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Youth and First Love

By Albina Davidovna Vazhenina Becker
translated by Alexei Streltsov

[Editor's note: This is part 2 of a three part series. Part 1 was printed in the September 2009 edition of the **SLMS** newsletter]

Here is my picture when I was young, about 17-18 years. We were moved to Siberia, Tumen region, Uporovsky district, Ingalinka village. My sister and I married Russians, but our aunt Olga married a German. It was already 1952 when I got married. But we were still on a parole, even Nadya was still on a parole. That is, if I live in this part of the city, then I have to stay in it and may not go elsewhere. They abolished it only after Stalin's death. It continued until about 1953-54.

Then we moved to Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg) with my husband. Valentin, my sister Emma's husband, worked as a locomotive driver. When he was sent to Sverdlovsk for career advance, Emma was pregnant. She came to him to Sverdlovsk, but somebody "snitched" on her, and they came for her and took her and placed her in a dark hole [jail]. Valentin was a party member, and I don't know how it happened that somebody allowed him to marry a German. **Continued on page 4**



Translator is link between professors and students

By Gretchen Roberts

Without a radio transmitter, the electronic device that propagates an electromagnetic signal, music and information can't be broadcast to listeners. A radio station may have a storehouse of beautiful music or an incredible talk radio host on staff, but without a transmitter, the world cannot hear them.

At Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia, Olga Suhinina is one of three translators whose function is as vital as a radio transmitter. Because the Siberian Lutheran Church is so new, the seminary has relied on the deep and vast knowledge of English-speaking theologians from around the world to train their students. Without someone well-versed in the two languages to help relay the message, lectures would be, er, lost in translation. Olga's job is to translate the theological lectures for seminary students, who in turn go on to proclaim the Word in Siberia, recalling Psalm 19:4: *"Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."*

According to Professor Alan Ludwig, the sole full-time professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary, translating theological lectures from English to Russian is less straightforward than it sounds. Since the seminary was founded in 1997, almost all classes have been taught by English-speaking professors who **continued on page 3**



The Pihntinsk Lutherans: The Rest of the Story

by Jerry Frank

[Editor's note: A story about Bishop Lytkin's visit to a Polish Lutheran settlement in Pihntinsk, in the Tiaga near Irkutsk, appeared in the December 2008, [SLMS](#) newsletter. Mr Jerry Frank writes "the rest of the story" concerning these immigrants to Siberia]

In the fall of 2008 I became aware of the Pihntinsk Lutherans through an award winning research paper on ethnic minorities that had been prepared by middle school students in the nearby town of Zalari, Siberia. I conducted further research about the Pihntinski and presented the information this past summer at the conventions of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia and

These people are descendants of Germans who migrated to the Bug River region of what was Poland in the early 1600s. During the Polish Partitions of the late 1700s, the region became part of Russia and remained that way until WW I. From 1908-10, several families from the Bug River communities of Neudorf and Neubrow accepted the opportunity to move almost 5000 kilometers eastward under the agriculture reforms instigated by Piotr Stolypin. These reforms and programs resulted in the migration of millions of people to eastern Russia and Siberia on a scale similar to that which brought east European immigrants to the fertile plains of the United States and Canada. While the vast majority of Germans in Siberia and Kazakhstan were "verschlept" (forced there) on cattle trains during WW I, this small group voluntarily moved to Siberia with the hope of new life and opportunity.

Why would they worship in Polish? As indicated in



the Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe. I was pleased to see the Pihntinski featured in your December 2008 newsletter.

The Pihntinsk Lutherans actually live in three neighboring villages - Pihntinsk, Middle Pihntinsk, and Dagnik. Those of you with access to GOOGLE Earth can find the latter by searching for [Dagnik, Siberia]. The other two are along the road to the north. With that resource, you can see that they are still within the Siberian forest where these people originally settled 100 years ago.

This minority group is very unique. Their religious background is Lutheran. They worshipped in Polish. Upon arrival, their common language was a Slavic mix of Belarusian and Ukrainian. They all have Germanic sounding names. And because they are self described as "buzhskie golendry" (Bug Hollenders - Bug is pronounced "boog"), there are suspicions that they have Dutch origins. So who are these people and why am I talking about them to German interest groups?

As you may have surmised from a surname like Hildebrand mentioned in the article, these folk at Pihntinsk are not ethnically Polish but rather Germanic. Other surnames include Selent, Ludwig, Buetow, and Kuntz.

the article, the sermon books and other religious materials which they still have were written in Polish but in gothic script. In fact, this was German Fraktur script. These materials were published during the post Reformation era in East Prussia where there were numerous churches whose services were conducted in Polish and where there was even a Lutheran seminary that conducted classes in Polish. There are 2 possible reasons why they are using this material. One is that they adopted the Polish language as their own after having lived among the Poles, Belarusians and Ukrainians for several hundred years. The other possibility is that they were Mazurian Germans who were already worshipping in the Polish language before they migrated to the Bug River. [Mazurian Germans also migrated to Canada and the States where some Lutheran services were still conducted in Polish in the 1950s.]

Why would they be known as Hollender? A Hollendry is a village with a democratic (elected leadership) form of government that was created during the Dutch (typically Mennonite) migration into West Prussia. The Hollendry contrast with the Schultzenhof villages which had leaders appointed by the nobility. Later, **continued on page 5**

Olga

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know no Russian. Very few students know enough English to even understand the lectures, let alone ask questions in English. Theological course-work often involves Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, creating a melting pot of languages in a

After getting her Master's Degree, she began translating full-time for Lutheran Theological Seminary. On a typical day, Olga will get up early to do household tasks, walk to the seminary and translate three long courses such as Hebrew, Exodus, and Hymnology, attend other lectures or events at the seminary campus or church, and then head home for the evening. She loves to watch American television shows like "Scrubs" and "Less than Perfect." "The English original and Russian translations are very idiomatic. It's a fun exercise," she says.

BUT IT IS HER LOVE OF THEOLOGY THAT MAKES OLGA TRULY EXCEL AT HER VOCATION. "TRANSLATING IS AN ART AND A SCIENCE AND A SPORT," OLGA SAYS. "IT'S VERY EXCITING! I CAN BASK IN THE BEAUTY OF THE BIBLE, THE BEAUTY OF HUMAN LANGUAGES, AND THE BEAUTY OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. MY JOB GIVES ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT OUR MALE MINISTRY AS A WOMAN."

Olga also exercises her unique sense of humor in class, Professor Ludwig reports. "Olga is witty and makes very good puns in English – words native English speakers don't always think of because we connect sounds differently," he says. "For example, she might play on the words 'sin' and 'seen.' Once in

field of study where the preciseness of words can be vital to doctrine.

Prof. Ludwig says Olga's unique gifts help her as a translator. "Olga has a higher education in mathematics. Her mind is logical and precise, and she combines this precision with a love for languages," he says. "She is always looking for ways to improve the beauty and quality of her translations, and her English is nearly impeccable."

Equally important, Olga has a Master's Degree in theology from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which gives her a superb grasp of Lutheran theology and the Biblical languages.

But it is her love of theology that makes Olga truly excel at her vocation. "Translating is an art and a science and a sport," Olga says. "It's very exciting! I can bask in the beauty of the Bible, the beauty of human languages, and the beauty of Christian fellowship. My job gives me an opportunity to support our male ministry as a woman."

Olga studied English from the second grade, memorizing hundreds of English texts, reading and translating English books, and discussing issues in English-to-Russian translation of children's classics like *Winnie the Pooh*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. While in college, she met some American evangelical Christians and began attending their Bible studies. On her nineteenth birthday, Olga translated her first lecture, on Acts 3. "Our local church had many visitors, so I was asked to translate a lot," she says.

After graduating from Novosibirsk State University with a degree in applied mathematics, Olga began working at a Baptist Bible institute along with Father Alexei Streltsov, now rector at Lutheran Theological Seminary. "I only truly became Lutheran after hearing American seminary professors at summer seminars and at the seminary," she says. "Having a copy of the Lutheran catechism or attending services is not enough. One needs the Lutheran teachers of God and creation in order to have all the dots connected."

awhile she'll make a clever wordplay or joke in Russian and crack up the class."

But Olga takes her vocation seriously, saying that it's a "high calling." "My job combines Martha and Mary, cooking a healthy meal for my fellow Christians while learning at my Master's feet," she says. And she can't help but think that some day, these young, eager Russian students sitting in class will become the pillars of the Siberian Lutheran



Olga translating for Charles Evanson at summer seminars in Altai Region of Siberia, 2003

church. "One day, when we are all very old, I shall murmur to myself, 'Why, I remember them when they were new at our seminary.' It will be so exciting! Things always turn out interestingly in God's kingdom." ✕

Gretchen Roberts is a freelance writer and the wife of an LCMS campus pastor in Knoxville, Tenn. Her father, Alan Ludwig, has served as the full-time professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk since 1998.

Persecuted for being German

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But he was persistent. Later on she was released, but she spent 5 days there in a dark hole pregnant. She already had a belly. Their son Vladimir was born in July 1952. All this happened in winter or in the end of 1951 or beginning of 1952. My daughter Nadya was born in 1953.

I had a good friend in my youth – his name was Alexey. Sometimes I think I still love him. But I have already torn all photos of him and thrown them away. He was an athlete, three years older than I was. He lived in the same town of Zavodoukovsk (Tumen region). When He came back from his first military tour he was transferred to Novosibirsk to continue his military service.

He went to Zavodoukovsk and told people about me, that he had a bride, a German girl. He told people that he loved me. But they frightened him so much, by telling him

When I later came to Zavodoukovsk with Nadya, my daughter, the mother of Alexey was working at the store. As I came to the store she would stand up and cry. I did not understand at that time, but later she told my mother that Alexey married a girl by the name of Masha. But he still kept asking about me. Probably it was not our destiny to marry. His life was all



Albina with daughter, Nadya, 1954

...HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO NOVOSIBIRSK TO CONTINUE HIS MILITARY SERVICE... HE WENT TO ZAVODOUKOVSK AND TOLD PEOPLE ABOUT ME, THAT HE HAD A BRIDE, A GERMAN GIRL. HE TOLD PEOPLE THAT HE LOVED ME. BUT THEY FRIGHTENED HIM SO MUCH, BY TELLING HIM THAT HE COULD LOSE HIS CAREER BECAUSE OF ME OR EVEN GO TO PRISON.

messed up, according to my mother's words. I also understood it the same way... It didn't turn out.

Though he told me then: "You wait for me, and I give you my word, that some day they will lift these charges from us." And I said: "So, when will they lift them up? Look **Continued on page 5**

that he could lose his career because of me or even go to prison.

Of course, he was young. And I would play the guitar and sing songs about my life. My neighbor would then tell me: "Alya, you will lose all your happiness while singing." [translator's note: This is a Russian idiom having to do with a common Russian superstition where it is said, "you sing away all your happiness."] I answered that my happiness awaits me. And so I sat, played the guitar, and sang a song for him:

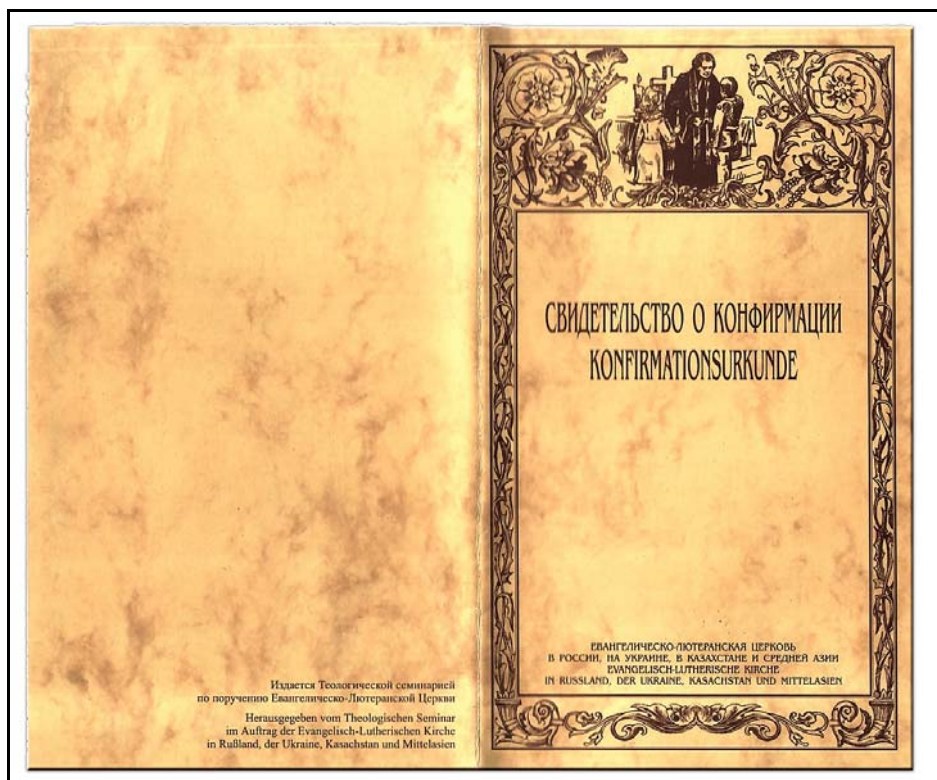
"Call me to the camp.

Let them play the last waltz for me.

I quarreled with my beloved for eternity,

And nothing would bring us back."

Though it is hard for me to forget all these words, I try to forget them. As Alexey sat next to me, he cried. I said, "Alexey, don't cry. If this is so, why should you spoil your life. Maybe you would love another." And later I met Georgiy, my future husband. I don't know, maybe I didn't love him. So, we didn't have life together the way we were supposed to.



Albina's Confirmation certificate. See inside of certificate on page 6.

Albina: Persecuted as “enemy of the people”

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how they persecute us for one grandfather [Gottfried] that he was a [Lutheran] priest, and the other grandfather, Christian, was the ‘enemy of the people,’ because he supposedly said things that were not acceptable, so for his ‘tongue’ he was also executed [shot].” This is the father of my aunt, Olga. Now she supposedly receives some big money in Germany for him having been shot. When my grandfather was executed, I was not even born yet. With my other grandfather, we were children. We lived in Volga Region, in the European part of Russia, in Kraft village.

Once we were already asleep, he came running into the house late at night, took off his fur coat, which we used as a blanket. They came after him. And my grandmother was running all around the house. Then

“...LOOK HOW THEY PERSECUTE US FOR ONE GRANDFATHER [GOTFRIED] THAT HE WAS A [LUTHERAN] PRIEST, AND THE OTHER GRANDFATHER, CHRISTIAN, WAS THE ‘ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE’ BECAUSE HE SUPPOSEDLY SAID THINGS THAT WERE NOT ACCEPTABLE, SO FOR HIS ‘TONGUE’ HE WAS ALSO EXECUTED [SHOT].”

everything got quiet. And for a long time I didn’t know what happened to him. No one was allowed to inquire about him. And so my grandmother did not have any data on where they took him. Subsequently, when they lifted all the charges and announced that the repressions would stop, Olga, being his daughter, received the documents that it was all a “mistake.” It’s been four years since my mother is no more [died]. Emma and I thought, we were, someday, going to ask mother about everything, about all her life. But now, it will not be.

Grandfather Gottfried, who was a priest, maintained a special book and conducted services. They gathered at different houses. They did it secretly. And how much did they [the authorities] oppress them! They fined them or disrupted the services. They were punished for gatherings and sent to some correction labor services. It continued also after they lifted their accusation, when we were no longer “enemies of the people” [translator’s note: This is a special term coined in Stalin’s time to designate the enemies of the Soviet regime who were to be persecuted]. And when they placed pregnant Emma into a dark hole, as she came to visit her husband... It all appears so outrageous... Oh, it’s better not to recall all that!

I had a very much believing **Continued on page 6**

Pihtinsk

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many other ethnic groups adopted this form of village government as their own but the name stuck. These villages were later duplicated in Russian Poland settlement regions where the name was also used. Even in modern

THOUGH THESE FOLK HAVE LOST THEIR GERMAN CULTURE, THEY HAVE, THROUGH GREAT DIFFICULTY, RETAINED THEIR LUTHERAN FAITH. THEY REMAIN “UNSERE LEUTE” - OUR PEOPLE - OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST.

day Poland, some villages still carry the Hollendry name as an adjective, not because the villagers were originally Dutch but because of how they were historically governed. When these Germans migrated to their Bug River settlement, they negotiated this Hollendry style of government with their Polish landlord. And so they became known as Bug Hollender. Though these folk have lost their German culture, they have, through great difficulty, retained their Lutheran faith. They remain “unsere Leute” - our people - our brothers and sisters in Christ. ✕



Polish Lutheran sermon book

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