else out before we got there. We no longer had any hassle. We were given rooms that were ready, bread, and money for food. We rested from work and other cares but were woken up early in the morning. The chaperon yelled: ‘She ate, she left!’

Little Aram was getting sick of all the traveling: ‘Where is our room? I want a room, I want a pastry. Where are they taking me?’ He announced to his mother, not wanting to get up one morning. Suzy never protested as long as she could hold my hand. We arrived in the city of Urumchi, the capital of Xinjiang Autonomous Region. They took us to the central police department and started to question each of us thoroughly. They looked through all our things; they wanted to find gold. I had had a gold bracelet, but we had sold it during our journey in the city of Karashar.

After the search, we were all put into cars, given food, and sent further. We had almost reached our destination. The journey is much shorter by car than by horse.

– ‘I pity you,’ our Chinese chaperon said. ‘I get to go home soon but you have to travel and travel.’

After a month of traveling with us, he had grown accustomed to us and made friends with the youth.

– ‘Who will accompany us further?’

– ‘I don’t know,’ he said.

We understood that he was hinting at the fact that we might be sent back to the Soviet Union. We started to beg with the Lord. Was it true? But the Father comforted us: ‘Do not be troubled, do not lose heart, the enemy has big plans but they will not succeed. You will be here.’

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

Our lips never fell silent. We prayed all the time. The road was paved; it was a highway which led straight to the Soviet Union. A little to the right, and we’d end up in a trap – a little to the left and we’d be in Gulja. The last turn was approaching. Everyone felt the incredible tension. It seemed that the truck was going to the USSR – then it made a sudden turn and we were brought to Gulja. We all took a deep breath of relief. Praise God! The Father had said it would happen this way and so it did. We were once again in Gulja!

Chapter 18

Gulja

They took us to a Russian shanzunat²¹. Our chaperon counted us for the last time and then handed us over to the shanzun; after saying his goodbyes, he left.

We were set up in the shanzunat on the balconies, in the corridors – wherever they could find a place for us. In Gulja, most of the people were Uighurs. There were also many Russians who had escaped during the revolution and civil war when the Red Army chased the White guards out of all the cities of Russia. Many of the families were living very well there as they had managed to take all their gold and valuables with them before they left. The believers whom the Lord had led here had nothing. They had walked in what they were wearing now. The market was full of all kinds of products. It wasn't a bad life.

The local brothers met us and brought us food – they brought us from what they had themselves. The next morning, all the new arrivals were registered at the control office. We were told to find our own flat. For the time being, our family lived with Ivan Lyashenko's family. But we had a great need for God to show us the place where we could reside permanently. As we were out hunting for a flat, the Lord said: 'To the right, then right again.' We turned right, walked a little ways and then turned right again. The house that stood before us belonged to a Uighur. We asked him if he had any rooms for rent. He nodded yes. He said he had two rooms for rent.

We went into the yard. There were divided rows with flowers, but it was clean everywhere. It was pleasant to look at. The owner warned us not to let the children damage the flowers. We agreed on the amount for the rent and moved our things in. We lived there for a whole year. In the morning, the children went out into the yard; the owner was already out there gardening. They

really wanted to touch the flowers, but they had been taught not to touch things, which didn't belong to them. With their hands behind their backs, they just looked at the flowers. The owner was surprised at how obedient the children were; they didn't touch anything, only looked. If he gave them a flower, they would take it.

The year passed and the owner died. His sons informed us that we would have to leave as they needed the rooms now. We couldn't find another suitable place to live. In desperation, we prayed to the Father, saying: 'Lord, You know that our rental has come to a close and we have nowhere to live.'

The Lord sent us to a Mullah – how could this be? Mullahs never helped Russians; we were unclean by their standards. We cried as we went. We reached the place the Lord had told us. We had been here before but hadn't seen anything suitable. But then, it was as if our eyes were opened. A house stood there, empty but in good shape. There was a nice fence with a gate. But it seemed to us that we couldn't afford such a place – too expensive.

We knocked at the gate. A dog barked in response. We looked over – the dogs were huge, like calves. An old Taranch (Uighur) came out. He looked like a rich man. He walked over importantly, yelling at the dogs. They ran over to the side and lay down. We asked about renting; but the price really was beyond our means.

– 'That's too expensive for us,' we said.

– 'I have something cheaper. Come, take a look.'

We went into the yard. In the opposite corner there was a house with three windows. He led us there. A little further on we saw another house where the Taranch himself lived.

There were two rooms in the house; in one there was a wooden floor and in the other the floor was the ground. We liked the house and moved in. The owner allowed us to plant flowers in the yard and dig out a cellar. At our last place there were many flowers. We made flower beds and by the evening, we'd planted them all with flowers. The empty, dusty yard now looked like a garden in paradise.

²¹ Shanzunat / Shanzun – civil control office / worker

We used the first room as our dining room. Papa and Mama also slept there. I set up my sewing machine in the other room near the window. My cot and Suzy's was also in this room. Deeper into the room against the opposite wall was the bed for Vanya, Liza and Aram.

Now we had work and food; we glorified the Lord for all we had. Liza was pregnant. Mama went out to gather apricots to make pastila. She was in a rush because she wanted to make sure she got home in time for the birth. She arrived and the baby was born the next day. It was a girl. The rain fell heavily that day. Baby Sarah arrived with the rain.

In the morning, Suzy and Aram asked:

– 'Mama, where did the girl come from?'

– 'She was found in a ditch,' said grandma, laughing. The rain poured down.

It was August, 1942.

In the spring, some officers from the regiment came to us. They were Vanya's friends from his time in prison; we'd fed them when we sent our care packages. Everything they'd owned had been confiscated. They only had the clothing on their backs. This was the extent of their 'riches.' They spent the night in the gardens of people who would allow them to. They didn't have a cent to their names.

Vanya told us about their arrival in our city, saying:

– 'They have nothing. What do you think? Can we take them in until they are able to get on their own feet? We have more than enough to eat.'

We agreed. In the yard, we had a covered gazebo. We gave them bedding there and they ate there as well. It was summer so it was warm and comfortable to sleep outside.

Soon, one of them returned to his wife and left us. Phillip, however, remained with us. He loved the children very much. He'd often take baby Sarah from grandma or grandpa and carry her around the yard in his arms until she fell asleep. And that is how we lived for the month since Philip arrived.

1943 came; our rental agreement had been for one year. The owner didn't want to extend it. We had to look for a flat again. Vanya was working for a man whose company made sausage (lunch meat). This man gave us a place to live for a month while we continued looking. Again, we lifted prayers to the Lord for help. On the corner of the road there stood a blacksmith's and a small house was attached to it. We rented this place. The blacksmith's workshop turned out to be a comfortable, brightly-lit room for Susanna and me.

Soon after, Katya Lyashenko moved in with me. Her father had converted to the Seventh-Day Adventists and rigidly forced his family to accept their teachings. Katya had fought against him for a long time. She hadn't wanted to become an Adventist, but nor did she want to leave her family and home. Finally, she reached the point where she could no longer bear her father's severity, so she left. She worked and lived in the workshop. Greatly missing her mother and other relatives, she returned for a visit while her father was away. She was standing in the yard with her mother when suddenly her father appeared at the gate. Katya had to run past him as he was already rushing towards her, holding a brush with a long handle in his hand. Her mother wanted to block her from being beaten. Katya decided to try to slip past him, but her father lashed out and hit his daughter with the back of the brush. The mark was visible on her for quite some time. It turned from black to purple to crimson and then from crimson to yellow.

Katya ran to us, seeking shelter. Of course we couldn't turn her away. From that time she always lived with us. At the end of 1943, Vanya and Liza had another daughter, Esther. But she did not bring us joy for long. She only lived six months, and passed away. Around this time, we were told to move again from the dwelling we'd been occupying. We were again searching for a place to live. We were offered a nice flat near the barracks of the airfield at a discounted price. This was near the city centre. In prayer, however, the Lord said: 'That is no place for you.'

Around this time, brother Kiryusha offered us two rooms in his yard. We moved there and shared a wall with him.

In 1944, terrible events took place. At the time, I was working with Katya who also lived with us. One morning, we got up early to get to work sooner because we had a lot of piece work piled up. Papa walked in and said:

– ‘Where do you think you’re going? Can’t you hear shots being fired?’

Katya and I rushed out to the yard to listen. And we really could hear shots firing back and forth, but for some reason, they were only sporadic. We couldn’t understand what was going on. We waited, expecting the Zivaza²², as we’d been told. But we just heard the Zivaza coming from one direction, then another with sporadic shooting, and then they were gone.

The soldiers came to meet the rebels from the east but they had come from the west. All our neighbours had gone outside and were waiting, listening to the shots. But no one dared go any further than their gates.

We, after pulling on our boots, were ready to set out down the road when a brother waved at us to go back. No sooner had we made it back to our gate, when the shooting started. At that moment, a small Chinese boy came running down the street. The soldiers chased after him and shot him down right behind our house. It was the first time we’d seen a victim of military action. Civil war had broken out in China. This was when our troubles and tears began.

The soldiers called for volunteers and then they started general conscription of all men, regardless of their family obligations. Many of our brothers had voluntarily gone to the front. But there were also those who knew that taking up arms and killing is a sin. This was a time of testing of our faith. It is written: ‘be faithful even unto death.’

Our Vanya refused to take up a weapon and go to war. As a result, much suffering, scarcity and fear had to be endured by him as well as the rest of us. But God was his hope, protection and

²² Zivaza – rebels, insurgents

reliance. When they were checking the conscripts at one of the block posts, an officer came over to them. He saw some were not holding weapons. He asked one of them:

– ‘Surname?’

– ‘Mogilin.’

– ‘Name and patronymic?’

– ‘Peter Moiseyevich [Moses].’

– ‘Where’s your weapon?’

– ‘Don’t have one.’

– ‘Why?’

– ‘I won’t take one according to Christ’s command.’

– ‘Down to the grave with you, to Moisey [Moses].’

He came up to Vanya.

– ‘And you’re the same?’

– ‘Yes.’

– ‘To the grave with you.’

At that moment, the shooting started; a fight had broken out. The officer hadn’t managed to finish issuing his sentence when he ran off to the front. As he left, he threatened:

– ‘When I get back I’ll shoot you!’

But he didn’t come back. The Father saved the lives of these two brothers by His Arm. At that time, our Esther died, having lived only six months. We buried her as we heard shots firing, but God protected us.

The front moved away from the city, and things got easier. We could now go into the city. Production began again and shops opened. Vanya’s arrest warrant was removed.

Little Sarah pouted her lips at Grandfather Sergei and said: ‘I don’t want to love grandfather because he took Essa away.’ We had to buckle down, forcing her ‘to love.’

Vanya was forced to work at the army base. Here, the Chinese prisoners were being guarded. Vanya fed them. The soldiers liked what he prepared and had him moved to their kitchen to feed them. Vanya worked honestly and didn’t pay any mind to the hours. However, he fell down with sharp pains in his stomach one day. He was sent immediately to the hospital. It

turned out his appendix had become infected and burst. A specialist-surgeon came to the army quarters. The operation went smoothly, but he didn't stitch him up, just covered the wound with gauze. His wife was informed. She came and found her husband in the ward after already having undergone the operation. God helped Vanya recover quickly. Soon, he was released from the hospital.

Vanya really didn't want to have to go back to serve. During one prayer, the Lord said: 'You won't go again.' The day for Vanya to return to the army was coming. Tomorrow he would have to show up at the army base. How could this be? We'd been told he wouldn't go again. Only a few hours were left. Liza was walking by the army base at around that time. They called her in to talk to the boss. He gave her a release form for her husband. We felt simultaneously both joy and shame for our doubts and lack of faith. We repented and thanked God for His mercy.

Finally the war was over. Peace had been reached and prisoners were being exchanged between the Chinese and the Russians.

That year, our father had fallen ill with pyrexia and died after three days. We had lost our helper. Vanya was the only man left in our family. All the male duties were now on him.

Similar conflicts, like the civil war, often took place in these areas. The Soviet powers set people against each other. At that time, China put Chiang Kai-Shek in power. Mao Tse Tung, spurred on by Stalin, rose up against him. The Soviet powers helped Mao. The Russians wanted to take Xinjiang province under their protectorate. They often stirred up the population there against the Chinese authorities. There were many rebellions there. These events took place in 1945 and 1946.

These events served as another big push to pray to God. We asked Him about our future journey. Some of the Russians ventured to ask for permission to leave, although this wasn't exactly a safe thing to do. In any case, against all expectations, they were actually granted permission and so they left. The Lord also announced a journey for us. In prayer it was said: 'Mister will

be here, tell him – *take us* and he will.' We understood that someone with authority would arrive; a foreigner.

In the middle of summer we got word again: 'Mister is here.' We got up from prayer and began to discuss where we thought he might be.

Vanya, Liza's husband, came back from the market and told us that some Kerzhak was walking around the city and a great crowd was following him. This was not a simple person, but a foreigner. 'Well, this must be him,' we thought. God had announced his arrival to us. We found out where he would be.

Liza and Mary set out for the home of the Syr... family. We had met Mary during the war. They had arrived here from the city of Urumqi before the war began. Her husband had heard about us a few years even before that, and had wanted to get acquainted. When we were deported from Hotan, we met them in Gulja. They came to our service, but we didn't meet them then because we had left the service very quickly for we were in disagreement with our brothers. The Father had forewarned us: 'I lead you there in contempt.' This was our punishment for disobedience at that time. We had been relying on one person instead of on God. We had to accept this with patience and humility.

Sister Mary asked Vera Drozdova to bring her to us and introduce us. At first, we didn't want to meet with her; we thought 'what does she want with us?' But then we got to know them better and by this time we were inseparable; praying together at all times. Sometime later we met with the consul.

THE ENGLISH CONSUL

The consul who had come to the city of Gulja spoke Russian very well. He knew the city like the back of his hand and could easily orient himself. He knew where and to whom people should go. After speaking with some believers, he said that he had a truck,

which could transport those who want to leave the country and that he himself would be leaving soon.

– 'Take us with you,' Mary requested.

– 'Alright, get ready,' the consul replied.

Liza, standing nearby, had been afraid to ask, but Mary was already handing her the pass.

A few days later, Ivan Sam... came running up to me and said:

– 'I want to tell you a secret, but it dies with you.'

– 'Okay, you know I'll take it to the grave.'

– 'Yes, and that's why I want to let you know that yesterday I spoke with the Kerzhak (consul). I saw him walking along by himself, without his 'tail' of followers. I guess he managed to get away from them. I went up to him and greeted him; then asked if he might be able to help us get out of here. He said we'd have to get out of Gulja ourselves but he could help with the next step. He was just whispering to me when two detectives came over, wanting to find out who I was. They stuck out their hands to shake mine but I just pulled my cap lower over my eyes so they couldn't see my face. We walked past them but they followed us from behind. The Kerzhak went in through the gates of the silinbu²³, and I kept walking. The two detectives looked the other way and I slipped down another street. I had just managed to get my sweatshirt and cap off and then I went up to the gates of the consulate. The manager was standing there working. I know him well. I stopped and started to talk with him about the contract he'd promised me earlier. The two detectives came over and asked if we'd seen a man in a sweatshirt and cap. We said we hadn't seen anyone like that here. They thought that was strange as they had just seen him; where could he have gone? The manager told them to stop bothering us as we hadn't seen anyone. They left. I finished talking with the manager and then waited a little while longer until the detectives had gone further away, then I jumped over the

duval (fence made of adobe) and walked through the cemetery. I buried the sweatshirt and cap there, and then went home. Now I'm going to get the pass, I'm going to leave as soon as I can. I advise you all to get out of here – fast.'

– 'Pray for me,' Ivan said, as he walked away.

– 'Sure, now go and may God help you. Just don't tell anyone else about this. Your words have caused me enough fear.'

The Father also led us to go ask for a pass, saying: 'The way is open for a short time.'

Ivan Sam... got his pass that very day and he left two days later. But our pass was being withheld. Mary was also given a pass but she lost sight of the car from the consul. She came to us in deep distress. During the prayer, the Lord comforted her and promised to help. At that moment, a brother came and told us he had seen the consul's car. The chauffeur said he was leaving in two days and the consul had already gone by plane.

– 'Where is the chauffeur?' Mary asked.

– 'He's standing on the street (and he gave the name). He's fixing something on the car.' Mary ran to the place she'd been told, found the car and asked the chauffeur:

– 'I was looking for you but couldn't find you. When can we leave?'

– 'I'm leaving tomorrow,' he replied.

We also got our pass as the Father had said. When we were returning home, our path was crossed by the car, which was driving Mary and her family.

It turned out we would not be leaving alone. Even though we hadn't told anyone about our intercessions before the Lord nor about His answers, we had met many of the others from the other group while we were at the police station. They had also come for passes.

When we met before departing, we rented trucks and moved out of the houses into the garage where the trucks go. While the trucks were being checked and loaded, we sat under the overhang for almost a week. Finally they arrived, ready to go. One

²³ Silinbu – municipal control office

was a three-ton vehicle; the other was six-tons. There were twenty of us. Sister Luda and her mother were in the same truck as us.

None of the brothers living in Gulja believed that God had already led His people to the East and then out of the country. Some of them spoke to us with contempt, saying:

– ‘Sinister people are used to wandering about the city. Where are you, evil girl, taking those children?’

It was unpleasant to hear such remarks from our brothers in faith, but God had allowed this defamation. That is why He had led us to Gulja. Only one brother, Tarasov (or Tarasenko), came to see us off, saying:

– ‘We’ll be coming in your footsteps!’

This strengthened and encouraged us. Finally we were on our journey. We traveled about fifteen miles and then stopped. The drivers had forgotten some paperwork. We unloaded onto a square while they drove back to get the papers. There was a village nearby. We set ourselves up on the square and cooked lunch. We ate and slept under the open sky. Some of us went for a swim. We lived only by faith and the Holy Spirit’s guidance. If it weren’t for that, we would likely have complained.

On the third day, the trucks came back for us and they were loaded up with even more things. We got on. We sat high up on the loads; so high we could see what was on the roofs of the houses. We traveled for five hours and then stopped again; something needed fixing. The tires were old and they went flat from the heavy loads. Of the six bolts, which should hold the wheels in place, there were only three. So we stopped more than we drove. But praise God we were moving forward!

SHEEHY-YANZA (SHEEHEZI)

Only on the twentieth day after leaving Gulja did we arrive in Sheehy-Yanza. It was night. We settled on the ground near a wall with the dogs and sat there cross-legged. And there were a lot of dogs. We slept there until morning. In the morning they came for us from the police station. The search began. They

looked through our truck and carefully inspected our bedding and all our belongings. They called some baking into question. Mama had made biscuits along the way. Vanya had specially made a box for them and packed them up. Presumably they just wanted some food. They looked really tasty, after all, good enough to sell. But we managed to defend ourselves and keep them. Now we had to pack all our things back.

At that time, a car from Urumqi drove up. The chauffeur saw Katya and he liked what he saw. He said:

– ‘Where are you going? To the Chinese? Come with me back to the motherland.’

Katya didn’t pay him any mind. I heard the conversation and told Katya:

– ‘Katya, get in the truck and don’t peek out.’

She did as she was told. The chauffeur started to look for her but couldn’t find her. He went to the police station and announced she was a Baptist-spy. He wanted to take her off to his home in the USSR.

We all sat in the truck, ready to go. An Askyar (soldier) came over and asked:

– ‘Who here is a Baptist?’

– ‘We’re all Baptists,’ we replied.

– ‘I need a Baptist girl,’ said the Askyar, shrugging his shoulders.

– ‘Do you know who Baptists are?’ we asked him.

– ‘No, I don’t.’

– ‘They are people who pray to the living God Who is in heaven and Who created the heavens and the earth.’

He liked the sound of that. He was of the opinion that all Russians are *kapri*, meaning they worship idols.

– ‘Kandak klamen? What shall we do?’ he asked us.

– ‘Go and tell your boss we’re all Baptists,’ we advised him and then started to cry out to God for protection.

But the enemy didn’t back down. That chauffeur came and, pointing at Katya, announced she was the spy. The soldier

ordered Katya to come with him to the police station. Vanya also followed them to the headquarters.

– ‘She worked in the office, spying on you,’ the chauffeur claimed.

– ‘Is this true?’ the boss asked.

– ‘I can’t even write,’ Katya replied.

– ‘Sign here,’ he said, handing her a paper.

– ‘I don’t know how,’ Katya said.

– ‘What’s her name?’ the boss asked, turning to the chauffeur.

– ‘I don’t know,’ he said.

– ‘Go to the car. We’ll check if it’s true that you’ve been spying. We’ll find you wherever you go.’

Katya came back to us, troubled and upset by all that had happened.

We were all back together. Only the cargo transporter was walking around. There was some reason for delay.

They were saying something in Chinese. Luda translated for us:

– ‘Our truck is being sent back.’

From the great shock, Luda’s mother felt sharp pains in her chest. She was shaking and her teeth chattered; she couldn’t say a word. She was starting to turn blue and we all froze from the shock of the news. But the men down there kept talking and talking. Luda translated some more:

– ‘The truck will keep going but the cargo transporter is being sent back.’

After calming down, we thanked God. Our path to freedom had been opened by our Heavenly Father. Now, there was no more cause for constant worry.

Chapter 19 FREEDOM

Once again we were moving forward. Soon, the trucks reached a river. The river was the border between Red [communist] China and Free China. We saw that the bridge had been broken down – it was impossible to cross. We all got off the trucks and, carefully in single file, crossed what was left of the bridge. The trucks couldn’t drive on the bridge so they went through the water – the level was low at that time.

We crossed safely. We felt spiritually relieved. It seemed as though the sun shone brighter here and it was easier to breathe. The army post was ahead of us. The soldiers registered us as having crossed over into Free China. A village was nearby. The villagers gave us rice and flour so we could make something to eat. They understood where and in what conditions we had been living for many years. And now, as free people, we rushed toward the light.

There were about ten miles left to the city. The trucks also managed to travel without stopping – as if they also felt the relief, and soon we arrived in the city.

Here it is! We went to the Caravan Inn and started to settle in for the night. We occupied a room. The caravaners had just managed to clear their things out when one sister started to go into labour. The room we’d been given was dirty and in disorder. There was garbage everywhere and the kan hadn’t been swept. They had been selling grapes on it and it was still covered in sticky juice and dirt. There were flies all over the ceiling – you couldn’t count them. In the day time they sat on the grapes but at night they slept on the ceiling and on the poles which were holding up the ceiling.

We quickly lay out a clean sheet and put the woman in childbirth on it. A new person had come into the world. They called him Benjamin. His grandmother made soup and shared it with everyone to celebrate the birth of a healthy grandson.

We also rejoiced. We were free, after all! Our hearts were glad at this great change in life.

There was just a little way left to Urumqi. It was a good road; straight and smooth. We traveled through the night because the chauffeur was in a rush to get back home. It was easier for them to travel without the hired loader. Just a little distance outside the city, the lights on the truck went out. Although there was a bright moon in the sky, it was still impossible to travel without headlights. We decided to spend the night in the nearest village. We found a room and barricaded the doors from the inside. We hadn't yet managed to doze off when a knock came at the door and someone told us to open up. We all jumped up with fear. Vanya asked: 'Who's banging at our door?'

But no one answered. We heard some footsteps moving away from us. Our evening 'guest' had left.

That was how we spent the night, almost without sleeping. In the morning we arrived in Urumqi. Now we were faced with a big question – where would we live? We met Elena Prokhorova on the street; she had arrived ahead of us. She was planning to go back to Gulja so she gave us her room.

The first truck had arrived long before us. They were processing their documents so that they might travel further east. Andrey had been here before so he explained to us where and how to process our documents. Even though we had only just unloaded the truck and had arrived much later than the others, still we lost no time in processing our documents. We immediately received money to travel and documents from the government.

We lived in a house without doors for exactly ten days. It had snowed just before we arrived here. While we were living here, I was bothered by our plan to travel east. We were actually supposed to be going south. I shared my thoughts with Vanya and Liza. This caused Liza to fall into disbelief but she didn't resist – whatever will be, will be. So she prayed to the Father, saying: 'Lord, may Your will be done. You are our all in all. If we are not supposed to go to Lanzhou then create a barrier.'

In actuality, we had such great success in all things, that we felt God's hand and were just amazed; for we had arrived ten days later than all the others, and yet we'd managed to prepare everything to be ready with them at the same time. And now it was time to travel on to the city of Turpan. We had been told about Turpan earlier; that we would go there. This gave us relief. We lived in Uqturpan, which is a different city. It is to the south, closer to India; Turpan is south-east of Urumqi.

In Turpan we had to switch vehicles. We stayed there for only two days so I don't have any memory of particularly important events from there. After our time there, we moved on. We traveled to the border of Kula. Here was the post of Yantszyn-qiang.

YANTSZYN-QIANG

In the yard of this security point, many living quarters had been built for travelers. We stayed in one of the rooms, which the local authorities led us to. We were here for only three days because the chauffeurs had gone off to take care of some personal matters. The men went into the mountains to get wood and we gathered dried thistles for kindling.

The post itself was located in the valley between the mountains. The beauty of the mountains was breath-taking; it was hard to tear our eyes away. They rose so majestically against the blue of the sky. We just stared in wonder, our eyes fixed in place.

The post manager, a young Chinese man, saw Liza's little Sarah. He liked her so much that he begged Liza to sell her to him. What kind of mother would sell her own child? Of course we couldn't agree to such a thing.

Finally the chauffeurs returned and we loaded up our things and set off. The weather was cold. Although we were heading south-east, the low temperatures forced us to wrap the children up in blankets. Sarah was in Liza's arms and I held Aram; warmly bundled. Suzy sat between us. She was a big girl now.

To our dismay, Sarah and Aram came down with measles. How badly we wanted to reach the city! We were lagging behind. Due to this, the check point workers delayed us on the way. They wouldn't let the vehicles drive further. We unloaded and took shelter in the barn until they permitted us to continue. We had to lay out our bedding right on the frozen ground. We put the sick children on the blanket and lay ourselves down as their mattress; our hands under their backs and their feet on our stomachs so the cold didn't reach them. If we weren't careful, the measles would go further into their system and they could die. They slept in our arms. They asked for milk. Where could we find milk? There was only water and it was cold. We warmed it in our mouths and gave them it like birds. We barely made it to sunrise.

The next day, they allowed us to leave Yantszyn-qiang. We got into the vehicles and set off. We traveled until late in the evening. We arrived in the city of Lanzhou (modern day Wu Wei).

Here we could finally rent rooms in the Caravan Inn. We lay the sick children on the kan and started to heat the room with coal. Although it got a little smoky, it was at least warm. The kan was heated by the stove so the children didn't freeze. There was hot water. We could bathe and launder.

In the shops we could buy some smoked bacon and Chinese bread made with baking soda. It was a white kind of flat bread. It tasted nice.

The next day, our brothers and sisters went out to find Chinese believers; they joined them at their service. In the morning, one Chinese sister came to pray for our children. God responded to our need. "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up... James 5:15"

We didn't stay long here either; just three days. We hired a car to take us to Lanzhou. This was a large city on the Yellow river. Our chauffeur turned out to be a very respectable man. We traveled without stopping: he himself was in a rush to get home. We reached the city that night.

- 'Lanzhou is over there,' our chauffeur said.

I was expecting to see the bright orange streams of light, which shine from big cities, but I couldn't see a thing. The road had become very bad as well; on one side there was a mountain, and on the other there was a cliff over a river. The river was large and the road seemed very narrow. Would two cars fit if another came towards us?

Finally, we entered the city. The street lights, glowed dimly. The signs on the shops gave off little light because the electricity in the wires was weak. For some reason, all the windows in the houses were covered with paper. The houses themselves seemed like they had been made of cardboard boxes. We couldn't see any chimneys going from the houses; how did they heat them? Our chauffeur took us to the hotel. We stayed there until morning. We had eaten along the way, and now we were very tired so we slept deeply. It was difficult to wake up in the morning. There was so much smoke in the room that we almost had to give our souls up to God. Each room had a metal stove in it and the chimney went out through the window. The window leads into the hall. When the stoves were kindled in the morning, the smoke began to build up in the corridor and started coming into the rooms.

We went to look for a flat. We found a yard - there was a caravan, which was empty at that time. There were many vacant rooms. We rented out the whole yard. Each of us had our own room; whichever we liked. We got our things from the hotel and brought them to the caravan. We put them on the kan and brought the children who were still wrapped in blankets.

After having measles, Sarah was bloated. She sat like an old woman with her head hanging.

- 'What would you like, daughter?' Liza asked.

- 'Bacon,' she replied.

Vanya and I went to the market to get food.

- 'You know, Vanya,' I said, 'we should get a stove first of all.'

We went to a workshop selling various stoves. There was a new iron one. We asked the price and were horrified. All the money

we had still wouldn't have been enough. We moved on. We caught sight of an old cast-iron one with pipes.

– 'Ask – it's probably expensive as well.'

It turned out to be half the price of the other one. We quickly made the transaction before the seller would rethink. Now we had enough left for food and fuel.

Liza met her husband with gladness over the bargain purchase. Now we could get warm and eat our bacon. We put the stove near the window so the pipes could go out of it. Then we put in some wood and set our kettle on it. We put a table cloth down and cut bread and bacon. We ate and praised our God with mighty gratitude for His help and generosity.

After that, we all lay down to rest. Suddenly we started to feel the bites of some kind of insect. We turned on the light. Yuck! Bedbugs had fallen on us in an 'army' and mercilessly began to feast on us, not paying any mind to our 'status.' With the light on, they began to run away along the walls into the cracks. Jumping out of our beds we began our battle with them. We painted the walls with them. In the morning, we had to whitewash the walls.

We had just settled down, when rats started to come into the rooms. To make it short – it was heaven and hell. Heaven was the rest from the difficult journey; hell was the uninvited 'guests.'

We had arrived in Lanzhou in December. Outside, the temperature was below zero and snow covered the ground. Here, in the Chinese church, we celebrated Christmas and New Year. We heard that some of the brotherhood had left Gulja. Brother Ivan Tarasov soon caught up with us.

We continued to pray and waited for the command from above. We found jobs. Some of us sewed, others whitewashed, others did what they could. Some of the brothers sold raisins. Vanya also bought them by the sacksful. We sorted them and then took them out to sell. Katya, who had traveled with us, found a job in the bank. She did the laundry for the bankers. The eight of us all lived in one room.

Winter passed and spring arrived. At about this time, a representative from the immigration services I.R.A. came from

Shanghai to help refugees. This organization started to pay our rent. They gave us flour and other provisions. Life became much easier. At my request, we were given a different room on the second floor. Liza and Vanya also changed rooms. Now they had a well-lit room.

Easter of 1947 was approaching. Liza was expecting another child. Mary, who had traveled with us, moved into our yard. Her room was beside Liza's.

The children of the refugees went to the Chinese school; they could write with brushes and read in a singsong.

Just before Easter, I began to make preparations. I went to bed very late that night. Everyone else was already asleep. I was just getting ready to lay down myself when I saw someone walk past my window. Quietly, Vanya knocked at my door:

– 'Liza is asking for you,' he said, 'labour has started.'

– 'Don't joke like that,' I replied, 'I was just there.'

– 'Anya, I'm not kidding – this is serious.'

I slowly opened my door so as not to wake anyone else, and I made my way to Liza. I called for Mary to come and help. Labour had begun.

To my horror, the child was not in the right position. I tried to move it while still in utero but it didn't work. We prayed to the Father for success in the birth. I acted on inertia. I could feel the strength of the Lord controlling me; I had no worries and no fear, just constant prayers to God. The child was coming out breech. I got its legs out and the shoulders got stuck. I freed its shoulders but the head wouldn't budge. The body was out but the head wouldn't come – it was a terrifying scene.

Everything turned out fine, in the end. She had a boy. I quickly wrapped him up in a swaddling blanket and put him on the kan, and then I went back to Liza. I had to help out the mother.

Mary took the child in her arms, pressed him to her chest and walked around talking to him. From the first minute after birth he was spanked on the bottom to get him to cry. If we hadn't done that, his lungs might not have worked. Praise God,

everything was fine! Only now did the tension leave me. It seemed as if all the pain was on me. I was ill for three days after the birth and I couldn't look at Daniel for three months. I kept seeing the horrific images of his birth.

Some time passed after Easter. I heard that our brotherhood was on its way here too. They were to arrive the next day. Everyone was getting ready to meet them: cooking, cleaning. We were all in joyful expectation. Just then, a Uighur came and informed us that our brothers had been sent back to Shiho. What a slap in the face! We all walked around in discouragement.

JOURNEY TO SHANGHAI

It was May and we were still in the same place. Finally the Father announced that we'd be leaving soon. We started preparing. We made biscuits, stowed our things and fussed about. Baby Danny lay on the kan and Sarah guarded him. She always sat near him, afraid someone might take him. Then he started crying, but we were just in the process of putting the sheets of biscuits in the oven.

– 'Mama,' Sarah yelled, 'Danny is crying!'

– 'Never mind, I'm busy right now,' Liza replied.

On the kan, spread out on a tablecloth, were the biscuits which had already been baked. We heard the baby stop crying. We finished getting everything in the oven and Liza ran over to the baby. He was already going blue. It turned out that Sarah had decided he was crying of hunger and wanted to feed him. She had taken a biscuit and chewed some up for him then put it in his mouth. The baby had choked and gone silent. We had to nurse him back to health.

Immigration services set the date for our departure. They came to pick us up the evening before with two vehicles. We loaded all our things into them except our bedding which we still needed until morning. It was a nice day – warm and sunny. We sat on our things. My Suzy sat next to me like an adult now. Aram sat

with his father and Sarah was with grandma and her Mama. Liza held Daniel in her arms. Katya was also with us, along with many others from the group. Everyone was happy and comfortable.

We passed by several cities and villages. Wherever we went, our chaperon, a Chinese man named Van, found places for us to spend the night.

We reached a large city called Xian. We all got off and went into the Mission house. They hadn't quite finished building it yet. We slept on our sheets on the cement floor. It was only temporary because we had to leave again the next morning to go to Nanking. We woke up in the morning, but my Suzy couldn't get to her feet. She said they were hurting her badly. She was already ten years old; a big girl by now. Thus began a great ordeal for me. Now I was her bed and her stretcher.

Finally we reached the station. It was time for the train to leave but there were no places for us. Even though we had tickets for this train, it was already overcrowded with passengers. Van found out that the next one would come in an hour, but that we would have to pay additionally for tickets. We agreed and stayed back to wait.

Suddenly the Chinese people on the platform started to fuss about. They unhooked the engine from the rest of the train and it went off somewhere. We heard gun shots. Everyone was confused; what had happened? It was time for the train to leave but the engine was gone. Finally another was brought and a group of Chinese men in chains ran after it. It turned out that they were rebels who had been shooting at the train, which left earlier. That is how the Lord kept us from danger.

Finally it was time for our train to leave. Suzanna was sitting in my lap, and Liza and Danny found a spot on the shelf for baggage. Sarah sat near grandma like an adult and Aram was with his Papa.

Eventually, our train arrived in Nanking. We had to walk three blocks along the platform to the station. I carried Suzy in my arms. My heart almost burst. It was difficult; no one could help her – her legs ached.

At the station, they checked our documents to make sure everything was in order. Then they put us on a steamboat. We had to sail to Shanghai...

Chapter 20 SHANGHAI

We arrived in Shanghai at night. A representative from the I.R.A. (International Refugee Association) met us. He put us on a bus and took us to the building of a commercial school. We were sent to different classrooms. They added Manya Kulakova to our group. Varya was with us as well. Now there were ten of us. We all lay down on the floor and slept deeply; being tired from the trip.

In the morning we went out to get jobs. Katya found work right away but I came back home. Mama and Liza met me and told me that someone had come from the Armenian Society to take us in and care for us. Soon after, another representative came and said:

- 'A truck is coming for you, pack up your things.'
- 'Another Russian girl lives with us,' I told the representative. 'Can we take her with us?'
- 'Of course,' he replied, 'if she lives with you, bring her along.'

At that moment a truck drove up. They took our things and loaded them onto the truck. They had rented a cab for us and took us to the community centre. A room had already been prepared for us on the second floor. There was a thick carpet on the floor into which we buried our feet. Lunch was waiting for us as well.

That evening, I went back to the commercial school to pick up Katya. She had already returned from work and had found out that the Armenian Society had taken us in. She was upset, as she thought we had abandoned her. She perked up when she saw me.

Sometime soon after that, we were brought many boxes with food and clothing. The abundance began to have an effect on us. We were so excited we couldn't sleep that night. We prayed and thanked God for His mercy toward us.

The room had a double bed for Vanya and Liza; Suzy and I slept on the couch. Katya slept on the other couch and Varya slept on the table; she had always traveled with us. She was also Armenian. Aram slept with Granny Sofia on the chairs.

Varya found a job working for one of the Armenian families. I was put in charge of the household, since I had post-secondary education.

Here, we were introduced to a family of Pentecostals. Nina Osipovna Frolova lived in Shanghai with her husband. She was a prayer warrior. Her husband was passionate about baptism in the Holy Spirit. We often visited them for prayer. By now, my Suzy also desired to receive the Holy Spirit.

Nina Osipovna had a stepson whom she loved dearly. She wanted to get him a wife from the Pentecostals. Katya fit the bill perfectly to Nina's taste. So Nina did all she could to arrange such a marriage. Soon, a wedding was announced. It was August of 1948. The wedding was extravagant. They rented tables from a restaurant and moved them out into the garden. The garden was lit up with small tree lights of various colours. The bakery provided cakes and pies. Many of the guests were from the Armenian diaspora. Unfortunately, six years later, Katya left her husband...

We continued to pray to the Father about our journey. The Father said: 'Soon, your trip will continue.'

THE PHILIPPINES

In February, 1949, all the refugees were evacuated to the Philippine islands. Our family traveled on the second steamboat. We arrived on the island of Samar. It was not a large island; it was covered in jungle with very few inhabitants.

We left the Frolovs in Shanghai but when we arrived on the island they were there ahead of us. They helped us set up our tent. When all the refugees had finished arriving and settled in, a tent-town had sprung up with a population of six thousand. A town sprung up overnight – there were neighbourhoods, grocery

locations, kitchens, places to heat water, a hospital, a school, an electricity station and a church for services. There was electricity in every tent. Streets were also made with sand and gravel. We started a new, free life in the Philippines. How long we'd be here was a mystery to us.

One day some kids ran home from school and told us that our Sarah had been taken to the hospital. Liza and I ran straight there and we met Sarah along the way. It turned out that at school she had taken a glass jar and gone to get some water. She fell on the road and the jar had shattered; she had cut her finger. At the hospital, they bandaged her up and sent her home...

Suzy and Aram had their own homeschooling teacher. He came every day to teach them. Time passed. We had settled in nicely in this new place. The next year, we remade our tent. We hired some Filipinos who built the rafters for the roof and set another tent on that. Now, the hot sun could not burn us through two layers of canvas. We made a shower. We brought water and poured it into the barrel. The sun heated the water; it was warm. Inside the tent, we put down some flooring and made a dining area. Suzy started to plant a garden around the tent.

Occasionally, there were typhoons on the island. Sometimes it was even frightening because it rained in sheets and the wind carried away everything that wasn't fixed in place. But the Lord protected us and the typhoons never harmed us. It is true, though, that after we'd left, the others told us of a typhoon which pulled up the tents. It caused an awful lot of damage.

One day, a committee from Australia arrived and made an offer:

– 'Submit your documents to move to Australia because the U.S.A. won't take you.'

We called out to the Heavenly Father. He said: 'That is not the place for you.' We turned down Australia's offer. Next, someone from Uruguay came. Again, concern rose up among us in the brotherhood. They said: 'Come on, let's sign up for Uruguay!' I said:

– 'Let's pray!'

Once again, the Lord did not give us the go ahead.

A committee came from Paraguay. Some of us agreed to register there. The land was good there and they promised many things – just come and settle.

– ‘So are we just going to keep waiting?’ Liza asked.

– ‘Are you suggesting you want to go work in the fields, sowing and reaping?’ Vanya asked his wife.

– ‘Be bold,’ I said, ‘until we get word from the Lord, I’m not going anywhere.’

Again, we prayed; even more fervently, asking for an answer from God. The Father answered: ‘Haan will come and you will go.’ What or who is Haan? We discussed it amongst ourselves.

Some more time passed. Single families started to move to America. A committee came from the U.S.A. and started to invite us for interviews in preparation for departure. The brotherhood from San Francisco sent affidavits. At some point earlier, word had come from the Lord about San Francisco as well. I was so afraid; I thought perhaps the vessel had spoken from his own desires: calling on Catholic saints.

Christmas of 1950 arrived. Everyone was rejoicing. Everyone was ready with the exception of very few who had to make small corrections to their documents. Everyone could feel the holiday spirit.

It was night, but no one wanted to sleep. We sat and talked as we waited for the ship. Finally, the ship arrived from America. We looked at the name written on the side: ‘General Haan.’ Then we remembered what we’d been told: ‘Haan will come and you will go.’ The ship waited on the sloop, since there was no dock at this place.

In the morning of one January day in 1951, everyone who was going to the U.S.A. came to the shore. They began to call us by family name. Some of our brothers had been taken aboard earlier to help prepare food and places in the cabins.

Little by little we went through the formalities and rowed out to the ship on small boats. The sun was already at the zenith – it was hot. We rowed over to the ship. Here, every family was

called according to their list. I went with Mama, but we left Liza with the four children. We got up onto the deck. I looked back at the children with Liza; they were waiting for their turn on the alphabetical list. My surname started with ‘B’ but Liza’s was ‘Sh’ almost at the very end. Our poor babies were burning under the sun, they were like little turkey chicks whose ‘wings’ had grown faint. Suddenly an orange flew toward them, then another, then a third... our children took heart and were glad for such a present.

Finally our whole family was on the ship. Everyone from the group of refugees was given cabins. Liza, Danny, Suzy, Sarah and one other old lady were in one cabin. Mama and I were on the third hold. Vanya and Aram were also on the third hold, in the men’s section.

The ship cast off from the island of Samar; from Tubabao camp. Our life in the tropical jungle had ended. Now we were on our way to America; to the place the Father had designated. We sailed, the ship rocked; many were seasick. It was announced that a typhoon was arising. The ship set out into the open sea. ‘General Haan’ didn’t enter any ports. We reached the shores of America without making a single stop.

FINAL CHAPTER 21

U.S.A.

We sailed under the bridge called *Golden Gate*. Many threw coins, hoping to hit the bridge, which was a symbol of happiness to come. We arrived in San Francisco at night. The city looked like a Christmas tree; many different coloured lights lit up the sky. It was indescribably beautiful. From the deck of the ship we could see cars driving in all directions. None of us could sleep; we were all hyped up after all we'd been through.

In the morning, on the pier, a brass band began to play. It was January 21st, 1951. We had arrived on the American continent.

All the refugees were required to pass through a medical check. After this, we were given copies of our X-rays and documents for permanent residency in the U.S.A.

Various organizations had come to meet us. While we were still in Shanghai, we'd been taken in by the Armenian organization 'Ancha.' The chairman of the organization, Mr. Mardikyan, came to meet us himself at the pier. Women from all the organizations helped the I.R.A. to make a variety of snacks and they distributed sandwiches and juice to the arriving refugees.

We still had to pass through customs. They checked our suitcases and handbags. The brothers and sisters who sponsored us had come to meet us. They took us to Gary Street where they rented a two-story home.

The sponsoring church of Pentecostals in San Francisco operated through the Assembly of God.

The room, which our family had been provided with was very small, but this was only a temporary inconvenience. Brother Fadeyev brought us bread and eggs. Vanya was hired for a few weeks to work as a janitor. Brother T. V. Mogno collected some of the brothers and took them to work at Bethlehem Steel. Sister Mogno and I gathered the children, lined them up in pairs, and led them to school.

George found out from our friends in Shanghai, that some Armenians had arrived and they went to meet them and introduce themselves; they wanted to know what we needed. They brought us a crate of apples and a crate of oranges. Our primary need was an apartment for our whole family. They decided to help. At that time, there weren't even any rooms available for rent because the ship 'General Haan' had brought 1127 Russian refugees, of whom 135 were Sing-Yan Pentecostals. (Ed. Note: Taken from the archives of arriving immigrants.)

The Armenian diaspora began looking for an apartment. They made a radio announcement, hoping someone would respond to help this large family of refugees.

After living in tight quarters for three months, we received a phone call: 'Get ready, it's time to move.' An apartment had been found. Liza and I quickly ran outside so as not to hold up our friends. Mama stayed back with the kids. A car drove up and we went off to negotiate the rent.

The place they'd found for us was located near the park. On one side of the road was the park and houses were along the other. Near the building, which the apartment was in, grew a tall tree under the window. The branches reached up to the window. The owners weren't in; the windows were dark. However, they drove us around the neighbourhood, showing us the area. When we got back, the light was on in the house, although it was dark in the street.

We climbed up the stairs and entered the room. It was a large room – on the right was a door to another room, which was also quite large and from that room you could enter the bedroom. The kitchen had a door to the washroom and to another large room.

– 'So,' asked the owner, 'will you take it?'

– 'How much is it?'

– 'I'll give it to you for 65 dollars a month.'

After some negotiating we settled on 60 dollars. Liza was getting flustered. Vanya wasn't with us and without him she couldn't do anything.

– 'We have to give them an answer now,' said George, who had found the apartment for us.

– 'We'll take it,' I told him.

– 'Then I'll give the landlord 60 dollars. Do you have the money to pay me back?'

– 'Yes,' Liza said.

After concluding our agreement, we went back home. In the morning, we came to clean the apartment.

As we got down to cleaning, we were surprised to find that no matter what we touched our hands went black. We really had to work hard to get it all clean. Grace came to help us. We washed the walls, ceiling, doors, windows and floors. Finally, the apartment was ready. We decided to rent a truck the next day to move our things.

A few items of furniture were given to us; beds, mattresses, a couch and an armchair. The couch didn't have any legs on it so we had to put blocks under it. Everything had been upholstered with pieces of material. The living room was elegant. Now, everyone had their own room.

The tree, which had been blocking light from coming in the window, was cut down. Our new life was starting in this big, spacious house.

We met the neighbours who were also friendly. Now our children could play at the park while Grandma kept an eye on them. Our children have good memories about their life in that house; a large part of their childhood was spent there. There, the Lord baptized both Aram and Sarah with the Holy Spirit on the same day. It was a birthday present for them. Danny now desired baptism. Although he was still quite young, the Lord did not pass him by. Suzy had received the Holy Spirit when we were living on Gary Street after arriving to America. I remember when Liza got sick, Danny put his hands on the area, which was hurting her and prayed for her healing. The Lord healed his mother.

This is the house where they also spent their youth. Suzy, Aram and Sarah finished school. Suzy went to study at the Bible

college, Aram found a job and Sarah decided to study to become a dentist. She went to college for four years.

The youth gathered for their youth service, desiring baptism with the Holy Spirit.

We rented that house for nine years. By then, we had purchased new furniture for all the rooms.

During Easter of 1960, the owner of the house came for a visit and said:

– 'I'm selling the house. I want to give you the first chance to buy it.'

We had asked him before if he would sell it to us but he had refused at that time. Now we turned down his offer. We decided to buy a different one. Soon, the owner showed the house to new buyers who were eager to move in, so we had to move out. Liza had grown accustomed to life here – it was hard to part with it, but there was no other choice.

We found another apartment. It seemed even better to us than the previous one. Mama could even have her own room here. Aram and Daniel shared a bedroom – they had grown up by now and were no longer children.

The girls also had their own room. The kitchen was as wide as the house itself. You could fit 30 people around the table. Mama lived here for only one year. She had grown very weak. We would bring her food to her room so she didn't have to move. On May 15th 1961, Mama left us for eternity. It was her ninetieth year. Three days before she died, she had become paralyzed. Her right side and throat had lost all feeling. Her last words were: 'He' arrived!' She smiled, reached out her left hand to someone and then closed her eyes forever. She could only squeeze our hands; as a sign, that she was conscious of us.

In 1962, Aram went to serve in the army. He asked his father to buy a house and he would give him money for the deposit. I was also part of this purchase. The house needed a lot of work done with the floors. By Thanksgiving, everything was complete. When Aram got back from his time in the army,

everything was ready. In 1964 he got married. Now he had his own family.

Suzy had married the year before, in 1963, and she moved to Idaho. Sarah married in June of 1964, leaving her studies behind. In May of 1966 Danny got married. All the children had been taken care of. This is our and your life in the Lord, dear children.

CONCLUSION

'Thus far the Lord has helped us,' just as the prophet Samuel wrote in 1 Sam. 7:12, so I also will repeat his words.

You, dear children, were led to America by the Heavenly Father, as one family under His care. There were four of you and now each of you has a spouse and children. Now you each have your own family. Now you need to take care to receive instruction from the Lord: 'Go on a journey!' It is a great privilege to receive such an offer from the Lord Himself; for He leads to the good, to save from evil and death. The decision is yours. You can believe and thank the Father for His mercy, and attentively wait for the command in prayer and petition, or you can turn away harshly in disbelief, following your own worldly, materialistic interests, saying: *Where should we go? For what? Surely there is no better place than this! Here we can earn money.* 1 Tim. 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." James, the Lord's servant, wrote to the brothers who were spread out: "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes." James 5:1-2

My children, we often give little meaning to the sins of avarice (love of money) and covetousness (greed). Sinning in this way, we think we are doing just fine. How can we live any differently? The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians 3:5 "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which are idolatry." Think and be careful!

Maybe I won't go, I'll lay down my bones on the journey, but the journey lies before you; a journey of purity, holiness, and unquestioning obedience to the voice of the Lord. Therefore: "...Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36. And also in this body, to the promised land where He shall still lead you. Time is short. We are at the doorstep. I pray to God that each of you may stand to enter the Promised Land. Amen. 1952- 12.23.1970.

EPILOGUE

From the editor
Ury Zhrebilov

This story is life itself. It is not easy to walk with God, giving him our full trust. As a loving Father, He instructs us, gives us understanding, and reveals the future. However, circumstances and events around us can, at times, choke our souls to the point of doubting. What's more, the enemy of mankind, Satan, is doing all he can against the children of God.

Anna Bagdasarian uncovers this in her narrative. After all, human strength has a limit. Fear and doubt creep into each of us. But the Saints have a strong, invincible weapon – prayers of faith. This shield of faith terrifies the devil.

There is some historical material about the guidance of God from Russia to China. I have had the opportunity to read some short stories in magazines about the exodus of these groups from a country of atheism before the war.

A good and more detailed story appeared more recently, called: **A Journey Three Lives Long**. It was edited by Aleksandra Timoshenko who was born in China. This sister colourfully describes the whole journey, which she took with her parents and grandfather. It was difficult, so difficult for these brothers and sisters at the very beginning of their journey. To the border, past the border, and even in China, life was not easy. In the books of A. Timoshenko and Anna Bagdasarian, the image of Christian life flashes before the eyes of the attentive reader. This is the life of one who trusts the Holy Spirit and is prepared to make any sacrifice required to obey the will of the Heavenly Father. Yes, mistakes were made, there were complaints and even those who backslid. But this does not in the slightest detract from the Lord's plan or challenge before us Christians. This was also the case for the Israelites, leaving Egypt. For Adam will always be Adam; until Christ Jesus returns and flesh changes to a new body and takes on the likeness of the Lord's Body.

In addition, there are some accounts from brothers who traveled through China. One book was written by Georgiy Ivanovich Loktev (1902-1998) called **My Memories**. He recounts his life from childhood. Another, published in 1996 by the couple Ivan Semenovitch and Praskova Maksimovna Brachunov, is called **Escape of Immigrants from the Soviet Union**. As well, there is a book by Fedor A. Tenikov called **The Path We Traveled**, and also a book written by A.E. Shevchenko called **Short Story of the Christians of The Evangelical Faith Pentecostals**. In his book he also tells the reader how their group was brought out of the USSR under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. After acquainting myself with these books, I became more knowledgeable about the events of the years past, of how the Lord led His people on a journey they could never have imagined. Only the Holy Spirit led them from place to place, giving them strength to endure the trials of hunger and cold, of persecution and chains in Red [communist] China.

I would like to add a few excerpts from these books to Anna Bagdasarian's book. These texts are about the events in Christian lives, which intersect with and fill out her narration.

ADDITION

In his account, G. I. Loktev writes the following about Mikhail Danchenko's group, which the Bagdasarian family was a part of:

"They are believing brothers and sisters, exiting Russia: from St. Petersburg and Rostov-on-the-Don.

At one time, the Lord's servant I. Voronayev turned the hearts of many to the Lord in Rostov-on-the-Don. Churches of Pentecostals were formed there.

One day, during prayer, the Holy Spirit revealed to them that they would make a journey to China. In addition, it was also said that there would be a great shedding of blood at their current location; and that here: 'not a stone would remain on another.'

By the Holy Spirit's revelation, they left their native land for a long and difficult journey right to China.

Everyone knows how many people were killed in those places during the Second World War. Thousands were thrown into the mines. (The city of Shakhtinsk is located near Rostov-on-the-Don). How many were poisoned with gas! How many were shot! And indeed, the city was completely destroyed.

Therefore God led His children by revelation through the Holy Spirit from different places in Russia and Ukraine. Our society in Gulja never met brother M. Danchenko; we never even heard about his group.

At the beginning of May 1933 after the evening service, we met at my flat, as usual, for prayer. The Holy Spirit spoke through a vessel and said: 'My son Mikhail is going with his group. The Spirit is on fire but the flesh is weak. They will come and go from Tekes but you will stay.' We discussed this and thought perhaps it was my brother Mikhail Drozdov. We were waiting for him to arrive from the Soviet Union. But this was spoken about Mikhail Danchenko and his group from Rostov. We never met each other and were never in his city.

It happened like this: on Monday, brother Pavel Sizintsov and I were going to work. We had been hired by a rich Kashkarlyk (a Uighur from the city of Kashgar) to cut boards from logs. On Saturday an unfamiliar woman came up to us (we found out later her name was Maria Il'ina) and said: 'we're looking for our brothers.'

– 'Yes, that's us,' we replied.

We packed up our instruments and led her to our flat. Coming around the corner, we saw a group of about twenty people. They told us about their journey.

It turned out that when we were being told about brother Mikhail, his group was leaving Zharkent at that moment. They had left at night and kept their lamps on in their rooms so that no one would grow suspicious.

After walking all night, they rested in the dunes – hungry and without water. It was a great shame to look at the expressions

of the children. One girl was dying from dehydration. They cried out to God for help. The Holy Spirit gave them direction through a prophet to find water. They pressed on and they saw a puddle of water in front of a dune. With this water, they saved the child's life.

They were told: 'I will keep you safe on this journey.' The Lord kept His word. Praise Him! He is righteous. He is true. As always, they prayed before leaving Zharkent. They were told that at 12 midnight they would cross the river at the border. When they reached the river, they carefully shone a light on their watch. It was exactly 12. What joy and exclamation. Praise the Lord!

They crossed the border. On the other side, bushes grew. They split up into the bushes and rested. Three sisters each took one thing and went to a house which was overgrown by the forest. It turned out to be a mill run by water. They went up to it and a man came out. They started to ask him to trade them bread for the things they had brought. The man asked: 'Are you from across the border?' The sisters were afraid to admit this because there had been instances when others had been robbed and then sent back across the border; others had been robbed and then killed.

The man continued:

– 'I can see you just arrived from Russia. Don't be afraid of me. I know hunger, I experienced it myself. I promised God: *if You save me, I will help those who experience the poverty I've been through.*'

Then he directed them – two had to stay back and make lunch while the third went back to bring the group here. (Anna Bagdasarian wrote in more detail above about how this happened).

Everyone came, was strengthened, and then rested for two days. Then, the kind man put all their things on a cart and showed them the road to Gulja.

A young boy got stuck behind the cart; he was about nine years old. The cart driver hadn't noticed him. After covering a large distance, the driver looked back. The boy could barely keep up and was tripping with exhaustion. The driver cried out in astonishment:

– ‘Dear boy, why didn’t you say anything? Silly old man, not paying any attention. Sit down with me, quickly.’ He stopped the horses and put the boy on the cart, scolding himself for not noticing sooner.

This boy was Mikhail Danchenko’s son, Nikolay. Subsequently, he became my son-in-law.

After living in Gulja for some time, the group left for Tekes by revelation. There, they lived and held services. Thanks to them, Avram Markovich Tarasenko came to faith along with his wife and their daughter-in-law. That winter, brother Danchenko baptised them in water. The Word of God was planted among their relatives. There were many Tarasenkos in China. It was 1933.”

Here, the paths of brother G. I. Loktev and the Bagdasarian’s group crossed. As I draw a conclusion about their lives, trials, persecutions and chains, both in the USSR as well as in China, I’d like to repeat the words of the Apostle Paul: **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Tim. 3:12** That is what the Lord Himself determined for His children.

The Christians went into China and endured great suffering in that country: some for twenty years, others for thirty three. Their destinies played out in a variety of ways. But neither hunger, nor chains could shake their faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit who led their lives and their journey. Praise the Eternal! Their descendants (and some of those who journeyed are still alive themselves) live today in abundance in the U.S.A., Canada and Australia. Some others are in South America, in Paraguay and Uruguay.

I also thank God for all those who were able to share their memories in the pages of magazines and especially for the books, which were mentioned above. After doing a little work, I was able, with the Lord’s help and the help of some other witnesses, to edit Anna Bagdasarian’s book.

Amen!



Anna Bagdasarian

We are not better than those who stayed far behind. But one thing is sure: we were obedient to Christ's will, like Abraham. "The Lord said to Abram: leave your country, your family and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you" Gen. 12:1.

We received the same call! The Lord said: "There will be a great shedding of blood here. Leave!"

The massacre started in 1941 when Germany attacked the U.S.S.R.

"Led by the Holy Spirit"
(Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit)

ОГЛАВЛЕНИЕ

По д. Богучельска
Святого Духа

	Предисловие.. Forward.....	
Chapter	Организация ВСУСХ Евангельской Веры Пятидесятников.....	All-Ukraine (CEA) Voronezh 3
1	Биография.. Biography.....	5
2	Обращение.. Conversion.....	8
3	Новая жизнь.. New Life.....	10
	- Сон..... - Dream.....	13
	- Крещение Духом Святым.. - Baptism Holy Spirit.....	14
	- Исцеление..... - Healing.....	17
4	Апостольские дни.. Apostolic Days.....	20
	- Атака врага..... - Enemy Attack.....	21
	- Изгнание бесов..... - Driving out demons.....	22
	- Крещение водой..... - Water Baptism.....	23
	- Разъяснение сна..... - Explanation of the Dream.....	25
5	Приезд Воропаева.. The Arrival of Voropaev.....	25
	Благовестие.. - Evangelism.....	26
	Допущение.. - assumption.....	29
	Украинская группа.. - Ukrainian Group.....	30
	Недопонимание.. - misunderstanding.....	31
6	Путь в Батуми.. The Journey to Batumi.....	32
	Батуми.. - Batumi.....	34
	Арест.. - the Arrest.....	35
	Тифлис.. - Tiflis.....	37
7	Путь в Васильевку.. The Journey to Vasil'evka.....	37
	Баку.. - Baku.....	39
	Васильевка.. - Vasil'evka.....	40
	Сватанье.. - Matchmaking.....	41
	За покупкой в Баку.. - Shopping in Baku.....	42
	Отпадение.. - Falling Away (apostasy).....	43
	Утопленница.. - Drowned woman.....	44
8	Красноводск.. Krasnovodsk.....	47
	Совхоз Чар-Дара.. - char-dara co-op farm (state).....	48
	Ташкент.. - Tashkent, again.....	50
9	Алма-Ата.. Alma-Ata.....	51
	Пропуск.. - Pass.....	53
	Джаркент.. - Zharkent.....	54
10	В Китае.. In China.....	56

	Граница.....	- the Border	58
	По Китаю.....	- through China	60
⑪	Суйлун.....	Suidling	62
	Кульджа.....	- Kuldzha	64
⑫	Ак-Дала.....	Ak-Dala	67
	Кок-Терек.....	- Kok-Terek	70
	Шаты.....	- Shaty	71
	В поисках пропитания.....	- In search of food	73
⑬	Калмак-Куре.....	Kalmak-Kure	78
	Муаджан.....	- Muadjan	82
	Турфан.....	- Turfan	84
⑭	Аксу.....	Aksu	85
	Свадьба.....	- wedding	87
	Сюзи.....	- Suzi	87
	Новое Аксу.....	- new Aksu	88
⑮	Арест Вани.....	Vanya's Arrest	90
	Арам.....	- Aram	92
⑯	Освобождение.....	Liberation (Freedom)	93
	Уч-Турфан.....	- Uch-Turfan	93
	Яркент.....	- Yarkent	95
⑰	Хотен.....	Khoten	97
	Звездочка.....	- Little Star	99
	Кажгар.....	- Kazhgar	100
⑱	Опять Кульджа.....	Again Kuldza (Gulja)	105
	Английский консул.....	- English Consul	109
	Шихи-Янза.....	- Shihi-Yanza	111
⑲	Свобода.....	Freedom	112
	Янзинг-Цян.....	- Yanzing-Qians	114
	Ланд-Жоу.....	- Land-Zhou	114
	В Шанхай.....	- to Shanghai	117
⑳	Шанхай.....	Shanghai	118
	Филиппины.....	- Philippines	119
㉑	США.....	USA	121
	Заключение.....	- Conclusion	125