The Woodchips That Flew:

Trauma and Family Separation during the Stalinist Purges

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the family separation that occurred in the Soviet Union during The Great Purge from 1934-1939 and asks how each member of the family reacted to their separation and trauma, and how they survived. The first chapter, “Fathers & Husbands,” analyzes the memoirs and letters of four men and finds that, while they prioritized work as a means to bolster their dignity, they also worked to be cultivators of culture for their children and emotional leaders for their wives. Chapter two, “Mothers & Wives,” analyzes three women’s memoirs and find that women were most likely to obsess over their identities as mother and wife, even if those identities (sole mother and wife) no longer existed for them (birth mother and widow). Chapter three, “Children,” argues that besides having to live with lifelong trauma and grief over missed out or traumatic childhoods, altered career paths, and murdered relatives, the subjects usually were also eventually responsible for caring for their severely traumatized parents. Nonetheless, they survived through written correspondence with parents, nurturance by extended family, or reliance on siblings.

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Introduction

Chop. Olga Adamova-Sliozberg smacks her axe against the ice-covered conifer towering above her. As the arctic wind howls against her quilted camp jacket, snow and ice attempt to penetrate her used camp issued boots. Each swing of her axe is one step closer to dinner, one step closer to leaving this frigid cold, and one step closer to the stove warming her barrack.

Olga swings her axe alone. All of her friends have been transferred out of her camp. In her loneliness, she falls deeper into depression. She mourns her past life where she never understood the brutality of humans and nature. A life where she sat in the comfort of her home with her children giggling down the hall, her husband preparing a lecture, and her nose in a book, the pages fresh and unused.[1]

As her axe strikes the trunk, wood chips disperse in the snow around her where they will ever so slowly decompose for the decades to come. "When they cut down a forest, woodchips fly" (*Les rubyat–shchepki letyat*) her husband, Yudel, once recited in response to Olga questioning the morality of mass arrests.[2] Surely, he thought, these arrests were justified. Even more, surely, it won't affect me. By justifying the purging of thousands of Soviet citizens, Yudel, like many others, faced the terror with idealism. However, the mass arrests, later labeled as "The Great Purge," were significant for their rampant targeting of innocent Soviet citizens, especially Party members or elites in Soviet society. Yudel and Olga were two of the Great Purge's victims, and only Olga survived.

As the most famous of all Stalinist purges, the Great Purge is often referred to as a one-time phenomenon. However, the Great Purge was only one wave of many mass arrests ordered

[1] Olga Lvovna Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey: How One Woman Survived Stalin's Gulag,* translated by Katherine Gratwick Baker (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 126.
[2] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 7.

by Stalin. Whether it was the first wave of political prisoners after the Bolshevik takeover in the early 1920s, dekulakization in the late 1920s to the early 1930s, or ethnic targeting post-WWII, the Soviet state frequently used terror to control its population. What makes the "Great Purge" unique is not the purge itself, but the exponential increase of violence that occurred from 1936 to 1938.

Starting on December 1, 1934, in response to the murder of Sergei Kirov that occurred the same day, Stalin proposed a pivotal decree that altered the process of indicting enemies of the state. After ten days of interrogation, defendants would be given twenty-four-hour notice of their indictment, followed by a trial (which were usually performed in *absentia*), after which their punishment would be immediately executed–even in cases of capital punishment. Two days later, on December 3rd, the Politburo approved the decree. The "Great Purge" thus began–though with a rather slow start. Between 1934 and 1936 the NKVD (*Narodniy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del',* or People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) arrested just over 290,000 individuals for counterrevolutionary crimes. In contrast, the totals of 1937 and 1938 alone multiplied by more than four times, with over 1,372,000 arrests.[3]

This shift in arrests can be explained by a series of orders issued by Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD. On July 30, 1937, Yezhov released Order No. 00447 which called for the targeting of anti-Soviet elements and their families. In the order, Yezhov also delineated the two types of sentences anti-Soviet elements could receive: execution or corrective labor. In the final pages of the order, Yezhov laid out the estimated number of enemies present in each oblast, setting quotas for each local NKVD agency to meet.[4]

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[3] Oleg Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag,* translated by Vadim A. Staklo (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 290-291.
[4] People's Commissioner of Internal Affairs of the USSR, *Operative Order of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of S.S.R. No. 00447*, July 30, 1937, from *Vikiteka*. https://ru.wikisource.org.

A couple of weeks later, Yezhov released Order No. 00486, which specifically targeted wives and children of the enemies of the people.[5] This order sent "wives of the enemies of the people" and their children who were older than fifteen to prisons and labor camps. Any of their children younger than fifteen were to be delivered to state-run orphanages. Stalin then gave a toast after a demonstration in November where he called for the destruction of all enemies and their families who could even be incriminated by their thoughts.[6] From 1937 to 1938, NKVD troikas convicted just over 1.1 million individuals of counterrevolutionary agitation and sentenced over 680,000 individuals to be shot.[7]

Individuals convicted of counterrevolutionary behavior were sentenced for violating one or more subpoints of Article 58 in the Soviet Criminal Code.[8] Article 58 separated arrests into two major categories: political prisoners and common criminals. Later given the nickname "58ers," guards treated political prisoners worst in the Gulag camps as compared to the common criminals.[9] Scholar Steven Barnes attributes this treatment to the social "redeemability" of each category. Redeemability is defined as the ability to immerse oneself back into Soviet thought and society after being socially molded through forced labor. Bolshevik ideology professed that, in most cases, forced labor was the answer for anti-Soviet agitation. One's redeemability was usually based on a person's background. Political prisoners were viewed as less redeemable whereas common criminals could be construed as victims of the capitalist system and thus more redeemable. Order No. 00447 further divided political prisoners into two more categories of

[5] People's Commissioner of Internal Affairs of the USSR, *Operative Order of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of S.S.R. No. 00486,* August 15, 1937, from Memorial, trans. Google Translate http://old.memo.ru/history/document/00486.htm.
[6] V. A. Nevzhin, *Zastol'nie rechi Stalina: Dokumenty i materialy* (Saint Petersburg, AIRO-XX, 2003), 148.
[7] Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag*, 290.
[8] Central Executive Committee of the USSR, "Article 58," from the *Criminal Code of the RSFSR,* March 5, 1926, from *Vikiteka*. https://ru.wikisource.org.
[9] Steven Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 85.

redeemability. Those who were shot were unredeemable, while those sentenced to exile or corrective labor were potentially redeemable.[10]

Alongside the terror, Soviet officials began passing pro-natalist and pro-family policies that contradicted the radical policies of the decade before.[11] Party officials no longer tolerated the ideals of free love, easy divorce, and freedom of abortion. Per Stalin, population totals needed to increase as the nation grew closer to war with Germany.[12] As a result, the Politburo passed new family laws in 1936 which restricted divorce practices and criminalized abortion.[13] Interestingly, citizens did not disagree with the measures, but instead requested more infrastructural support for working mothers. In fact, most women agreed with the pro-motherhood rhetoric while also citing the simultaneous lack of children's clothing, daycares, and food.[14]

Thus, these two realities coexisted–that of destroying families and that of building families. The existing scholarship that points out this overlap has tended to highlight the origins of familial distrust. Such is the case in Katerina Clark's *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* which discusses the "Great Family" and the "Little Family."[15] The "Great Family" represented the Soviet Union, or the communal family, whereas the "Little Family" related to kinship or blood-related families. Stalin sought to create comradery through the "Great Family," and

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[10] Steven Barnes, *Death and Redemption,* 87. By using Steven Barnes' work, I do not mean to align myself with his argument, but rather explain the mindset of camp guards and administration. Other Gulag scholars have argued against this explanation for the purpose of the Gulag, such as Golfo Alexopoulos in *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag,* where she argues for the exploitation "raw human labor." Other scholars such as Anne Applebaum and Oleg Khlevniuk have instead argued that the Gulag was a central component of economic expansion. Generally, this is still a contested debate.

[11] H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 90.

[12] David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 134.

[13] Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 331-332.

[14] Lynne Atwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 119.

[15] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, 3rd ed.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 116.

encouraged suspicion of "Little Family" ties. To Stalin, blood should not be thicker than water–each Soviet citizen was responsible for holding their family members accountable, regardless of the bond they shared. While some historians, such as Robert Thurston, have expressed skepticism over a government sabotaging itself considering the goals of their pro-natalist policies, the general agreement is that family destruction was a genuine pursuit of Stalin's throughout the entirety of his reign.

Still, the definition of how the state targeted families has been debated. David Hoffman maintains in *Stalinist Values* that the Soviet objective was not to eliminate enemy families, but to remove them from society and destroy their economic and cultural influence.[16] In her chapter, "Terror of Intimacy," Cynthia Hooper agreed with Hoffmann's argument, also noting that Moscow officials viewed kinship families, specifically within the party elite, as capable of undermining "all supreme socialist loyalties."[17] Golfo Alexopoulos further contested that despite inconsistency in categories corresponding to waves of arrest (i.e. kulaks, political elites, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, etc.) the targeting of family units remained consistent.[18] Ultimately, most scholars agree that the coexistence of family targeting and uplifting can be explained by a desire to both destroy families of enemies and forge new socialist families.

Along with this scholarship, some have investigated family and survival with the Gulag. For example, Elaine MacKinnon has written on motherhood as a tool of survival, and Jehanne Gheith has numerous articles and monographs in which she psychologically analyzes survivor

[16] David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 102.
[17] Cynthia Hooper, "Terror of Intimacy: Family Politics in the 1930s Soviet Union," in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside,* edited by Christina Kaier and Eric Naiman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 74.
[18] Golfo Alexopoulos, "Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s-1940s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 no.1 (2008): 91-117.

experiences.[19] Cathy Frierson has similarly studied family separation from the perspectives of children.[20] There is also literature that analyzes memoirs themselves, such as Andrea Gullotta who has assessed the importance of writing down traumatic experiences for survival.[21] Leona Toker has instead taken a literary approach as she analyzed the patterns of memoirs and how they reflect survival methods.[22] Nonetheless, scholars have not examined the promotion of family roles, through Soviet policies and messaging. Nor is there a comprehensive study of family separation that resulted from the Great Purge. This thesis fills these historiographical oversights. In particular, it probes two main questions: how did each member react to their family's separation? And how did they survive?

I utilize psychological analysis to elucidate the meaning of these events to survivors and their families. It is important to note that I will not be using diagnoses consistent with the time periods in which these historical subjects lived. Not only does this lack meaning to audiences today, but Stalin deemed psychological practices a pseudoscience, resulting in the decline of psychological research throughout most of the Soviet era.[23] Each diagnosis and symptom provided in this paper will remain consistent with modern psychological literature and research. I plan to focus more on symptoms than diagnoses to achieve my goal of emphasizing meaning as well as revealing patterns across the subjects.

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[19] See Elaine MacKinnon, "Motherhood and Survival in the Stalinist Gulag," *Aspasia* 13 no. 1 (2019): 65-94; see also Jehanne Gheith, "I Never Talked: Enforced Silence, Non-Narrative Memory, and the Gulag," *Mortality* 12, no. 2 (2007): 159-175 and "'It's Difficult to Convey': Oral History and Memories of Gulag Survivors," *Gulag Studies* 2 no. 3 (2009): 37-53.
[20] See Cathy Frierson, *Silence Was Salvation: Child Survivors of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), and Cathy Frierson and Semyon Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
[21] Andrea Gullotta, "Trauma and Self in the Soviet Context: Remarks on Gulag Writings," *Avtobiogrfija* 1 (2012): 73-87.
[22] Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).
[23] Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was (Un)Made: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 15.

One of these patterns is trauma. Trauma is defined as events that severely alter ideas people have about their place in the world around them, such as how they perceive themselves, society, or their future.[24] This can include something as simple as an altered value or as severe as a threat to life. From the perspective of the traumatized, trauma is not understood in the original instance, but in the following triggers that "haunt the survivor."[25] As Cathy Caruth describes, experiencing trauma can be explained as seeking to understand "what cannot be understood," or the inability to consciously place the trauma in an "ordered experience of time."[26] Theoretically, memory is understood as a cognitive timeline of registering events and orienting them on said timeline to form individual memories. However, when a traumatic event takes place, this experience is disrupted, and the brain is compelled to replay the event repeatedly until the issue is resolved.[27]

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a long-term response to a traumatic event involving intrusive flashbacks of traumatic events, depression, and inability to complete daily tasks.[28] PTSD is caused by either witnessing or learning that a traumatic event occurred to a close family member, friend, or loved one. It is particularly apparent in individuals who's loved one(s) experienced threat of death, or died, in a violent or accidental manner.[29] For children, PTSD can have lifelong behavioral effects like aggression, antisocial behavior, hyperactivity, or anxious attachment.[30] Following traumatic deaths, in particular, grief-related dreams about the

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[24] Richard Tedeschi, "Growth, Posttraumatic," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide,* ed. Charles R. Figley (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 248.
[25] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 41.
[26] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 6 and 61.
[27] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 61.
[28] Nirit Gordon and Judith Alpert, "Psychological Trauma," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide,* ed. Charles R. Figley (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 491.
[29] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 271.
[30] Don Catherall, *Handbook of Stress, Trauma, and the Family* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 187.

deceased and their death may occur.[31] This is known as complicated grieving, or when a person becomes fixated on what they lost to the point of unhealthy levels and manifests in different ways.[32] If the individual is physically or psychologically isolated from a safe community, they might cope by latching onto a threatened familial identity that brings them comfort.[33] The obsession can also be a process of healing, as individuals who directly or indirectly witnessed a violent or sudden death might honor the lost one by pursuing something that mattered to the deceased.[34]

Moreover, the ability to share trauma is an essential tool for recovery, as it can both acknowledge the hurt and allow one to advocate for themselves. For example, survivor literature on the Holocaust has circulated around American classrooms for decades, but this was only possible because of the repercussions that followed the end of the Holocaust. Not only were Nazis held accountable for their crimes, but Holocaust survivors found spaces to narrate their trauma and heal within the communities that surrounded them.[35] Jehanne Gheith contrasts this ability to the Soviet reality in her article on enforced silence. In the Soviet Union, means of relief and healing were complicated, as many survivors felt unable to speak about what they endured. This is a common theme seen in each individual presented in this paper. Where Holocaust survivors could utilize narrative healing, Gheith notes that many Gulag survivors had to rely on non-narrative healing, meaning ways of recovering without verbal testimony, or where verbal testimony came after an alternative recovery process.[36] While some survivors felt comfortable

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[31] Kathleen Nader, "Grief, Complicated," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide,* ed. Charles R. Figley (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 290.
[32] Nader, "Grief, Complicated," 289.
[33] Pauline Boss, *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic Work with Ambiguous Loss* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 26.
[34] Boss, *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience*, 87.
[35] Even more, the only punishment for NKVD agents and administrators was when the Purges turned on them and targeted them too.
[36] Gheith, "I Never Talked," 162.

telling their stories under hushed voices in prison cells, many instead relied on comradery and correspondence from home, often reinforcing their familial identities through their actions. This included nurturing those around them, advising their children's education and careers via letters, and even sending self-authored short, illustrated stories for their children.

Thus, it was not hopeless for the Soviet survivors, but their society did make it far more difficult. Despite the repercussions that could follow, some later felt compelled to spread the truth and wrote memoirs. Now known as the genre of *Lagernaia Memuaristika*, or Gulag memoirs, many first published their experiences in *samizdat*, as a form of protest and to protect their image and dignity. My research heavily relies on these memoirs as they are rich with emotional and mental content. Often, their authors blatantly state that they experienced night-terrors, tightness in their chest, recurring thoughts, and more. For my research, the reliability of the memoir lies in these physiological and emotional recollections. I am less concerned with what exactly happened and more with how these events made them feel.

Further, particularly in the fathers and husbands' chapter, I examine letters. This is due to the unfortunate reality that men were primary targets of terror and less frequently survived to tell their story themselves. Fortunately, institutions like MEMORIAL and the Hoover Archives have preserved these letters down to their colorful sketches featured in the margins. It is worth noting, though, that even 1940s Soviet era letters are a complicated source–especially when they originated from within Gulag camp walls. If the author shared too many details, censors left bold black redactions through the beautiful cursive. If one was desperate for more private correspondence, they could illegally send post through freed laborers or released prisoners. However, even these were self-censored in some ways, mostly by the messengers not wanting to

upset their families with the realities of their conditions. Still, these letters reveal deep emotions of longing for reunion and the depression that came with separation.

Finally, children's memories are almost exclusively preserved through oral testimony. This is yet another traditionally challenging source for reliability, but similar to memoirs, trauma's stronghold over the victim's emotional memory tends to reveal itself clearly. Most of these interviews were collected in monographs by Simon Vilensky titled *Deti Gulaga (Children of the Gulag)* and *Silence was Salvation* by Cathy Frierson.

I identify the major traumatic experiences as the separation from loved ones and loss of dignity. I argue that those who survived these traumas often did so by preserving their innocence and past lives through familial ties. In my first chapter, "Fathers & Husbands," I look at the memoirs and letters of four men and find that while they prioritized work as a means to bolster their dignity, they also sought to be cultivators of culture for their children and emotional leaders for their wives. In the following chapter, "Mothers & Wives," I analyze three women's memoirs to demonstrate how women were most likely to obsess over their identities as mother and wife, even if those identities no longer existed for them. Finally, in chapter 3 on "Children," I argue that besides having to live with lifelong trauma and grief over missed out or traumatic childhoods, altered career paths, and murdered relatives, they usually were also eventually responsible for caring for their severely traumatized parents. Nonetheless, they survived through saviors, literature, and introspection.

The pages that lie ahead are not for the faint of heart. Not only are they filled with tragedy and sorrow, but also instances of terror, verbal and physical abuse, and murder. Despite this, these stories need to be shared both so that we can learn from them and also honor the memory of those who suffered. Please note that I do take extensive care in telling their stories so

that they are not a spectacle of Stalinist terror, but rather a story of real people whose lives were changed forever by a paranoid tyrant. This is the story of separation, but more importantly, this is the story of survival.

Chapter 1: Fathers & Husbands

The USSR of the 1930s was a man's world–more specifically, it was Stalin's world. Soviet men found themselves second to Stalin, the "ultimate man" whom they could never be.[1] By the 1930s, Stalin's restrictions had an effect on men's experiences as men. While they held power over women in society, this came with expectations to be family breadwinners and responsible fathers.[2] Further, with the rise in Stalinist terror, men found themselves having to justify their trustworthiness to the state by exceeding expectations in the workplace and their social standings to their friends.[3] Despite their gendered power in society, Stalin's paranoid suspicion of politically powerful men betraying him forced them to frequently reinforce their power within the bounds of masculinity.[4]

Family targeting in the Purges almost always started with the patriarch of the household due to their status in society.[5] Counterrevolutionaries were most threatening in positions of influence, such as teachers, managers, and politicians, all of which were male-dominated.[6] It is then ironic that men suffered in Soviet society because of their superior status.[7] Not only were they the first in the family to be arrested, but their gender also determined the severity of their sentence. The NKVD shot men at a higher rate and gave them harsher camp assignments, as compared to women. For example, in Leningrad, about 95 percent of those shot from January

[1] Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was (Un)Made: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 10.
[2] H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 242.
[3] E. Thomas Ewing, "'If the Teacher Were a Man': Masculinity and Power in Stalinist Schools," *Gender and History* 21 no. 1 (2009): 109.
[4] Ewing, "If the Teacher Were a Man," 108.
[5] Only on rare occasions was the head of the household a woman. Alexopoulos, "Stalin and the Politics of Kinship," 92.
[6] Ewing, "If the Teacher Were a Man," 118.
[7] Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 241.

1937 to September 1938 were men.[8] As for the camps, men made up 92 percent of gender demographics.[9] Due to the impossible quotas set by the state, camp bosses desired more male inmates for tree felling, mining, and building, as they were more likely to physically withstand the labor.[10] While women did participate in these areas on occasion, men participated far more frequently, resulting in malnutrition, excessive fatigue, frostbite, injuries, and in many cases, death. Men experienced the brunt of the violence that came with The Great Purge, and their survival tended to depend on a little bit of strength, but a whole lot of luck.

Following the October Revolution, elite families started to practice child-centered parenting methods, marked by parents providing children with an abundance of their attention.[11] Child centered families were still based in reason and research, for instance, women were encouraged to breast feed by the hour rather than when their baby cried. Parents also approached discipline by acting as proper examples of Soviet morality and using stories to influence their children to behave properly.[12] In this context, fathers were considered to be the "senior executive member" of the family.[13] Soviet society viewed men as calm, detached, and stricter than their wives when it came to punishments. Strictness was crucial, as Soviet authorities sought to ensure that families were not raising spoiled children.[14] Therefore, the balance of maintaining a child-centered family and avoiding spoiling one's children relied heavily on fathers. Yet, many

[8] Melanie Ilic, "The Great Terror in Leningrad: Evidence from the *Leningradskii Martirolog,*" in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin*, ed. by James Harris (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 319-320.
[9] "Report on the composition of prisoners in NKVD camps by sex, age, and education" in *The History of the Gulag* by Oleg Khlevniuk, 315: (cites GARF, f. R-9414, op. 1, d.1155, ll. 9-10).
[10] Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 310-311.
[11] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 382; Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 276.
[12] Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 277.
[13] A. A. Makarenko, *Kniga Dlya Roditeli* (Moscow, 1937), 202, quoted in Catriona Kelly, *Children's World*, 373.
[14] Kelly, *Children's World,* 373.

children, especially after WWII, grew up fatherless–all due to men's primary responsibility to the state.[15]

Only a handful of scholars have written on early-Stalinist masculinity. E. Thomas Ewing wrote on male teachers in Soviet primary schooling.[16] Lilya Kaganovsky had researched masculinity in Stalinist film.[17] H. Kent Geiger who primarily studied the family, has also provided pockets of information on men's roles.[18] Catriona Kelly has written on men's advice literature, and Katerina Clark's foundational work, *The Soviet Novel*, discusses the gendered hierarchy between ordinary men and Stalin.[19] What has yet to be discussed is masculinity and the family within the Gulag, which is the primary focus of this chapter.

In order to fill these gaps, I use masculinity theory from psychological and sociological perspectives. Under Stalin, masculinity of the 1930s rapidly transformed into characteristics known today as "hegemonic masculinity." Coined in 1995 by scholar, R. W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity describes traits which justify the legitimacy of patriarchy, thus guaranteeing the dominance of men over women.[20] Along with a dichotomy between men and women, hegemonic masculinity can also include tensions between homosexual men and heterosexual men as well as even physically smaller men versus larger men. In justifying their legitimacy, hegemonic men must weed out the unworthy men by performing their dominance over them as well. Aspects of traditionally masculine traits within this hegemony comprise of power (including the justified

[15] Kelly, *Children's World*, 386.
[16] E. Thomas Ewing, "'If the Teacher Were a Man': Masculinity and Power in Stalinist Schools" *Gender and History* 21 no. 1 (2009): 107-129.
[17] Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was (Un)Made: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).
[18] H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).
[19] Catriona Kelly, "The Education of the Will: Advice Literature, *Zakal*, and Manliness in Early-Twentieth-Century Russia," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. by Barbara Evans Clements, et al., 131-151 (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, 3rd ed* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).
[20] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 77.

use of violence to maintain power), division of labor, and permission to act on sexual desire.[21] The men presented in this chapter all used and experienced these traits of masculinity to reassert their dignity as the Gulag attempted to dehumanize them.

This chapter studies four men who endured the Gulag camps: Leonid Bolotov, Mikhail Lebedev, Yevgeny Yablokov, and Arsenii Formakov, and explores how their masculinity influenced their traumatic responses and their methods of survival.[22] While these men prioritized work as a means to bolster their dignity, they also followed traditional roles of Soviet fatherhood. These roles included being a disciplinarian, cultural and educational teacher, and loving parent for their children, and appreciative, loving, and supportive spouse to their wife.

Letters

The harshness of the labor camps and prisons left many stories untold. Regardless of their authors' outcomes, letters have preserved the memory of men and their relationships with family members. Still, letters as a source deserve some context, particularly letters that originated in the Gulag camps. Most inmates wrote their letters on any material they could find; some wrote on postcards, graphing paper, lined paper, thin and fibrous paper, and even bark. Sometimes the paper looks ripped and ragged, while other pages have deep creases, reflecting the way it was mailed. With the lack of envelopes, men learned how to fold letters into *treugolniks*, or triangles, and mailed them this way.[23]

Moreover, their script varied based on audience. When a husband wrote to his wife, he presented his thoughts in beautiful cursive. With his children, he wrote in clear block letters,

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[21] Connell, *Masculinities*, 73-74.
[22] From here on throughout my thesis I will be referring to the individuals by their first names. Due to the intimacy of information provided, it feels insensitive and detached to refer to them by their last names. I acknowledge the unconventionality of this approach; however, I find that it is more effective for describing emotion and trauma than conventional methods.
[23] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, June 28, 1944, in *Gulag* Letters, ed. and trans. by Emily D. Johnson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 56.

legible for them to read. Sometimes, a man would include drawings of the landscape, flowers, or amusing cartoons. Just by observing the letters alone, one can clearly see the painstaking effort taken in crafting them, influenced by the limited rate in which they could write home.[24] For example, Arsenii could only write home once every three months.[25] Over those three months he compiled all his thoughts into pages of text and anxiously anticipated the response from his family.

The next step before the letters reached families was censorship. Many inmates already participated in self-censorship to comply with the censors and to not cause too much grief among their recipients, nor incriminate themselves. For these reasons, family members needed to read between the lines. For instance, inmates used terms such as "contract" in place of "sentence" and "hotel" in place of "camp."[26]

Camp censors checked for any unauthorized information leaking from within the Gulag walls. If there was impermissible information, the censor would cross through the word, phrase, or sentence with their pen. For example, any information regarding camp conditions, death rates, working conditions, illness–basically, anything negative about the camp environment–was usually scribbled out. On the other hand, if a letter had too much unauthorized information, censors would either dispose of the letter or flag it for authorities. Ultimately, censors were meant to prevent sensitive information from corrupting the Soviet public. Due to severe understaffing, mail was regularly backlogged, leaving prisoners unsure of which correspondence had and had not gotten through. In response, authors would repeat information to ensure that their recipients were always informed of their situation.

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[24] Emily D. Johnson, *Gulag Letters*, 15.
[25] Johnson, *Gulag Letters,* 19.
[26] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, August 16, 1945, in *Gulag* Letters, 149; Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, September 30, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 156.

If an author did not want to conform to these standards–and they had connections–they could send mail illegally.[27] Inmates often used freed laborers or recently freed prisoners to mail their more sensitive letters. Thus, if an inmate had limited correspondence, they could rely on their camp networks to help them connect with their families back home.

I primarily use letters for the analysis in this chapter. Leonid and Arsenii did live long enough to write their own memoirs, however. In fact, Leonid does not have any preserved letters, so his case relies entirely on his memoir. Due to the fallibility of memoir literature, both Leonid and Aresnii's memoir will only be used to discuss emotions rather than logistics of events.[28]

Meet the Men

Each man chosen for this chapter was an ethnically Russian intelligentsia member, whom the NKVD arrested during the height of the Great Purge with one exception, Arsenii Formakov, who was arrested in 1940. Arsenii's arrest actually features multiple consistencies with those of the Great Purge. He was a writer for a political journal, a teacher, and he proudly identified as a Russian and a communist. The ethnic arrests (targeting of Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, etc.) may have occurred closer to his timeline, but I plan to take advantage of this gray zone and include his story with the others.

Leonid Bolotov was born in Saratov, Russia in 1906.[29] By the time Leonid was in his mid-twenties, he worked as an engineer at a factory in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), had married his wife, Nina, and had two children, Gennady and Valeria.[30] On July 17, 1937, two NKVD agents awoke Leonid and his family at two in the morning to take him away to

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[27] Johnson, *Gulag Letters*, 20.
[28] For more on this, see chapter 2.
[29] Irina Yevgenievna Barclay, "Translator-Editor's Introduction" in *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag: Memoir of a Political Prisoner at Kolyma,* trans. Irina Yevgenievna Barclay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2020), 3.
[30] Barclay, "Translator-Editor's Introduction," 4.

Leningrad's Shpalernaya prison. During his arrest, Leonid recalled his family calmly gathering his things to help him leave. He remembered his son's confusion, asking "Daddy, are you going on a trip?" to which he replied, "Yes, son."[31]

Upon arrival to Shpalernaya, Leonid's interrogators accused him of opposing the October Revolution and pressured him to sign a false confession. Leonid refused. In response to this, Leonid's primary interrogator physically threatened to "beat [his] face to a pulp" and prevent him from sleeping until he signed the confession.[32] Still, Leonid resisted. Later, another interrogator wrote on a paper, "Don't sign the record; it will save your life."[33] They officially charged him with being a member of a terrorist organization that orchestrated the murder of Sergei Kirov, as well as attempted murders on Joseph Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov, and Vyacheslav Molotov.[34]

As he approached his trial, Leonid experienced intense confusion, questioning how this could this be happening to him. He hoped that the judges would see that his arrest was a mistake and let him go.[35] However, on September 5, 1937, the three-judge system known as a troika, found Leonid guilty and sentenced him to death. That is, until moments later when the judges learned of a resolution that revised Leonid's sentence from capital punishment to ten years corrective labor.[36] Having escaped death, he stepped into a transport train car and bid Leningrad farewell, asking himself aloud when he would ever see it again, to which another passenger answered, "never."[37]

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[31] Leonid Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 10-12.
[32] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 49.
[33] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 51.
[34] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 56.
[35] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 59.
[36] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 66.
[37] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 73.

Leonid served his time at Kolyma–a cluster of labor camps on the far northeastern Siberian coast notorious for its high death rates. In Kolyma, jobs ranged from manufacturing to tree felling to mining, each growing rapidly more dangerous. While at Kolyma, Leonid worked mainly as a miner, up until his release on November 10, 1951.[38] He then resided in Seymchan, Siberia, a town near Kolyma, for three years until he reunited with his wife, Nina. The two were rehabilitated in 1956, and Leonid wrote his memoir in 1980 before passing away seven years later at the age of 91.[39]

Our next subject is Mikhail Lebedev, born in 1892 in Suwałki, Russia (now Poland). After marrying his wife, Felya, they had their daughter, Yanina in 1920.[40] Mikhail and his family lived in Yaroslavl' where he worked as the chief physician at the neurological-therapeutic hospital until the NKVD arrested him on the night of September 22, 1937.[41] In the confines of his interrogation room in Zlatoust Prison, Mikhail's interrogators tortured him. Disgusted by these actions, he wrote a letter of complaint to the Prosecutor's Office, citing the use of sleep deprivation and forced nonstop sitting in a chair for four days in a row.[42] Like Leonid, Mikhail seriously believed that he would be released and that this was all a mistake.

Unfortunately, not only was his letter never acknowledged, but a troika found Mikhail guilty of participating in a counterrevolutionary terrorist organization and sentenced him to ten years of corrective labor to be spent at Kolyma.[43] While at Kolyma, the weather, intensity of labor, and malnutrition proved too much for Mikhail. In the early 1940s, he submitted himself to

[38] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 200.
[39] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag*, 247.
[40] The 'MEMORIAL' International Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charitable Society, *My Father's Letters: Correspondence from the Soviet Gulag,* ed. by Alena Kozlova, et al, trans. by Georgia Thompson (London: Granata Books, 2021), 93.
[41] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters,* 94.
[42] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 96.
[43] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 95.

a clinic where a doctor diagnosed him with stomach cancer and declared him an "invalid," or disabled person.[44]

This diagnosis changed Mikhail's life for better and for worse. The Gulag's food rationing corresponded with a four-tiered system of labor capacity. The top three tiers went up in ability, where the bottom tier was designated for invalids.[45] Due to their inability to work, invalids received much lower food rations, and eventually were released when they were on the brink of death so as to not increase the death rates within the Gulag.[46] Such was the case for Mikhail whom the camp administration released eighteen months early, on March 21, 1946.[47]

When Yanina saw her father for the first time in eight years, she did not recognize him. "What do you want?" she said as she answered the door. Mikhail quietly responded, "Don't you recognize me?" As soon as she heard her father's voice, she realized who he was and invited him inside. Upon reuniting, Felya and Yanina tried to help him recover both mentally and physically until he died of stomach cancer at the age of 77. Mikhail was posthumously rehabilitated in 1957.[48]

Our third subject, Yevgeny Yablokov, was born in Ryazan in 1887. After attending university, Yevgeny married his wife, Nina, in 1921, followed by the birth of their two children, Irina and Yuri in 1923 and 1925, respectively.[49] Yevgeny was a professor of botany at the Ryazan Pedagogical University until his arrest on January 10, 1938. After quick interrogations, a troika charged Yevgeny with participation in a counter-revolutionary organization and sentenced him to eight years corrective labor, which he served at a camp in Arkhangelsk.[50]

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[44] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 103.
[45] Golfo Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 71.
[46] Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag*, 133.
[47] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 103.
[48] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters,* 105.
[49] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 51-52.
[50] MEMORIAL, *My Father's Letters*, 54 and 51.

While at the camp, Yevgeny floated timber at a processing mill, until he got sick in 1941, resulting in his reassignment to working in the camp medical unit instead. Unfortunately, Yevgeny never recovered from his illness, and like Mikhail, was released as an invalid. Yevgeny lived his final days in exile and stayed in touch with his family via letter until his death of malnutrition in March 1944.

Finally, Arsenii Formakov, born in 1900 in Libava, Russia (now Liepaja, Latvia) came from a wealthy and educated background, having studied in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) from 1916 to 1919, until he moved to Dvinsk (Daugavpils) in 1919. In 1932, he married his wife, Anna, followed three years later by the birth of their son, Dmitri, in 1935, and daughter Evgenia, in 1940. While in Dvinsk, Arsenii worked as a school administrator and journalist for *The Voice of Dvinsk (Dvinskii Golos)*, where he participated in writing anti-Stalinist literature. The NKVD arrested Arsenii on July 30, 1940, six weeks after the Soviet invasion of Latvia, marking Arsenii as their first target in Dvinsk. Interrogators held Arsenii in solitary confinement for six months before finally calling him in for his first interrogation. His interrogators offered him a trade of seeing his wife who was then pregnant with their daughter Evgenia, for a confession to anti-Soviet activities. He complied. At this point he also managed to convince Anna to agree to a divorce. This way, she could keep her connections with him without being targeted herself.[51] The NKVD's Special Board *(Osoboe Soveshchanie)* then tried Arsenii in *absentia*, found him guilty, and sentenced him to eight years corrective labor.[52]

Arsenii served his time at Kraslag in Kansk, Siberia, primarily working in tree felling. Due to the harshness of tree felling on his body, he also worked as an informer to hopefully be

[51] Johnson, *Gulag Letters,* 46.
[52] Johnson, *Gulag Letters*, 7.

transferred to an indoor position.[53] The authorities awarded this to him along with a six-month reduction to his sentence. Arsenii was released on November 30, 1947, but his freedom was short lived as the NKVD rearrested him along with many other freed prisoners starting in 1948 due to an executive rearrest order.

At this point, he was almost fifty years old, and there was little prospect of him dying a dignified death, so he attempted to kill himself by slitting his wrists in solitary confinement but was unsuccessful. The NKVD sentenced Arsenii to ten more years corrective labor for the same crime as before. This time, he toiled at Ozerlag in Taishet, Siberia until his release and rehabilitation in 1955. Arsenii lived out his final years with his family until his death in 1983.

Each of these subjects is a prime example of the complicated reality of being a man in Stalinist Russia. Where they saw the benefits of manhood in their careers and family life, they also saw the severe consequences in their treatment in the prisons and Gulag and separation from their families. While in the Gulag, they depended on their identities as men, fathers, and husbands to survive.

As a Man

In order to fully appreciate the methods of survival, one must first understand men's traumas. This section is broken into five general circumstances that each man experienced while imprisoned: labor, casualness of death, testing will power, illness, and missing their families. Men suppressed their emotions, acted aggressively and competitively, in reaction to feeling diminished socially and politically.

[53] Johnson, *Gulag Letters,* 39.

[54] While men and women share these traumas, masculinity had a crucial role in men's perceptions of these events.

Further, the men's gendered identity, combined with their class, occupational, educational background, and ethnic identity, influenced the severity of their trauma.[55] Before their arrest, the men held skilled, high-class positions, were educated and ethnically Russian, all of which culminated into an entitlement to respect. However, after their arrest, the entire basis of their identity changed. No longer did merit and privilege determine their treatment, but their status as a political prisoner and a man. If one did not perform masculinity properly, they were more likely to be targeted for violence and harassment by other inmates.

One way that men knew to perform their masculinity was through labor. In Soviet society the state encouraged men to be the primary laborers. Thus, in the camps men maintained their pride and dignity by engaging in their labor assignments. However, this proved to be a dead end at times, as administrators did not assign political prisoners to jobs that they were skilled in, regardless of camp need. Only if political prisoners proved themselves trustworthy would they later have opportunities to transfer to skilled labor positions.

Moreover, in the camps, labor was treated very differently. Inmates were considered "units of labor," and men's experiences relied heavily on how they performed their labor.[56] Arsenii first task was to move dirt for the building of a new camp where he recalled unsuccessfully moving a wheelbarrow along a thin board and dropping dirt along the way.[57] Arsenii's previous occupations never required him to do manual labor, however upon his arrival

[54] Connell, *Masculinities*, 73-74.
[55] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2002), 10.
[56] Applebaum, *Gulag,* 102; Barnes, *Death and Redemption,* 34-48.
[57] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 7, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

to Kansk, his daily meals relied on his ability to fill impossible quotas. Similarly, Yevgeny told his son about how his hands swelled, and joints ached while felling trees for eight hours a day. "But we ignore this," Yevgeny concluded. If he did not ignore it, he would succumb to the pressure of the quota, and he might not eat that night. Despite their inexperience and the pain, the men knew they had to keep working if they were going to survive.

It is important to note that the camps were not intended for mass murder despite the massive amounts of murder that occurred.[58] Still, men witnessed countless deaths, whether from the labor, the weather, the guards, or gang violence. Threats of death always surrounded them, and in response, men spoke of death rather casually. Psychologically labelled as avoidance, this is a common symptom of PTSD in which survivors make efforts to avoid distressing feelings that are associated with their trauma. [59] This can be paired with numbing, in which "emotions are detached from thoughts feelings and behaviors."[60] Avoidance and numbing are inherent bodily responses to protect the brain from overwhelming amounts of discomfort.

Leonid experienced avoidance and numbing the most out of our subjects. He once recalled the line of large transport trucks driving up a narrow, icy road on the way to his camp. Suddenly, the leading truck slipped off the road, falling down the cliff right beside it. In that moment all the prisoners in the truck died.[61] He spent nine sentences of his memoir describing this scene before moving on to the next event. In another example, he was working with a man at the mine who was on the verge of death. Seeing that this man was going to die soon, a guard came up from behind him and broke his spine with a sledgehammer. The man was then tossed

[58] Applebaum, *Gulag*, xxxix.
[59] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 271.
[60] Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, issuing body. *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services: A Treatment Improvement Protocol* (Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014), 63.
[61] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 99.

into a pit of corpses.[62] Leonid provided no emotional response to this, as he stated that the horror of the event left him and his comrades "transfixed."[63] The fact that he told it without emotions shows how deeply these events affected him–and these are only two stories out of hundreds. At some point, Leonid had to adapt to the environment he lived in. He had to learn to stop feeling.

Controlling their reaction to humiliation was a crucial step in the process of not feeling. Besides being treated like a unit of labor, guards purposely treated inmates inhumanely. From the moment Leonid arrived at Shpalernaya prison, he experienced his first medical and physical bodily search. He was told to "strip naked" and "bend over!" followed by the guards poking and prodding at his most intimate parts.[64] By "betraying" the Soviet Union, Leonid lost his right to privacy in every sense of the word. These bodily searches continued on a biweekly basis in the prison, and served as a constant reminder that prisoners did not deserve their dignity.

Another method of avoidance was through distraction. As Arsenii wrote to his wife, Anna, he slept, read, went to the movies, and "most important," he tried "to think as little as possible."[65] He later sent a letter describing how sometimes he just wanted to wail, "but nature did not short-change [him] on strength of will," so he focused his energy on working instead.[66] Arsenii used labor to distract himself from his grief. Even more, he used a traditionally masculine trait to his advantage. Manliness–the root of his dignity–meant being strong willed and a laborer. Thus, if he leaned into his labor to distract himself from his trauma, he could retain his dignity and his sanity.

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[62] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 112.
[63] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 112.
[64] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 12; Barnes, *Death and Redemption,* 53.
[65] The Gulag administration sometimes granted laborers, such as Arsenii, the privilege of going into town to watch films at the local theatre. On other occasions, movies would be played in camp itself to boost the morale of deserving prisoners. Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, Dmitri Formakov, and Evgenia Formakova, August 10, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 62.
[66] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, June 23, 1946, in *Gulag* Letters, 205.

Nevertheless, some thoughts broke through. Especially in cases of PTSD, intrusive recollection of trauma is a common, yet inevitable, symptom.[67] It was not that the men necessarily prevented these thoughts from coming up, but they chose not to entertain them. If they did, they faced reconciling with their realities. For example, Arsenii wrote to his wife, Anna, that when he started "thinking about things seriously" he realized that "seven years are gone."[68] This reveals Arsenii's trauma as losing seven years of his life to prison. Arsenii needed to ignore his trauma and distract himself because if he continued to entertain this thought, he would slip into a depression that could risk his survival.

Similarly, Yevgeny told his wife, Nina, that he "could write" about the living conditions, but didn't want to. Still, he provided a glance into his life alongside common criminals, listing "swearing, a lack of privacy, inconsiderate behavior, and the absence of both physical and moral hygiene."[69] Alongside these more concrete issues, we can assume from his comment on the "physical and moral hygiene" that Yevgeny also witnessed gang violence. Not only did gang members tend to live outside the rules of social order (such as waging bets for the price of a man's life), but they also generated a culture of sexual violence throughout all the camps on men and women alike.[70] Gang rape was a huge and extremely violent issue for women and smaller men in the camps, leading men to perform manliness in order to avoid being targeted in this way.[71] They had to present themselves as tough, aloof, and physically dangerous.[72] Of course, even if they protected themselves, this did not prevent them from witnessing sexual violence.

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[67] Gordon and Alpert, "Psychological Trauma," 491.
[68] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, June 22, 1947, in *Gulag Letters*, 236.
[69] Yevgeny Yablokov to Nina Yablokova, n.d., in *My Father's Letters*, 75.
[70] Wilson Bell, "Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24 no. 2 (2015): 199.
[71] Applebaum, *Gulag*, 171; Amy Randall, "Soviet and Russian Masculinities: Rethinking Soviet Fatherhood after Stalin and Renewing Virility in the Russian Nation under Putin," *The Journal of Modern History* 92 (2020): 863.
[72] Perales, "Like Father, Like Son," 401.

The severity of the violence that Yevgeny witnessed is revealed in his need to comment on it to his wife. Sometimes, little acts of acknowledging trauma can help relieve the overwhelming amounts of stress that accompany it.

When men did not manage their stress properly, whether from their thoughts, environment, or job, they got sick. Illness was a crucial reminder of the men's fragility, as it left them to sit alone in their thoughts surrounded by other men who were all competing for survival. For example, when Arsenii got dysentery, the clinic he went to did not have any medicine for him, and his condition worsened rapidly. Within weeks, the medical staff transferred him from a smaller room for four to a larger room "where candidates for the other world" resided. [73] He recalled how the death that surrounded him stole all of his hope for ever seeing his family again. Leonid experienced a similar feeling when he was in the medical ward with a broken leg. He, too, was disturbed by the corpses that were brought in every day of the three months he stayed there.[74] Outside of the medical ward, men could distract themselves with work, and other social events; but in the medical ward, men faced the reality of death and pushed their will power to its limit.

Fortunately, comradery with fellow brigade members came to save them. In Arsenii's case, a nurse informed him of a folk remedy that his friends could acquire ingredients for in the forest. His friends gladly helped him, and he got better within a matter of days. Arsenii noted in his memoir, "it's good to feel a strong hand of a comrade under your elbow!"[75] Though these men were competing for survival, it did not have to always be this way. In fact, they were better

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[73] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 65, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[74] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag*, 128.
[75] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 66, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

off if they relied on each other for a multitude of reasons. If they had a group of friends, they could make money through trading goods or services, they had extra protection from criminal gangs, and they had extra help in the workforce as needed.

Still, friends could never replace family, and all four men missed their family terribly. Formakov told of a time he came across a young boy named Valerka who was on his way to school. After talking to the boy for a bit, he figured that his son, Dmitri, was probably the same age, the same height, and also attending school. Upon realizing this, Arsenii lamented that it never occurred to him that his son was growing up so fast. He remembered being a teacher and dreaming of the day that he would teach his son to read and write, but now his son was growing up thousands of miles away.[76]

Nonetheless, when Arsenii finally made contact with his family after the Red Army freed Latvia from German occupation in 1944, he "wept with joy."[77] After four years of living in the ambiguity of his family's status and clinging to the hope that they were alive, Arsenii was finally relieved of this pain. He wrote to his aunt that hearing of Dmitri's literacy and Evgenia's high spirit was "the most precious news" for him to have received.[78] He was overjoyed to see the "large handwriting" of his son and the "first drawings" by his daughter. To him, this correspondence brought him the community and emotional support he needed to keep surviving.

Mikhail, on the other hand, found himself disappointed in his support system. He noted in a letter that he loved his daughter and wife "for some reason," but the love had "dampened" and that he couldn't "pinpoint it again until it drie[d] out."[79] Distancing oneself from loved ones is a

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[76] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 64, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[77] Arsenii Formakov to Mariia Ananievna Vysotskaia, October 1, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 67.
[78] Arsenii Formakov to Mariia Ananievna Vysotskaia, October 1, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 67.
[79] Mikhail Lebedev to Yanina Lebedeva and Felya Lebedeva, February 22, 1939, in *My Father's Letters,* 102.

common aspect of trauma and is usually motivated by feelings of guilt or hopelessness.[80] Here Mikhail describes his love as damp, or wet, resembling feeling weighed down as compared to light and airy–his depression overtook the lightness of his love for his wife and daughter. Mikhail allowed himself into the forbidden head space and was struggling to find a way out.

As a Father

Still, staying connected to their families was a major part of the non-narrative healing methods that men employed. A common way individuals in the Gulags coped with their PTSD was by caring for the individuals that they associated their trauma with (i.e. family separation)–their close family bonds served as their life preserver.[81] By writing letters, captives leaned into the strength of their family ties and were able to preserve their identity as fathers.

The first paternal role the men played was as a disciplinarian. While mothers were in charge of the material well-being of their children, disciplining behavior was a crucial part of raising morally educated Soviet citizens, and this responsibility fell to the father.[82] In elite families, discipline relied on reason over physical punishment.[83] Through letters the fathers constantly reminded their children to listen to their mothers and be on their best behavior. For example, Arsenii reminded Dmitri and Evgenia to be "neat and clean; don't be fussy," qualifying that when he returned, they "can be naughty and fuss as much as [they] like."[84] Yevgeny wrote to his son, Yuri, to love his mother and sister, and by love he meant that Yuri should "be good to them."[85] Along with the personal satisfaction of maintaining the identity as father, they also showed support to their spouses who were having to parent on their own. By disciplining their

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[80] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* 272.
[81] Gheith, "I Never Talked," 166; Don Catherall, *Handbook of Stress, Trauma, and the Family*, 17.
[82] Ewing, "'If the Teacher Were a Man'," 117.
[83] Kelly, *Children's World*, 382.
[84] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, Dmitri Formakov, and Evgenia Formakova, August 10, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 60-61.
[85] Yevgeny Yablokov to Yuri Yablokov, n.d., in *My Father's Letters*, 56.

children in this way, the men asserted themselves as responsible fathers, an idea that was heavily pressed in the 1930s alongside the pro-natalist propaganda.[86]

This disciplinarian role was prioritized most between the fathers and their sons, and it was shaped by a desire to inculcate manliness.[87] For example, after Dmitri shared that he watched the film, *Valery Chkalov*, Arsenii pointed out "what a brave and strong man" Valery was, "but how he suffered at first from being disobedient."[88] In the movie, Chkalov gets fired from the army for disobeying authority, only to later get recruited by a company to test out a new high-speed plane. Months later, Chkalov attends an aeronautics festival and takes part in a dog fight while flying the faster prototype plane. After he wins the dogfight, he discovers that his plane's left landing gear is not engaging properly, and he cannot land. Stalin, who happens to be attending the festival as an observer, sees Chkalov's struggle and demands that he abandon his aircraft immediately. Chkalov ignores the order. Stalin then demands again, sending another message to abort immediately. Chkalov ignores this order once more, but finally engages his landing gear properly and lands safely. When Stalin approaches Chkalov afterward, he tells Chkalov to never disobey his orders again, for his life is more important than the prototype's. Shaken by this reality check, Chkalov finally obeys and eventually becomes the most successful pilot in the Soviet Union.[89] By telling Dmitri that Chkalov was only a brave and strong man because he obeyed Stalin, Arsenii ironically reinforced the same gendered hierarchy that he suffered from.

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[86] Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values,* 109.
[87] Catriona Kelly, "The Education of the Will: Advice Literature, *Zakal*, and Manliness in Early-Twentieth Century Russia," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. by Barbara Evans Clements, et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 142; Kelly, *Children's World*, 378-379.
[88] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 131, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[89] *Valery Chkalov,* directed by Mikhail Kalatozov (Lenfilm, 1941). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o4OduNEnP4&list=PLegrlK3pWjIVQGf60r-n9kFzlF7uNzsbR&index=6.

Arsenii and Dmitri's relationship remains an interesting case in a few other examples. Once, when Arsenii confessed to Anna that he felt like crying but was determined not to, he added, "Men don't cry (that's for Dima!)."[90] Thus, not only was proper masculine behavior being obedient, but it is also not being overly emotional. Arsenii led by example as he voiced his feelings of despair but had enough self-restraint to hold back his tears.

Arsenii also encouraged Dmitri to be the leader, or "man" of the house. He gave Dmitri the assignment of helping Anna however he could, specifically telling him that if he sees Evgenia getting out of line, "kiss her on the forehead and say, 'That is from Papa. He wants you to always be good.'"[91] So, Dmitri not only learned by example, but also by experience. When Arsenii asked Dmitri to fill his shoes, one can assume that Dmitri understood the weight of this responsibility. To be the man of the house is to be the leader, and nine-year-old Dmitri was already being initiated into this hierarchy of power.

Yevgeny stood as a similar example of encouraging behavior specifically for his son. He wrote to Yuri that he understood "absolutely everything" Yuri wrote in his letters, "especially the parts where you express your feelings," but shifted the letter to celebrate Yuri caring for his sister when she was sick by making her pancakes.[92] Here, Yevgeny encouraged Yuri's emotions, but redirected the energy of his letter to not linger on the emotions. He encouraged Yuri to continue to emote up to the line of no tears and practice his strong will in spite of hardship.

Sociologists have found that fathers communicate gendered standards to their children, particularly sons. Even more, fathers who are less directly involved with raising their children

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[90] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, Dmitri Formakov, and Evgenia Formakova, July 28, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 58.
[91] Arsenii Formakov to Dmitri Formakov, December 8, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 74.
[92] Yevgeni Yablokov to Yuri Yablokov, December 22, 1940, in *My Father's Letters*, 72.

are more likely to encourage gendered norms in their sons.[93] Although the men were helpless in their situation, they fell in line with this trend. It seems that sharing biological sex warrants fathers to create opportunities to pass down "desirable" behaviors in line with hegemonic masculinity.[94] As Arsenii taught these behaviors to Dmitri, and Yevgeny to Yuri, they perpetuated their masculinity intergenerationally.

Outside of being a disciplinarian, fathers also educated their children.[95] Arsenii was a particular proponent of this behavior. When Evgenia started reading, Arsenii sent her post cards with big block letters and words that were easy for a young child to read. He also sent Dmitri extremely legible cursive, down to lines placed below the "Ш."[96] Arsenii once joked that his children should be careful with how much they read, or they might end up with a head bigger than their shoulders can carry. To reinforce his joke, he drew an example of what this would look like.[97] Moments like these show the immense care that Arsenii had for his children. Having been a teacher himself, Arsenii knew the importance of education and the power an educated person yielded in Soviet society. Thus, in assisting in their education in this way, Arsenii's care lay in the hope for his children's future.

Once Dmitri got older, Arsenii and Anna had a conversation regarding his piano education. Anna was determined to teach their son piano, but Arsenii advised her to let the state organizations do it, for it would be better for her and Dmitri both. Arsenii apologized for intruding on "all this from afar," but contested that this was the best course of action. Here,

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[93] Michele Adams and Scott Coltrane, "Boys and Men in Families," in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. by Michael S. Kimmel, et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 235.
[94] Francisco Perales, "Like Father, Like Son," 401.
[95] Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 105.
[96] Arsenii Formakov to Dmitri Formakov, December 8, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 72-73; Due to the similar shapes present in Russian cursive, it is customary for those learning to place helpful markers around certain letters. Particularly letters that tend to look similar or mesh with other letters too smoothly. Such is the case in words where "ш" and "и" are next to each other.
[97] Arsenii Formakov to Dmitri Formakov, December 8, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 73.

Arsenii asserted himself as a decision maker for him and Anna. Another example of this was when Arsenii heard of Dmitri's poor grades and told Anna to allow Dmitri to be held back for a year.[98] While Anna ran the household, she still requested her husband's advice and allowed him to make the final decision–even when he was thousands of miles away.[99]

Yevgeny similarly involved himself in his children's education. For Yuri's twelfth birthday Yevgeny wrote "above all you must study." Doing so, he explained to Yuri, would help him achieve his dreams. Yevgeny saw that his son still had the potential for greatness and strongly encouraged Yuri to chase it. This moment is an example of Yevgeny's deep parental desire for his son to do better than himself.[100]

In another instance, Yevgeny told his daughter, Irina, that he felt "such a strong desire" to share his thoughts with her and Yuri, and expressed that, "life has such a wonderful potential, and yet so much of it is terrible…it is really only faith, faith in goodness, that saves us from despondency and sustains us."[101] Considering Yevgeny's circumstances, it is striking that he wrote to his daughter with such hope for her life. This shows the reflection he's undertook as he approached the end of his life, as well as his care in passing his life lessons onto them.

Along these lines, fathers also empathized with what their children had to endure and shared their love and endearment through letters. When Mikhail learned that Felya and Yanina were starving because they couldn't find work after his arrest, he protested, "A daughter is not responsible for her father, and yet your punishment has proven to be worse than my own."[102] In reference to Stalin's infamous saying that a child was not responsible for their father, Mikhail

[98] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, February 9, 1946, in *Gulag Letters*, 182.
[99] H. Kent Geiger refers to this as "ritual paternalism;" Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 228.
[100] Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia,* 171.
[101] Yevgeny Yablokov to Irina Yablokova, n.d., in *My Father's Letters*, 59.
[102] Mikhail Lebedev to Yanina Lebedeva, September 26, 1938, in *My Father's Letters*, 99.

pointed out the ironic reality that followed Stalin saying this. Mikhail was correct in saying that his wife and daughter suffered more than he in some ways. It was a fact that while he was malnourished, he at least had a ration of food to eat each day, a place to stay, and lived in a community of people who were not concerned with social status in the same ways that people in the cities were. For Mikhail's wife and daughter, they had to endure social punishment, starvation, and the threat of homelessness. In writing this letter, Mikhail knew he was powerless, so he did the only thing he could–he empathized and supported his family through their suffering.

Around the holidays, Arsenii found himself in a similar situation of powerlessness and as a result sent his children drawings and paintings. Arsenii's custom made postcards were a testament to the love, care, and intention he put into each of his correspondences with his children. For example, on the front of one postcard a watercolor polar bear, mouse, squirrel, fox, and rabbit sit around a fir tree in the snow. The tree is decorated with around twenty candles and a red star at the top. Above the tree and snowscape, the moon hangs in the sky, happily looking down at the creatures celebrating below. At the bottom of the card reads, "Happy Holidays!" *(С Праздником!)* in a sweeping blue font.[103] For another postcard Arsenii drew *Ded Moroz*, or Grandfather Frost, who comes to bring presents to children on New Years Eve. On the front, *Ded Moroz* sits between two bright eyed bunnies, one playing a horn and the other dancing in a dress. *Ded Moroz's* round, red, face is squished between his full, white beard and fur toque, and he celebrates with the bunnies by playing an accordion.[104] These two cards are significant because they celebrate the most popular Russian holiday, which is often spent with family. In confronting

[103] Postcard from Arsenii Formakov to Evgenia Formakova, Dec 1945, Box 1, folder 1, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[104] Postcard from Arsenii Formakov to Evgenia Formakova, Dec 8, 1946, Box 1, folder 1, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

the fact that he could not see his children for the multiple years in a row, Arsenii was helpless, yet chose to channel his hurt into love and care for his family.

As a Husband

When the men needed more mature support, they looked to their marital relationships. After all, their wives knew them the most intimately and often suffered alongside their husbands, whether from getting arrested themselves or getting caught up in the crossfire of World War II. Upon learning of their wives' bravery, husbands expressed immense reverence for their wives and celebrated the strength shown in the face of such hardship.

For instance, after four years of silence, in 1944 Arsenii finally learned of his family's safety and Anna's triumphs during the war. Anna stilled lived in Dvinsk when the Nazis invaded Latvia and was forced to flee the city. In a split-second decision, she put one-year-old Evgenia in a stroller, grabbed Dmitri by the hand and fled to a nearby village to stay with a distant relative. When Anna returned to Dvinsk after the dust settled, she was surprised to find their apartment perfectly intact and decided to remain there with the children. Once the air raids began, she hid in a cellar with the children and looped leather bags full of all their information around their neck in the event that she died. Afterward, they emerged from the cellar unscathed but learned that their apartment was not as fortunate. Suddenly homeless, Anna decided to take the children to her mother's home in Riga where they could live out the remainder of their childhood.[105]

Arsenii had two different reactions to this news. At first, he was disheartened by the fact that Anna had to suffer. Similarly to Mikhail's frustration with his wife and daughter's living condition, Arsenii also commented that he "spent those terrible years in tranquility and safety"

[105] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 130, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

compared to the chaos that Anna had to endure.[106] However, this empathy was paired with immense reverence for his wife. Arsenii wrote in his memoir that he had "not ceased to be amazed by [his] wife's extraordinary endurance and self-control."[107] He reflected that in every instance since his arrest, Anna remained courageous in the face of adversity.[108] In revering his wife, Arsenii also highlighted his values of endurance and self-control and celebrated these qualities in his wife. During this time, Anna had to act as both mother and father (nurturer and protecter) and while Arsenii shared his guilt, he was also not afraid to celebrate Anna's achievements. As he proclaimed, "She lived to save her children!"[109] Her actions during the raids showed the utmost courage in Arsenii's eyes further reflecting his appreciation of their partnership and their aligned values.

Leonid also emphasized his wife's bravery as the NKVD arrested Nina three months after Leonid as a "wife of the enemy of the people."[110] Nina told Leonid that for six weeks, she prayed that their arrests were a mistake, and that he would come to rescue her.[111] However, just as Leonid was pushed further into the prison system, so was Nina. She was transported to Tomsk labor camp and served five years there until she was sent into exile in 1942.[112] She was finally released from exile in 1944, upon which she began her search for her family.[113] After reconnecting with their children, Nina started corresponding with Leonid and, once he was released, took the journey to the Far East to be with him. Nina shared with Leonid that she had

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[106] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, December 10, 1944, in *Gulag Letters*, 75.
[107] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 129, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[108] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 129, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[109] Arsenii Formakov Memoir, p. 130, Box 1, folder 14, Arsenii Ivanovich Formakov Papers, 1910's-1983, Hoover Institution Library & Archives.
[110] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 221-222.
[111] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 222.
[112] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 225 and 231.
[113] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 233.

"no one to share [her] grief" with and it led her to almost take her life, but she chose to come and find him instead.[114] Leonid wrote in his memoir that as Nina spoke, he "listened" and couldn't help but admire her strength.[115] While in prison, he and other male prisoners were shocked to hear that the NKVD was also targeting their wives. Leonid felt incredibly guilty that Nina would have to go through all of this trauma just because of him. However, like Arsenii, his guilt was overpowered by his reverence for Nina. There was nothing he could do to prevent her arrest, just like there was nothing Arsenii could do to prevent the Nazi invasion. Instead, the men leaned into what they had control over and chose to celebrate their spouse's strength.

Freed wives reciprocated this support when they sent packages to their husbands, filled with warm clothes, food, and toiletries. Men could use their care packages to many advantages. If they needed items for themselves, such as food with extra nutrients or thick wool socks for the arctic winters, they could use them, but if they wanted to take advantage of their fellow inmates, they requested old newspapers which could be sold for cigarette rolling. Outside of these usual requests, Arsenii also asked for pictures of his family. Receiving photographs allowed him to stay updated on his children and wife's physical status, and ultimately allowed him to see their faces. Neurobiological research has shown that viewing photos of loved ones "activates facial recognition systems" as if the individuals were physically present.[116] Besides seeking updates on his family's appearance, Arsenii enjoyed seeing these pictures because his brain interpreted them similarly to when he was physically with his family, thus bringing him joy and comfort.

This leads into the spouses' companionate relationship. After he received the picture of their family, Arsenii joked with Anna that she managed to only get a picture of their children. He

[114] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 236.
[115] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 236.
[116] Claire White and Daniel M. T. Fessler, "Evolutionizing Grief: Viewing Photographs of the Deceased Predicts the Misattribution of Ambiguous Stimuli by the Bereaved," *Evolutionary Psychology* 11 no. 5 (2013): 1089.

wrote to her that she was "such a tease!" Whereas he has sent her "frightening drawings" of himself, she "managed to wiggle out of getting [her] picture taken" with the children.[117] Arsenii's joking about his wife's behavior harked to a time of normalcy when he lovingly joshed with her. Arsenii couldn't help himself from joking because this is something seemingly typical of Anna. This interaction came so naturally to him that he didn't even need to try to preserve their relationship, their love preserved it for them.

Despite Mikhail's depression isolating him from his love for his family, upon his release he anxiously anticipated their reunion. As he trekked from Kolyma to Ufa, he held in his hands a jar of red caviar. Mikhail must have been starving, desperate to open the jar and consume it for himself, but after he greeted Yanina, he told her, "This is for Mama. She always so loved red caviar and it's difficult to get hold of these days."[118] Sometimes to love is to sacrifice, and for Mikhail, he was dying of stomach cancer, probably compounded by malnutrition, yet took the weeks-long journey not opening the jar because he knew the caviar would make his wife happy. Mikhail knew that he was not the only one suffering–his wife and daughter were starving themselves–so not only is this an act of sacrifice, but an act of compassion.

The more romantic sides of their relationships also came through in the letters. When Arsenii finally got a portrait of Anna, he "smiled with joy" and wrote, "My darling, you are just perfect."[119] Where Arsenii first joked with Anna about her shyness, here Arsenii combined his physical attraction and desire to be with his wife into a pure and loving compliment. Whether she slipped out of the picture because she was shy or didn't think she was pretty due to her aging, Arsenii saw her beauty and reminded her of it.

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[117] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, Dmitri Formakov, and Evgenia Formakova, August 3, 1947, in *Gulag Letters*, 246.
[118] Yanina, *My Father's Letters*, 105.
[119] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, January 20, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 100.

Leonid similarly experienced satisfaction for his physical longing when he saw Nina for the first time after their separation. While Leonid was walking around downtown Seymchan preparing for Nina's arrival, a man informed him that Nina had been looking for him and that he sent her to Leonid's house. Startled by her early arrival, Leonid sprinted home to find Nina standing on the porch waiting for him. He recalled that she "hadn't changed" at all–she was just as beautiful as fifteen years before. Her blue eyes sparkled when she turned to look at him and he "felt like a lovesick teenager."[120] Leonid found himself consumed by Nina's beauty further fueling his desire to be with her.[121] While he admired her strength, seeing her in person allowed Leonid to be with Nina physically, perhaps in more way than one. After being apart for fifteen years, this interaction proves the depth of the love that they had for each other. Further, this moment reinforced his heterosexuality. Leonid flirted with women and constantly reminded his audience of how women viewed him. Upon reuniting with his wife, he thus found himself even more secure in his masculinity.

This brings us to sexual relationships. In the 1930s, Soviet rhetoric regarding sexuality insisted on chastity except for the purposes of procreation. With such demanding labor quotas, one needed to save their energies for work, not waste it on sex.[122] However, one's sexual needs must be met. In the salutation of one of his letters, Arsenii wrote, "Tender kisses and hugs so intense that your back pops."[123] The description of the hug Arsenii provided shows the intentionality he took to get his message across. Psychological findings show that touch is

[120] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 218.
[121] George Levinger and Ted L. Huston, "The Social Psychology of Marriage," in *The Psychology of Marriage: Basic Issues and Applications*, ed. by Frank D. Fincham and Thomas D. Bradbury (New York: Guilford Press, 1990), 27.
[122] Frances Lee Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 7.
[123] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, January 4, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 100.

"intimately related to our self-identity."[124] Arsenii even lamented that *nobody* had touched him in five years, not even accidentally.[125] In an environment where he was being treated as inhuman, Arsenii consistently desired someone to treat him with some dignity–in this case, just by touching him. He confided all of this to Anna not only because he wanted to be touched in general, but because he knew that she still respected him and saw him for who he truly is. She was his sanctuary.

He expressed his appreciation for Anna's sanctuary by writing of his love and desire for her. He wrote, "I encircle your proud neck with a necklace of kisses. I kiss your eyes gently, slowly, and many times."[126] Considering he expected people other than his wife to read these letters, Arsenii used rather erotic language and in doing so let off some of the pressure from his libido. It is common for long-distance couples to engage in sexual fantasies, or mental imagery that sexually arouses an individual, as sexual fantasy is considered a healthy way to find sexual satisfaction.[127] Arsenii wanted Anna to imagine his lips kissing her eyes "gently, slowly, and many times." He called her neck "proud" and celebrated her with his kisses. In sharing this, Arsenii showed Anna his support in a form of intimacy that was perceivably unavailable to them. Further, in the process of creating this imagery, he provided satisfaction for himself.

Still, romance can come with jealousy. Arsenii often worried that his sanctuary would be the last shoe to drop. He heard stories about men who returned only to find their wife married to another man, or who divorced their husbands upon their arrival, and Arsenii communicated these anxieties to Anna with tinges of jealousy. After Anna mentioned a man who recently came to her

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[124] Stanley Jones, *The Right Touch: Understanding and Using the Language of Physical Contact* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1994), 23.
[125] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, February 12, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 107.
[126] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, July 30, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 148.
[127] Justin J. Lehmiller, *The Psychology of Human Sexuality* (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 232.

aid, Arsenii wrote, “Who is that E or Ye who has appeared ‘in your life?’ I will break his ribs!!!”[128] Psychologically, romantic jealousy is understood as complex emotions or actions that responds to a perceived “loss of or threat to self-esteem” or “quality of the romantic relationship,” to a real or imagined individual.[129] While this “E” or “Ye” individual physically existed, his threat to Arsenii’s marriage was questionable. Arsenii’s response is notably masculine too, as he chose violence.[130] It is almost a performance to show Anna that he will fight for her, and that he is a strong, macho man. In the context of Arsenii’s circumstances and behavior, it seems that he was equally concerned with losing his marriage and the threat to his self-esteem. In fact, he was so fixated on the idea of adultery that he updated Anna on his own loyalty, informing her that he was so malnourished that he couldn’t get an erection for the past four years.[131] This way, she would know that they were both accountable to their vows of loyalty.

Even more, Arsenii commented on the sexual behavior of his fellow inmates, specifically the female inmates. He wrote to Anna about how he looked down on women who became lovers of men to get by.[132] This could be in line with the sexual propaganda of the time, which solely promoted sexually moral relationships, however, what these women were doing was not necessarily immoral.[133] While they bartered their sex for protection or goods, scholar Wilson Bell differentiates this from prostitution because women had different options for survival as compared to men.[134] There were also different societal rules and conditions in the camps that

[128] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, March 30, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 122.
[129] Gregory White and Paul Mullen, *Jealousy: Theory, Research, and Clinical Strategies* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1989), 9.
[130] White and Mullen, *Jealousy*, 129.
[131] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, February 20, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 110.
[132] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, June 26, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, Formakov, 145.
[133] Bell, “Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag,” 205.
[134] Bell, “Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag,” 215.

altered the meanings of their sexual bartering.[135] Even still, male political prisoners accused women of being morally weaker than men for this behavior.[136]

In these ways, men could engage with their sexuality, and women couldn't because women were too tempting. Leonid was a great example of this double standard, as he benefitted from it often. While he was loyally in love with and dedicated to Nina, he recalled many instances of women flirting with him in his memoir. In one instance, some women who worked in tree felling with him once asked him, "Leonid Petrovich, do you like me?" to which he simply responded, "Yes." In between these lines of text, though, he wrote that in confirming this woman's question, he could only think of his wife's curly brown hair and blue eyes.[137] He was conflicted by the double standard in which he lived. He remained loyal to his wife, but his participation in flirting outside of his marriage made him miss Nina more.

A few years later, while Leonid was in exile, he went to get tea and watch a movie with an "attractive nurse" named Aleksandra and "felt ashamed" when all her coworkers stared at them.[138] However, his shame did not come from cheating on his wife, but from his status as a freed prisoner who was dating a nurse–all while he is still sending money to his wife and children. Here we must ask, what was Leonid's motivation in entertaining these women who were not his wife? His actions continue to tell us in another instance, when he was working in a bookkeeping office in Seymchan. He described one of his subordinates as "attractive," and "sexy," noting that she would swing her hips when she walked. This woman approached him once, "cooing, 'Leonid Petrovich, we're all interested in you," and asked while gesturing to her

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[135] Bell, "Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag," 206.
[136] Applebaum, *Gulag,* 308.
[137] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 187.
[138] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 212.

coworkers, "'Don't you want one of us as a wife?'"[139] Leonid entertained their offer, joking around while they showed off their "shapely legs," but finally stated, "'Girls, I'm happily married," and refused them. Still, he reflected that he "liked their lush breasts," and wondered when women's breasts grew so much, as they were never that big before his arrest.[140]

Leonid's behavior can be explained as H. Kent Geiger's term, *Nichevo men*, or "so what?" men. These men are reflections of the dehumanization they experienced in the Gulag as their main goal post-incarceration was to project their dignity onto the world, including their manliness.[141] In these examples, Leonid performed his manliness by objectifying women. Each time he mentioned a woman outside of Nina, he disclosed nothing but physical lust. He loved their breasts, thin figures, hair, and eyes. While this was definitely compounded by a strong and unattended sexual desire, it was mainly driven by a need to reestablish his dignity from where he left it.

Finally, men were emotional leaders for their wives. Arsenii wrote to Anna, that he appreciated her sharing her "tears, bitter thoughts, and anguish," concluding with the rhetorical question, "who better to complain to than to me?"[142] While he restricted himself from showing all emotion, he found that allowing his wife to openly grieve reasserted his necessity in their relationship. Arsenii continued this role again during his second sentence, when Dmitri tragically died from drowning in a river. He wrote to Anna that writing couldn't possibly heal the wound that this tragedy left behind, so he told her, "We can and should only weep together."[143] Arsenii took control of the situation from afar and put himself in a necessary position. This was not

[139] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 214.
[140] Bolotov, *Twenty Years in a Siberian Gulag,* 214.
[141] Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia,* 242.
[142] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakov, January 25, 1945, in *Gulag Letters*, 102.
[143] Arsenii Formakov to Anna Formakova, January 2, 1952, in *Gulag Letters*, 268.

malicious, but subconscious–the man is the leader of the family, and now that the only other man was gone Arsenii needed to reassert his role at the head of the family.

Mikhail also encouraged Felya emotionally in his letters. After learning that Felya reread his letters every day, he wrote to her that, "Picking at and reopening wounds may well seem preferable to leaving them be and distracting yourself from them, but it is not helpful." He concluded his point with some tough love, writing, "It is time, already high time, to buck up!"[144] He reasoned with his wife that once she began to feel better, he would too. For Mikhail, his emotional leadership allowed him to assert his necessity, but also ensure his own happiness. He already felt the pressure of his family's situation on his shoulders, so his means of problem solving was to encourage his family to cheer up. At times, it came off as a bit insensitive–telling someone who is rereading your letters out of love to "buck up!" doesn't necessarily read as "I love you too!"–but Mikhail was motivated by survival. If anything more happened to his family because of his arrest and incarceration, his survival would be threatened. However, his daughter, Yanina, reflected that her mother was not as faint hearted as Mikhail's letters imply.[145] So, perhaps Mikhail read his own situation into the letters. Or, perhaps, in the privacy of her letters with her husband, Mikhail's wife shared her sorrows with him and saved face for Nina. Regardless, their main motivation was to survive long enough to reunite again.

Conclusion: A New Normal

Masculinity played a major role in the traumas these men experienced and methods of survival that they utilized. In their familial roles of fathers and husbands, they were able to maintain their strength through the inhumanity that they endured while incarcerated. These familial roles were based on the ideas that align with modern ideas of hegemonic masculinity,

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[144] Mikhail Lebedev to Yanina Lebedeva, July 2, 1938, in *My Father's Letters*, 97.
[145] Yanina Lebedeva, *My Father's Letters*, 100.

that emphasize lack of emotion, strength, power, and heterosexuality. The men also fulfilled roles expected of them by the Soviet state, such as being role models and educators. It is clear that those who survived successfully maintained their identities, however, these identities were further complicated upon their release.

For the men who were able to reunite with their families, they needed to adjust to their new realities. Over the course of up to twenty years, they went through two major life changes: leaving society, then reintegrating into society. By the time many of them were fully released and rehabilitated the Soviet Union was no longer the terror filled state it once was. Within their families, some of their children had children of their own and husbands had to adjust to living with their wives again for the first time in over a decade. As they adjusted to their new environments, some men tried to return to “normal” role patterns in place of acknowledging their trauma.[146] While they could have shared with their families, some refrained out of fear of experiencing it all over again. However, if they did not acknowledge it, the trauma would eat them alive.

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[146] Catherall, *Handbook of Stress, Trauma, and the Family,* 56.

Chapter 2: Mothers & Wives

During the Stalin Era, women were the weight bearing pillars of Soviet society. By fulfilling the roles of laborer, mother, and wife, women were the reason the regime functioned as well as it did.[1] For who would make the meals for the men, raise the children, and contribute to the rapid industrialization of the first communist country in the world without them? For elite women, these three identities were sources of pride.

Consequently, The Great Purge dealt a huge blow to their overall identity, as their husband's arrest undermined women's dignity. However, this was not the end of the terror. On August 15, 1937, Yezhov released Order No. 00486 which called for the arrests of the wives of the enemies of the people, leaving their children either with family members or to be sent to state orphanages.[2] Two months after the release of Order No. 00486, Yezhov reported that the NKVD had arrested eighteen thousand wives.[3] Quickly, women whose husbands had been arrested just months before, were arrested themselves. The final string holding their families together was cut in an instant. The following year, Lavrentiy Beria, Yezhov's replacement as the head of the NKVD, released Order No. 00689. This order responded to the overcrowding of prison cells by encouraging NVKD officers to exile women instead of arresting them, unless the wife seemed capable of counterrevolutionary activity herself.[4]

The women analyzed in this chapter are Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, Ludmila Miklashevskaya, and Anna Larina. Each woman was educated, married to a man of elite status, and had children prior to her arrest. Additionally, Olga and Ludmila worked while Anna did not.

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[1] Melanie Ilič, *Soviet Women–Everyday Lives* (New York: Taylor & Routledge, 2020), 7.
[2] People's Commissioner of Internal Affairs of the USSR, *Operative Order of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of S.S.R. No. 00486*, August 15, 1937, from *Vikiteka*, https://ru.wikisource.org.
[3] Melanie Ilic, "The Forgotten Five per cent: Women, Political Repression and the Purges," in *Stalin's Terror Revisited*, ed. by Melanie Ilič (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 128.
[4] People's Commissioner of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Operative Order of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of S.S.R. No. 00689, October 17, 1938, from *Vikiteka*, https://ru.wikisource.org.

Their identities as elite wives and mothers made the dehumanization process far more traumatic for them as compared to peasants who were used to ill treatment. I argue that the wives of the enemies of the people survived their traumas by maintaining their roles as wives and mothers, regardless of whether these identities still existed for them.

Memoirs

Unlike the letters of the previous chapter, this chapter primarily uses memoirs to understand the trauma and survival of wives of the enemies of the people. As compared to letters, memoirs hold different kinds of details and emotional memories. Where letters are specific and written in the moment, censorship often strips them of necessary details of traumatic events. Memoirs are more equipped to fill in these gaps, however they also have moments of fallacy.

For instance, the author maintains great authority over how readers interpret the described events.[5] Memoirists frequently paint their lives in the ways they wish to be viewed, like omitting details that would make them look bad or complicate their innocence. Memoirs also tend to have a tension between fact and aesthetic. In the three cases studied here, each memoirist took pride in her ability to write beautiful prose and fluffed up her memories for the sake of entertainment and literary ideals. However, this literary approach can also immerse the reader into the world and encourage empathy. As historian R.G. Collingwood noted in his book *Ideas of History,* memoirs divide history into thoughts versus what actually happened.[6] It has long been established that historians can never be objective, for history is a kaleidoscope of perspectives–

[5] Gullotta, "Trauma and Self in the Soviet Context: Remarks on Gulag Writings," 76.
[6] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 215.

even with supposedly factual documentation like government records.[7] Memoirs allow historians to see these various perspectives and piece together a history that is more accurate to the past "on its own terms."[8]

Nonetheless, the purpose for which I use their memoirs minimizes the impact of factual inaccuracies. I primarily rely on their traumatic memories and symptoms, all of which are explicitly described in the texts, to understand their trauma and survival before, during, and after their imprisonment. Much of the primary source material discusses the destruction of their families by the Soviet state, and survivors used their memoirs as an important step in their recovery process.[9]

For example, due to the lack of writing materials Olga Adamova-Sliozberg first wrote her memoir in her head while imprisoned in the late 1930s, later manifesting her memories in ink in 1946 while she temporarily lived in Moscow after completing her sentence. However, she was so scared of having potentially criminalizing documentation in her possession that she buried it in the garden of her family dacha. When she returned to find her manuscript in the 1950s, she couldn't remember where she buried it and was left to rewrite–and relive–her memories all over again.[10]

Besides the brief period of relief from censorship regarding the Gulag under Khrushchev, until the late 1980s, Gulag survivors were discouraged from discussing their traumas. While I will discuss the different ways they survived through "non-narrative" healing, in their final years

[7] Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Building a Bridge of Words: The Literary Autobiography and Historical Source Material," *Biography* 29, no. 3 (2006): 450. It should be noted that government records are notoriously falsified in Soviet history, leading many Soviet historians to research suspiciously.
[8] Wallach, "Building a Bridge of Words," 448.
[9] Dovilė Budrytė, "Deportation and Gulag as a Gendered Process," in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia, 1st edition,* ed by Katalin Fabian, et al (London: Routledge, 2021), 325.
[10] Katherine Gratwick Baker, "Introduction," in *My Journey: How One Woman Survived Stalin's Gulag* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), xx.

of life, each of these women took advantage of *glastnost'*, or Gorbachev's policy of openness, to finally engage in their much-needed narrative healing.[11] During this time, each woman's memoir was published either in full or in segments in mainstream media.[12]

Meet the Women

Olga Adamova-Sliozberg was born in Samara, Russia in 1902 to an intelligentsia family that valued education, and she moved to Moscow when she was 16 to study at the university. In 1928, she married a biology professor, Yudel Zakgeim, and together they started their family. In 1930 they had their son, Alexander, closely followed by their daughter, Elga, in 1932.

On April 27, 1936, four months after the NKVD arrested Yudel, Olga returned from an economics conference to NKVD agents waiting at her door.[13] She let them in and set to organizing her notes from the conference, convinced that her boss would want them despite her arrest. After their search, the investigator interrupted her organizing, suggesting that she say goodbye to her children. Within that moment, Olga melted into reality. Only when she kissed her daughter, Elga's, sleeping head did she realize "what it meant to be choked with tears."[14] She could hardly breathe, but she was determined to not let her wide-awake son see her grief.

A troika charged Olga under Article 58 for being recruited into a terrorist organization by her husband. They sentenced her to eight years of incarceration in prison and four years of exile. Olga remained in the prison system until the NKVD adjusted her sentence in 1939, and transferred her to Kolyma.[15] She completed her sentence in 1944, but was later rearrested in 1948 following the NKVD's rearrest order. During her first term, Olga learned of Yudel's death

[11] Gorbachev introduced *perestroika* in 1986 and continued this policy through the final years of the Soviet Union.
[12] As opposed to *samizdat.*
[13] It is unclear why Olga and Yudel were arrested so much earlier than everyone else as they were not Party members. This requires further research by someone with access to their arrest paperwork.
[14] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 11.
[15] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 66.

sentence and remarried Nikolai Vasilevich Adamov while in Kolyma. She was finally rehabilitated along with Yudel in 1956, followed by her writing and publishing her memoir, *My Journey (Put')* in *samizdat* in 1964, and in full in 2002.[16]

Our next subject is Ludmila Miklashevskaya who was born in 1899 in Odessa, Ukraine (then the Russian Empire). In the late 1920s, Ludmila met and cohabitated with her second (unregistered) husband, Izya Trotsky, in Leningrad. During her first marriage, Ludmila was desperate for a child, but was unsuccessful as her ex-husband forced her to have two abortions. When she found out about her first pregnancy with Izya, she begged him to not force her to abort the child, but was convinced to go to the clinic anyway. Fortunately for her, a third abortion would have threatened her wellbeing, and she was able to keep the child. She gave birth to her daughter, Elena, in 1930.

Ludmila was on a trip with Elena when Izya was arrested in 1936, and she immediately returned to Leningrad to protest his arrest.[17] While she and Izya were not officially married, her protests labeled her as a wife of an enemy of the people and allowed the NKVD to exile her to Arkhangelsk in July 1937.[18]

Ten months later, at one in the morning, Ludmila awoke to a firm pounding at her door and voices arguing outside. She groggily answered it to find two NKVD agents standing at the entrance, who showed her their warrant for her arrest. Rushing to her trembling daughter, Ludmila tried to explain that it was all a mistake, that everything would work out and she would return soon. However, Elena quickly observed that "Papa did not do anything bad" and he had

[16] *Samizdat* are underground, usually dissident, self-published pamphlets or newspapers.
[17] Ludmila Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia: A Life in the Shadow of Stalin's Terror,* trans. by Elaine MacKinnon (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 165.
[18] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 168.

not returned yet.[19] Determined to comfort her daughter, Ludmila ignored the comment, instead offering her a book and stuffed monkey. Even this was not enough as Elena cried, "What will I do without you mommy!"[20] Ludmila could not break her brave face and risk undermining her mission of comforting her daughter, so she grabbed another special item–a tiny carved tusk in the shape of a walrus called Tiutia–and handed it to Elena. Elena knew that this was an item Ludmila cherished deeply, so she stopped crying and wrapped her arms around her mother. Ludmila would have rather died than let go of her daughter in that moment. In her memoir, Ludmila described this moment as clear and vivid in her memory, showing the significance of its traumatic impacts.

Ludmila was initially charged under Article 58 for not informing on her husband, but this was later switched to her supposedly forming a terrorist organization that killed Yezhov.[21] Ludmila served at the Siberian camp, Viatlag, from September 1939 until her release in 1948. She, too, was rearrested that same year not to be released until Stalin's death in 1953, followed by her and Izya's rehabilitation in June 1956. She wrote her memoir, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia (Povtorenie proidennogo: zhenskie sud'by, XX vek)* just before her death in 1977, and it was published in segments in 1989.

Anna Larina, the third memoirist, was born in 1914 and was the daughter of famous Bolshevik, Yuri Larin. Anna grew up in the milieu of the Moscow elites, one with whom she often interacted was Nikolai Bukharin, who was twenty-six years her senior.[22] They married in 1934 and had their son, Yuri, in 1936.

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[19] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 178.
[20] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 178.
[21] MacKinnon, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 13.
[22] While Nikolai Bukharin was best known by his surname, I will also be addressing him by his first name as this is how Anna addressed him, and I wish to maintain this intimacy throughout my story telling.

After Nikolai was arrested in February 1937, the NKVD targeted Anna and exiled her to Astrakhan, where they arrested her in September 1937.[23] She was charged with participation in a terrorist conspiracy with her husband and sentenced to eight years of hard labor, though she served most of her time in solitary confinement at Lubyanka prison in Moscow. It wasn't until 1941 that she was transferred to Yeisk camp and then Iskitim camp in western Siberia. After her release she remained exiled in Tisul until 1959, when she moved to Moscow to start her petition for Nikolai's rehabilitation. She successfully rehabilitated Nikolai while publishing segments of her memoir, *This I Cannot Forget (Nezabyvaemoe)* in 1988.

As a Woman

Being a woman in the Soviet penal system came with its own set of challenges. While men and women experienced practically the same events and situations, the meanings of these events and situations varied by gendered identity. As Olga stepped into the narrow prisoner compartments of the dark green van known as the Black Crow, NKVD agents transported her to Lubyanka prison where her traumatic responses started to set in.

Situated in the heart of Moscow as the headquarters of the NKVD, Lubyanka prison concealed terror within its walls. Still, Lubyanka was arguably one of the best kept prisons in the Soviet penal system, with "gleaming white" tiles in the showers and "polished parquet floors."[24] Regular prison cells, where Olga resided, had six beds, equipped with sheets, pillows, and blankets, separated by a narrow walkway. From the center of the ceiling, a single lightbulb lit the room, never to turn off. The cell's large window taunted prisoners, as a screen prevented sunlight, air, and the life of Moscow from breaking through.[25] A thick steel door with a small

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[23] Anna Larina, *This I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin's Widow*, trans. by Gary Kern (New York: Norton & Co., 1993), 179-180.
[24] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 184; Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 12.
[25] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 12.

window for guards to watch prisoners resided at the entrance of the cell. In the corner sat a slop bucket for prisoners to use if or when their digestive systems betrayed them from their malnourishment as diarrhea and vomiting are common symptoms of pellagra. Over the next two years of Olga's incarceration, cell capacities grew so much that prisoners had to take turns sleeping and standing as there was barely any space to even sit down.

The process of becoming a prisoner was the first step of deteriorating one's dignity. The moment each woman entered their designated prison, all their possessions were taken from them, including wedding rings, bras, garters, and hair pins. The women were then subjected to a bodily search where guards forced them to stand naked and checked their bodies for forbidden items. These searches occurred on a bi-weekly basis, seemingly for the sole purpose of dehumanization.[26] If a prisoner was held with other prisoners, who were also searched extensively, and all items were confiscated upon arrival, then it becomes clear that these searches were just to reinforce prisoners' status as worthless criminals.

Despite the crowding and fear that existed within the cells and camp walls, inmates formed friendships with each other and found strength in their bonds of sisterhood. Olga recalled that in these bonds, many women in her cell felt compelled to tell their stories.[27] These attempts at narrative, or sharing their story in a supportive environment, were ways many women tried to recover as the traumatic experiences continued to pile on. Women who did not testify had to find ways of non-narrative healing, such as investing in their threatened identities or helping others.[28]

Interestingly, our subjects' responses to other inmate's testimonies contributed to their growing resentment against the Soviet system and Stalin. Olga recalled her initial disbelief in her

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[26] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 58.
[27] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 33.
[28] Gheith, "I Never Talked," 161.

cellmate's tales, but eventually recognized that the depth of their grief attested to the validity of their experiences.[29] Many of these women did not survive to tell their stories more widely, but Olga preserved their legacy by sharing their stories in her memoir.

Sisterhood also provided the space for women to trust and care for one another during the vicious cycle of interrogations. Interrogators were known to beat, starve, rape, and threaten family and friends of the accused.[30] Guards would lead prisoners from their cells down the long hallway to the investigation room. As they walked down the empty hallway, a distant scream would penetrate the silence and remind the prisoners that they might be the next victim of the investigator's coercion tactics.[31]

Verbal abuse was a common tactic to dehumanize the women as Anna's interrogators called her an "insolent bitch," "counterrevolutionary swine," "Brazen hussy," and "Bukharinist wretch."[32] As can be seen by these insults, the main ideas that wives were verbally attacked for were their relationships to their husbands, their social status as counterrevolutionaries, and an attack on their gender. However, gaslighting, or making up false stories that were presumed to be true, was the most common tactic used during interrogations, especially for these women. In Ludmila's case, the interrogators threatened her non-existent son, which was a fortunate mistake as this reassured her that her daughter was safe.[33]

To seemingly undermine these growing communities, the NKVD frequently relocated prisoners. Olga spent about five months in Lubyanka prison, two months in Butyrka prison, just three miles away, a year in the White Sea Island's Solovki monastery prison, and a year in Kazan

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[29] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 33-34.
[30] MacKinnon, *Gender and Survival*, 14.
[31] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 185.
[32] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget,* 88, 130.
[33] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia,* 188.

prison for another year, before finally being sent to Kolyma. For Ludmila, she went from Arkhangelsk prison to a transit prison, to Vologda prison, to Kirov prison, all from May 1938 to September 1939 when she was finally sent to Viatlag camp. Over her eight-year term, as the NKVD transferred Anna from Astrakhan prison to Tomsk camp, to Novosibirsk prison, to Lubyanka prison, and finally to Yeisk labor camp.

When women arrived at their labor camps, bodily exams occurred again, but this time, they were more of a health evaluation. Medical officials would test skin elasticity by pinching prisoners' buttocks with their hands.[34] Moreover, due to the rampant spread of venereal diseases, doctors conducted gynecological exams. Despite efforts to employ more female doctors, male personnel almost always carried out these procedures.[35]

While both of these exams required prisoners to stand naked in a line up and involved intense amounts of humiliation, the reasons for the humiliation differed. With the prison bodily search, the repeated nature of the checks for seemingly no purpose other than social torture reinforced the idea that these women were "criminals" and would be treated as such. It instilled an idea that they *deserved* to be treated this way. On the other hand, many of survivors likened the exams to prodding or observing cattle or a slave market.[36] Thus, not only were they reduced to criminals, but they were further reduced to walking muscle and bone.

After the initial bodily exam, women began the sanitation process, to repeat at least once a month. Women walked naked to the bathhouse to be sanitized while male workers (often inmates) shaved all body hair, including pubic hair. With the loss of their long hair, women were stripped of their last symbol of beauty. Ludmila recalls looking at herself "in horror," when she

[34] Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag*, 65.
[35] Barnes, *Death and Redemption,* 101; Emma Mason, "Women in the Gulag in the 1930s," in *Women in the Stalin Era*, edited by Melanie Ilič (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 136.
[36] Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag,* 65.

got her head shaved.[37] Olga noted that when she looked in the mirror for the first time in the bath house, she saw her mother looking back. Along with her loss of her once voluminous hair, at the age of thirty-four, prison life expedited Olga's aging and left her face hollow and wrinkled. Hair and skin care were the central tenets of feminine beauty, both of which incarceration stripped from women.

Once they were deloused, inmates moved to the bathhouse where male guards watched them bathe themselves. The repetition of these procedures normalized humiliating invasions of privacy in Gulag victims. To survive, women needed to adjust their mindset on the matter. For example, as Olga walked naked passed the guards to the bathhouse, she laughed and told herself that these were not real men, thus reinforcing her dignity.[38] Still, the threat of the male gaze remained at the forefront of her mind. If a guard saw a woman he liked, she didn't stand a chance against his power.[39]

As the women immersed themselves in camp life, they noticed the extremely masculine environment they lived in. On average, the percentage of women in the camps hovered around eight per cent, showing the domination of male prisoners.[40] Gang rape was rampant among male and female criminals, often targeting younger women. In some cases, even male guards identified and raped virgins during primary medical examinations.[41] Our subjects' silence on the matter paired with the fact that they were older and not virgins suggests that they were safe from this treatment, however we cannot know without them explicitly mentioning it in their memoirs.

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[37] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia,* 192.
[38] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 74.
[39] Fyodor Vasilevich Mochulsky, *Gulag Boss: A Soviet Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149.
[40] "Report on the composition of prisoners in NKVD camps by sex, age, and education" in *The History of the Gulag* by Oleg Khlevniuk, 315 (Khlevniuk cites GARF, f. R-9414, op. 1, d.1155, ll. 9-10).
[41] Mochulsky, *Gulag Boss*, 148-149; Mason, "Women in the Gulag in the 1930s," 137.

Many female inmates decided to take advantage of the gender disparity and threats of rape by bartering sex for favors. Contrastingly, many female political prisoners viewed their abstinence with pride, most likely due to the sexual propaganda and cultural traditionalism of the time that looked down on women who were sexually promiscuous.[42] As historian Wilson Bell notes, sex was a "negotiated power" that symbolized female resistance.[43] Strikingly, most men followed these sexual negotiation dynamics, despite their physical ability to get the sexual gratification they sought. While none of our subjects participated in this practice, all three expressed sexual discomfort around men, nonetheless.

Olga particularly became a victim of sexual harassment when the NKVD transferred her to Kolyma. Due to the intensity of the labor, the Gulag administration assigned very few women to Kolyma, meaning most men rarely saw women, if at all. When they did, men were quick to barter for the sake of sexual pleasure. Olga was extremely aware of this and made friends with a male inmate over their love of poetry. In honor of their friendship, he offered her safety and walked with her to her barrack each night.[44] In forming a deep platonic relationship with a man, Olga found a way to benefit from her social environment while also preserving her dignity.

As for their labor tasks, many women saw the masculine work they were assigned as especially humiliating.[45] After having only worked desk jobs and sat in prison cells, their muscles were not ready for the labor that they needed to endure. In fact, camp administration doubted women's ability to perform the labor required of them and specifically requested and traded for more physically capable male inmates.[46]

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[42] Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex*, 7.
[43] Wilson Bell, "Sex, Pregnancy, and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24 no. 2 (2015): 200.
[44] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 84-85.
[45] Budrytė, "Deportation and Gulag as a Gendered Process," 325.
[46] This could account for women's smaller population size in the labor camps. Applebaum, *Gulag,* 310-311.

Initially, Olga embraced her freedom from prison walls and leaned into the power of labor.[47] However, after working in tree felling, she lost most of her strength and realized that inmates were just slaves to the state. Similarly, Ludmila worked in tree felling, but quickly learned that she was not strong enough to carry the logs and failed to reach her quotas, leading the camp administration to transfer her to work in a medical clinic.

While "laborer" was surely an aspect of female identity in Soviet society, it often came second to their familial identities. Even more, the jobs offered to women were usually less physically rigorous so as not to overstress the body and hurt women's chances at reproduction.[48] Therefore, when women were forced to move trees and experienced their periods stopping or even pelvic organ prolapse, they experienced a loss of health that men could never experience.[49] The anatomical representation of their female identities was threatened by their labor and convinced them that they might never be able to have children again.

Nevertheless, like men, women prided themselves on their resilience and this shows in their poetry. As educated elites, our subjects were extremely well versed in literature and the arts. They memorized famous poems and stories and were valued in prison for being able to recite such literature to fellow inmates. However, in the deep recesses of their minds–their final spaces of privacy–they reflected on their trauma and memorized their own verses. As Olga wrote, "The thirst for life struggles with sadness/Driving away unwanted thoughts/This means that grief/Hangs like a millstone around my neck."[50] From the beginning of her incarceration, Olga described a desire to forget her past life, to have this "millstone" relieved from her neck. Still,

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[47] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 103.
[48] Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values,* 111.
[49] Pelvic organ prolapse is when a woman's pelvic floor collapses and can no longer structurally support the reproductive organs. As a result, these organs descend down the vagina and can sometimes be seen protruding from the woman's body.
[50] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 47.

Olga wanted to survive, as she communicated in her final lines, "This means that with clenched teeth/I have decided to endure and wait."[51] Her determination trumped her pain and highlighted her courage, strength, and resilience in the face of trauma. As Anna wrote, "When it's properly bad for us, that's when we write good verses."[52] Their poetry allowed them to express their grief when it felt heaviest and let go of some of the weight that came with their trauma.

Being a woman in the camps was difficult for a multitude of reasons. However, these daily issues were the least of women's worries when it comes to their familial identities. As they lived in the labor camps, both male and female prisoners knew that the deeper traumas were the ones that had the capacity to kill them. For women, these traumas related to their status as mothers and wives.

As a Mother

Of the two major traumas women experienced, loss of husband and children, the loss of children was generally more traumatic. Besides the cultural traditionalism that can be assumed, this also reflects the weight that soviet society placed on motherhood. Soviet women were told that they had an "organic need" to bear children, resulting in the vast majority of Soviet women viewing motherhood as their main duty over their role as a wife.[53]

Generally, successful mothers were those who were caring, patient, calm, and well educated. They oversaw the moral and physical hygiene of their children alongside fathers who provided supplemental moral and social teachings. While both men and women had parental roles, the roles assigned to women meant they took the brunt of responsibility in raising

[51] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 47.
[52] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 102.
[53] Yulia Gradskova, "Soviet People with Female Bodies: Performing Beauty and Maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930-1960s." (PhD. diss., Stockholm University, 2007), 66-67; Ilic, *Soviet Women*, 7.

children.[54] Even legally, alimony laws only required financial responsibility of fathers, whereas women had every other responsibility because they were considered more fit for parenthood.[55] While most women did not complain, there was an obvious privilege in being a father, where men could choose whether or not they wanted to be an active parent.

The legal emphasis on motherhood continued to grow in the mid-to-late 1930s prior to the passage of the anti-abortion law in 1936. This was introduced alongside a heap of pronatalist propaganda that responded to the drop in population from the multiple wars and famines of the 1910s and '20s. With the threat of another World War swiftly approaching, Stalin responded by encouraging population growth and portraying motherhood as a woman's duty to her nation.

By the time the NKVD arrested Olga, Ludmila, and Anna, they were each mothers of young children and took pride in their maternal identities as mothers. After their arrest, each were worried about her child's safety. Rumors about the state orphanages spread in the prison, suggesting that orphanage directors changed their children's names to make reunification nearly impossible.

Fortunately, Ludmila learned of her daughter's status fairly quickly. A few months into her time at Arkhangelsk prison, she noticed words carved into a fence while she completed her daily walk around the prison courtyard. After a couple passes, she learned of her daughter's safe location with family in Leningrad.

By contrast, it took Olga two years to learn that her children were safe with her parents in Moscow. As a result, thoughts of her children haunted her. Each night Olga awoke at four in the morning to a stabbing pain in her heart. As she came to consciousness, so too did the reality set

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[54] Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 289.
[55] Lauren Kaminsky, "'No Rituals and Formalities!' Free Love, Unregistered Marriage and Alimony in Early Soviet Law and Family Life," *Gender & History* 29 no. 3 (2017): 725.

in: “yes, they had taken my children from me and maybe I would never see them again.”[56] Thus, for the next two hours, Olga allowed herself to think about her past life and imagine what her family would be doing in those moments.[57] Despite her attempts to break away from the pain of this loss, there was no way to “hate that life” that she once cherished so deeply.[58] As she daydreamed, she escaped reality just long enough to survive the horrors of prison life.

Some memories that Olga ruminated on were of the time spent parenting with Yudel. She recalled one night when Yudel was preparing his lectures and their daughter, Elga, approached him demanding, “I want to play horsey.” Yudel obediently moved his work aside, picked up his daughter, and carried her around the house on his neck. Through Elga’s giggles, Yudel exclaimed, “It is so interesting for her to ride a horse and so pleasant for me to feel her chubby little legs on my neck!”[59] As for Alexander, Olga remembered a time when he asked her about how thermometers worked. Olga responded with what she knew, but Alexander debunked her answer. Yudel soon came in and cleared up Alexander’s confusion and teased Olga later for being shown up by a five-year-old.[60]

Ludmila too recalled fond memories in the quiet mornings in her barrack. She often reminisced about moments when she helped Elena memorize Pushkin or expand her art skills. These memories were like sweet honey attempting to glue back together her shattered soul–they left a bittersweet taste in the mouth. Thus, Olga and Ludmila could only designate a couple hours per day remembering, as ignoring the pain was an acknowledged survival method.[61]

[56] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 229.
[57] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 233.
[58] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 36.
[59] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 235-236.
[60] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 236.
[61] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 230.

Similar advice was given for the frigid Siberian weather. Inmates were advised to not go back and forth between the cold and the furnace, or they would never build up the tolerance for the climate. Such was also the case with memory. Olga must not revisit the warm memories too often, or she might never survive the cold darkness of her trauma. Although Olga's depression continued to disrupt her sleep, she learned how to control her thoughts, noting that some memories were okay to let in, but others needed to be driven away.[62] Still, this was easier said than done.

Anna, on the other hand, mentions little of her son, Yuri, but his could be for a variety of reasons. Oftentimes silence can speak to pain, so perhaps Anna spoke little of Yuri in her memoir because these memories were too painful for her. Another possibility could that Yuri being an orphan and Anna's high profile among the NKVD prevented them from corresponding, so Anna did not have much to say to begin with. Or perhaps, speaking of her son was not Anna's goal with her memoir. The fact is, Anna's memoir speaks more of her husband than even herself, so in this context it makes sense why Anna speaks so little of Yuri. The more likely explanation is more of a compilation of the three reasons listed here, however, their separation was emotional torture for her regardless of his presence in her memoir.

Like the fathers, mothers relied heavily on letters from their children. Particularly for Ludmila, looking forward to Elena's letters fueled her survival. Through their correspondence, Ludmila preserved her connection with her daughter and even helped Elena visit Viatlag in 1946 and '47. Olga also watched her children grow up though letters. She kissed her son's block letters and watched the outline of her daughter's hand grow bigger and bigger, until it was the size of her own. Both women used letters to challenge their threatened identities by reinforcing

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[62] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey,* 47.

themselves as mothers. They embraced the state-encouraged, maternal characteristics of patience, care, and peace in their letters, never revealing the horrors in which they lived.[63] Though the connections were limited, the mothers valued these letters and awaited their arrival with immense hope.

After their release from the labor camps, the women finally got the opportunity to reunite with their children. While exiled, individuals could apply for permits to visit Moscow and Leningrad for up to two weeks; however, many individuals remained in Moscow and Leningrad illegally, including Olga and Ludmila. Knowing how badly Olga dreamed of reuniting with her family, her brother secured her permission to travel to Moscow with a state official.[64] Upon hearing the news, Olga quickly arranged her things, wished her second husband, Nikolai, goodbye, and headed to the station to wait for the official to arrive. Unfortunately, Olga was forced to return to Kolyma after waiting days for the official who never arrived, and consequently fell into a state of numbness.

One of the following nights, she and Nikolai watched a film about a mother and son reuniting. As Olga watched the film, her despair emerged from beneath the numbness. Tears poured down Olga's cheeks, and though Nikolai attempted to comfort her, she cried through the night.[65] She could not deny the depth of her pain any longer. Fortunately, a few weeks later, she received news that the official had finally arrived. Immediately, Olga rushed to the station to board the train that would finally reunite her with her family.

As the train pulled into Moscow station, Olga searched the platform for familiar faces. When she left, her children were four and six and now they were teenagers–would she be able to

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[63] Ilič, *Soviet Women*, 111.
[64] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 146.
[65] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 148.

recognize them? Two figures in the distance came running toward her with a girl's voice crying out, "Mama! Mama? Mama!"[66]

As they approached her, she recognized Yudel's face in the boy's and knew that these were her children. Overnight, she reassumed the role of mother as Elga spilled her secrets while they cuddled closely under a blanket. However, with Alexander, Olga took caution when discussing her experiences. Her son adored Stalin and Olga did not want to risk wrecking her son's ideology or her own rearrest. While she lived in Moscow for the next three years, she carefully dropped hints of her narrative to her children. As they grew older, the more they understood, and the safer Olga felt around them.

Nonetheless, not every reunion went as smoothly. When Ludmila arrived in Leningrad in February 1948, she learned that Elena called her Aunt Musia "mama" and treated her as her mother in public. The ambiguity of Ludmila's position as a mother is similar to women who give up their children for adoption–no longer are they just a "mother," but a "birth mother," as opposed to an "adoptive mother." Each descriptor determines the role the woman plays and parents are given clear legal guidelines on their role in their child's life. Ludmila had neither a choice in her relationship to her daughter, nor any clear guidelines–her role was ambiguous. As a result, Elena calling Aunt Musia "mama," forced Ludmila to face her diminished role in her daughter's life because of her forced lack of involvement.

Unfortunately, in the same month that Ludmila arrived in Leningrad, the NKVD released a decree to rearrest individuals previously guilty of counterrevolutionary activity. After only four months with her daughter, an NKVD agent once again knocked on Ludmila's door to take her away. One can imagine how triggering this was for both Ludmila and Elena. The repetition of

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[66] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 163.

the helplessness that they both felt on top of Ludmila's new knowledge of Elena and Aunt Musia's relationship must have been unbearable. When Ludmila asked the NKVD agent why they rearrested her, he responded, "you spread out like cockroaches, and now we need to gather all of you into one place."[67] The NKVD could not risk having former convicts spreading their experiences in the major Soviet cities. That same summer, Olga was on high alert. However, the NKVD came for her just before she could leave Moscow.[68]

Ludmila and Olga both worried about their ability to survive camp life again. They were older and physically weaker than at the time of their first arrests a decade prior. Thus, they were relieved to learn that the Ministry of State Security's (MGB, formerly the NKVD) chose to exile them instead of sending them back to the labor camps. The MGB relocated Olga to Karaganda in northern Kazakhstan, and Ludmila to a state farm in the Siberian town of Krasnoyarsk.[69]

While she worked at the state farm, Ludmila resumed her written correspondence with Elena and learned that Elena had married and been pregnant, but miscarried without delivering the fetus. Concerned, Ludmila consulted a doctor at the state farm who suspected that the miscarriage could be dangerous, so he told Ludmila to demand that Elena remove the fetus immediately. However, to protect Aunt Musia's feelings, Elena refused, as her aunt gave her conflicting advice.[70]

Upon her final release from exile, Ludmila rushed to her daughter in Leningrad. Once Ludmila settled in, Elena confided that she started experiencing irregular periods, to which Ludmila pushed her again to go see a gynecologist. To spare Aunt Musia's feelings once again,

[67] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 209.
[68] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 169.
[69] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 190; Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 210.
[70] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 215.

Elena refused.[71] Unfortunately, Elena's missed periods were a sign of a malignant tumor growing on her ovaries. Over the next few years, Ludmila watched her daughter weaken from the cancer. On March 10, 1958, Ludmila sat next to Elena's hospital bed, and watched her breathing pattern shorten and "did not stir, for [she] knew what this pattern of breathing meant."[72] Calmly, she said goodbye to her daughter for the third and final time. Her daughter, whom she brought into the world twenty-eight years prior, was gone.

Understanding such an important loss requires understanding the different actions leading up to and during Elena's death. Ludmila experienced intense grief compounded by guilt for not being present for her daughter, despite her physical inability to do so. If Ludmila had more maternal authority, perhaps she could have saved her daughter's life. Interestingly, in her final moments with Elena, she came to accept that her daughter was dying with a degree of peace. This is where the ambiguity of Ludmila's identity turned to benefit her, as ambiguity trained her to be more tolerant of change and lack of control.[73]

As for Anna, though the MGB kept her in exile until 1959, they permitted her son, Yuri to visit her in Tisul', Siberia. Like the others, Anna approached the reunion with anxiety. She too, wondered if she would even recognize her son, but as soon as she heard Yuri's voice and saw his mannerisms, she was reminded of her husband.[74] A few days into his stay, Yuri finally addressed the elephant in the room and asked, "Mama, tell me, who is my father?"[75] Anna turned the question back to Yuri, asking him who he thought his father was. Yuri proposed that if he

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[71] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 220-221.
[72] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 224.
[73] Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 135.
[74] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 320.
[75] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 321.

guessed right, she must tell him. She agreed, not thinking that the first words out of his mouth would be–

"I suppose that my father is Bukharin."[76]

Shocked by the speed of his guess, Anna confirmed his answer and began telling Yuri about his father's life. Anna's anxiety around her husband's identity reflects the same anxiety Olga had around Alexander. The mothers worried about their son's loyalties–to whom were their sons willing to betray? Their families or Stalin? However, they quickly learned to trust their children's love and healed small wounds in the process.

Motherhood for these women may not have manifested in the ways the Soviet Union intended, but the results were the same. These women loved and cared for their children deeply, and as the only surviving members of their family, they bonded over their grief and grew as close as they could in the process. Still, it was difficult to reunite with their children, as many of them had grown up and started their lives while their mothers were away. Nonetheless, women found ways to remain close and even reclaim missed out moments. For example, Olga took advantage of being a grandmother and spent her final years embracing her grandchildren and witnessing their life moments that she missed with Elga and Alexander.[77]

As a Wife

Along with embracing motherhood, Stalin also encouraged women to form stable, loving relationships with their spouses. From the free love that Alexandra Kollontai encouraged in the 1920s, Stalin instead pushed for stability and painted this shift romantically by defining it as his belief in eternal love.[78]

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[76] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 321.
[77] Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 367.
[78] Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union: Ideals and Practices* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 27.

Within marriage, many urban elite families practiced the "equal rights with love pattern." As defined by H. Kent Geiger, this is centered around "ritual patriarchalism," or assumed equality when discussing decisions, but the husband gets the final word. Companionate love was also emphasized over erotic love as sex was for procreative purposes only, though whether this was a reality is questionable.[79]

For each woman, their husband's arrest sparked the onslaught of trauma that affected the rest of their lives. In January 1936, Olga arrived home to find Marusia, the nanny, sitting in the middle of the apartment with Alexander and Elga while NKVD officers conducted their search. Concerned that Yudel might have gotten hit by a car, Olga pestered Marusia for information.

"Don't you understand? They took him," Marusia responded. Olga did not understand. She and her husband had done nothing wrong–this must be a mistake. Marusia challenged Olga's denial and questioned, "Don't you realize that whoever ends up there never comes back?" Still, Olga stood by her assertion that it was a mistake, and everything would be corrected soon. However, her new reality made sustaining her denial difficult. She recalled people speaking to her with fear, crossing the street when she walked, and a man warning her to get her affairs in order, to all of which she reasoned, "But he is completely innocent!"[80]

While denial is a stage of grief that each woman experienced upon their husband's arrest, Olga's denial here speaks more to the arbitrary nature of the NKVD's arrests. Since Yudel was later rehabilitated, Olga's exclamation of his innocence was completely reasonable, yet he was still targeted. In fact, each of our subjects' husbands were innocent, yet all three were sentenced to death. Therefore, their husband's arrest subjected the women to a combination of grief and confusion–both of which came without any aid from the Soviet state.

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[79] Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex,* 7.
[80] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 9.

After Izya's arrest, Ludmila rushed back to Leningrad, but by the time she arrived, her life had already started to change. She had no one to speak to or share her fears with. As she stated, "Everyone shrank from me."[81] This was a common experience of wives of the enemies of the people and helps explain the name "The Great Terror." During this time, people were targeted through surveillance, such as undercover civilian reporters, tapped phones, and targeting of familial and platonic relations. People may not have known exactly what happened to those whom the NKVD arrested, but they knew that they did not want their life to be disrupted just for their relation to their neighbor. Thus, wives of the enemies of the people were often ostracized and even lost their jobs all because of their husband's arrest.

Anna was the only woman of our three subjects to be present for her husband's arrest, and with this came a much more dramatic affair. As Nikolai left their apartment, he fell on his knees before Anna and sobbed, begging her to forgive him for ruining her life. Her final words to her husband were simply, "See that you don't lie about yourself, Nikolai!"[82] Shortly thereafter, NKVD agents flooded their apartment, taking any and all the evidence they could find. They concluded their search by cooking themselves a meal in Anna's kitchen and singing a song of triumph.[83]

In two of the three cases, the arrest of their husband left wives in the condition psychologists define as "ambiguous loss." In ambiguous loss, a beloved person is absent but not known to be alive or dead. This uncertainty regarding their whereabouts or life status prevents individuals from letting go psychologically and begin grieving.[84] Olga and Ludmila lived for years in ambiguity over whether their husbands were alive or not.

[81] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 165.
[82] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 334.
[83] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 337.
[84] Boss, *Ambiguous Loss*, 9.

Anna, on the other hand, heard of Nikolai's death sentence relatively quickly because of the publicity surrounding his show trial.[85] To protect herself emotionally, Anna assumed Nikolai to be dead from the moment of his arrest, but once she heard the false basis of his conviction, she broke down in tears. She would have hoped that he could die in dignity and not defined by lies.[86] While the clarity did bring her some relief, she could not help but fall into a state of depression. She described that the world had become, "one huge and spiritless zone of gray."[87] Rehearsing her final moments with him, she insisted that she never once regretted the short days she got to share with Nikolai.

In her memoir, Anna recalled her first interactions with Bukharin as a school-girl crush and emphasized the innocence present in their early relationship.[88] At the ages of twenty-years-old and forty-six, they finally admitted their feelings for each other, and thus began their erratic relationship that held its insecurity in their age difference.

During an "off-again" period in 1932 after Anna's father died, Nikolai started coming around to help Anna and her mother.[89] With each visit, Nikolai left little notes for Anna on her desk announcing his presence, something that he knew would get her attention. One day, she confronted him on this note-leaving business to which he proposed "Do you want me to come to your place right now?" Anna immediately answered, "I do," full well knowing that this was the moment she decided to be with him forever. He warned, "But in that case I will never leave you!" and Anna reinforced her decision with "You don't have to."[90] This moment, painted in vivid color by Anna's narration, was foundational for her identity as Bukharin's partner forever.

[85] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 67.
[86] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 65.
[87] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 73.
[88] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 110.
[89] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 138.
[90] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 146.

Each wife's trauma manifests as a question of whether they were a wife or a widow. While Anna was the first to learn of her husband's fate, the others learned years later while they were in the Gulag. In 1944, Olga learned that the NKVD executed Yudel within twenty-four hours of his arrest. Ludmila, on the other hand, learned while she was at Viatlag sometime in the early 1940s, that Yezhov ordered Izya to be shot with other prisoners from the Solovki labor camp in 1937. She cried that it "was not enough" to dislocate her from her home, but the NKVD "had to arrest me, tear me from my child, and accuse me of not having informed on my husband."[91] She then turned her anger inward, and blamed herself for not having focused on her daughter more. She regretted the consequences that came with associating herself with Izya and questioned "why did I have to make him my priority?"[92] Here, her anger involved an internal battle against her two threatened identities. Her initial decision to help Izya was based on the hope that her duty as a wife was ongoing. In retrospect, she found that it would not have mattered to save her husband, because he was never meant to survive.[93]

While Ludmila resented her initial support, Anna and Olga leaned into their identities as wives and resisted the idea of being a widow. Anna showed this resistance best recollecting her interrogations, in which she was frequently challenged for her relationship with Nikolai. From the moment of her initial sentence into exile, she was repeatedly asked to denounce her husband, which she declined doing. Once in an interrogation with Beria, he told her to "shut up about Bukharin" if she wanted to keep living.[94] In response, Anna leaned into her love and memory of her husband and continued the role of loyal wife despite and in honor of his death. She was

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[91] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 184.
[92] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 184.
[93] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 187.
[94] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget,* 203.

empowered by the fact that she was married to Bukharin and took pride in having intimate knowledge of him.[95]

Interestingly, though, it was Anna and Olga who remarried while in camp. Anna even had two more children, Nadezhda and Mikhail. Along with not speaking much about the camps, Anna does not reveal anything about her second husband besides his name–Fyodor Dmitriyevich Fadeyev. Meanwhile, Olga met her second husband, Nikolai while in exile in Kolyma.[96] Unlike "camp marriages" which were long-term relationships based in sexual bartering, Olga sought to marry for companionship. After years of terror and dehumanization, Olga appreciated the affection Nikolai showed her and the ability to confide in him.

Nonetheless, the memories of their first husbands resurfaced upon the women's release and rehabilitation. In 1956, Olga received a call to report to the Supreme Court office on June 6 to be officially rehabilitated. When the fateful day arrived, Olga walked in, sat down, and waited for her life to be changed yet again by a piece of paper–this time, though, it would say that she should have been free all along. Within an hour a soldier called her name and ushered her back to an office where an official presented her with certificates of rehabilitation and monetary reimbursement. As soon as they were in her hands, she noticed something felt off. She had the ticket to freedom, but she didn't feel any different.

As she exited through the waiting room, a man approached her and asked if her husband once taught at the university. "Yes, until 1936," Olga replied. The man then told her that he was one of Yudel's students and always admired him as a teacher. Olga did not respond. All at once, in the quiet of what should have been her response, she noticed the emotion that filled the room.

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[95] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget,* 113.
[96] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 148.

She heard a woman in the corner yelling at a solider and sounds of crying in the distance, perhaps from an office like the one she was just in.

In an instant, Olga's emotions overtook her, and she started to weep. Only once she returned to the newfound safety of her home did she allow all of her grief to spill out. This scene shows a similar experience as the thousands of others who received certificates of rehabilitation. Where one expected to find closure, instead, they found a new stage of their life, dedicated to the question of whether or not to acknowledge their trauma. Here, Olga chose to lean in and embraced her soul that had been crying out for twenty long years.

Out of all her grief she mourned her husband's death the most. Yudel was at the height of his adult life. He just started his family and his career as a successful academic, but the NKVD viciously took all that from him. She was angry with those who convicted him, but also particularly disgusted by those who took pleasure in shooting him.

Olga recalled a time when she was watching a television program that showed the mass graves used for enemies of the people. In the midst of this horror, the host picked up a skull with a bullet-shaped hole through the brow. Olga believed that this was her husband's skull and began to imagine what might have happened to him that night. She pictured the NKVD solider stepping around her husband to see the horrified look on Yudel's face and shooting him point blank–as if killing him was not enough.[97]

Here, Olga experienced an intrusive thought. In her attempt to understand that moment in her life her brain suggested a solution for closure to relieve the distress it was under.[98] While she did not directly witness his death, Olga mourned the trauma of her husband's loss, as the

[97] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 234.
[98] Kathleen Nader, "Grief, Complicated," 289.

violence of his death scarred her. However, Olga's mourning was what motivated her to publish her memoir, noting "if I do not write about him, no one will."[99]

While Ludmila and Olga received posthumous certificates for the husbands, Anna did not. Her means of reconciliation were to recount all the political happenings and spread the truth about her husband and she spent years trying to rehabilitate Bukharin and redeem his legacy. [100] Fortunately, in 1988 via Gorbachev, she successfully achieved her life goal of proving her husband's innocence and gained closure in the process. As she stated in her speech celebrating the centenary of Nikolai's birth in 1988, "a terrible oppressive weight" lifted "from [her] mind."[101]

On this note, in 1992, fifty-four years after it was addressed, the Kremlin archives delivered Anna a letter from Nikolai written weeks before his death. In the letter Bukharin encouraged Anna to endure everything with valor and grace.[102] He admitted that he could not be so explicit on how much he missed her, but wrote, "you can read between the lines how much and how deeply I love you… and no matter what the outcome of the trial, I will see you afterward and be able to kiss your hands."[103]

This letter represented what Anna attempted to protect: her personal and intimate relationship with a man whom a paranoid tyrant wrongfully targeted. This letter opened a wound and sealed it with closure. Knowing that Bukharin did not lose his dignity in the end helped Anna heal. Trauma lives within individuals forever, but through healing, one learns to tolerate

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[99] Nader, "Grief, Complicated," 290; Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 234.
[100] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget,* 146.
[101] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 349.
[102] Nikolai Bukharin to Anna Larina, January 15, 1938, in *This I Cannot Forget*, ed. Gary Kern (New York: Norton & Co., 1993), 355.
[103] Bukharin to Larina, 356.

the pain, and through closure, one can move forward with answers and break the cycle of known and unknown.

Conclusion: I still have it to this day…

Legacies manifest in different ways. For some, they live on in physical objects. In their memoirs each woman mentioned something to the likes of, "I still have it to this day…" Ludmila kept the "tiny Tiutia" that she shared with Elena upon her arrest.[104] Anna kept Nikolai's "fine leather suitcase" in her house as a monument to who he was in her life.[105] By keeping these objects so many years later, wives cared for and preserved the memories of the people they represented.

Similarly, memoirs allow even more directness in preserving memories of loved ones. The freedom of rehabilitation forced each woman to sit in her trauma, resulting in a desire to narrate their experiences. Though, at some point, each woman had to face the most significant losses in their life. Often, they saved writing about these individuals for last, thus prolonging the heartbreak that came with writing about them.[106] Through their memoirs, they learned to embrace the emotions that came with their traumas and found healing along the way.

Moreover, their memoirs ultimately allowed them to control their lives with how they would be remembered. Olga envisioned her desired legacy in a dream she had just before she died in 1991. She dreamed of her death as a celebration of her greatest achievement in life: never did she incriminate anyone at the investigator's behest. Amid the celebration, she spotted Yudel in the distance. She ran to him, and they met with an embrace. She even smelled his cologne on his skin. Suddenly someone shouted, "She has died!" and Olga thought "yes, what a good

[104] Miklashevskaya, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia*, 179.
[105] Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 86.
[106] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 234; Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, 246.

death," she died in the arms of someone she loved. Then she awoke and realized it was all a dream.[107] After witnessing the violence of death in the prisons and the Gulag, Olga's dream begged for something different. Olga hoped that she would die in dignity.

[107] Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, 250.

Chapter 3: Children

The setting–a Soviet park in the 1930s. The subject stands dressed in all white with his face beaming, surrounded by children showing him all their prized possessions, from a toy ship and airplane to a bouquet of hydrangeas. However, his eyes are drawn to a small boy with cropped brown hair and a drawing of the Kremlin in his hands. This was a poster created in the 1930s with the caption: "Thank you dear Stalin for our happy childhood."[1] An array of other posters from this era shares the same caption, with Stalin in front of a New Year's tree, getting roses from a young brother and sister, and even being played violin by a young Ukrainian boy while his smiling mother holds Stalin's shoulders with pride.[2]

Just as Soviet graphic designers aimed Stalin's cult of personality toward their adult audience, so too did they picture the Soviet leader as the father and protector of the youth of the Union.[3] Shifting from the 1920s which viewed children as empowered by the state, the 1930s encouraged children to be entirely obedient and grateful to their parents and authority, with Stalin as the ultimate "facilitator of both discipline and happiness."[4] While children were encouraged to enjoy their childhood, discipline was equally crucial for the development of well-behaved and vigilant Soviet citizens.[5]

Moreover, the 1930s came with a variety of shortages. Echos of the collectivization and climate-driven famines in eastern Ukraine, Volga region, and Kazakh steppe were felt all

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[1] Viktor Govorkov, *Thank you dear Stalin for a happy childhood*, 1936, poster, Arthive. https://arthive.com/sl/artists/9893~Posters_USSR/works/281037~Thank_you_beloved_Stalin_for_a_happy_childhood.

[2] Nina Nikolaevna Vatolina, *Thank you dear Stalin for a happy childhood!* 1939, poster, 23.6 x 35.4in (60 x 90cm), Arthive; Nina Nikolaevna Vatolina, et. al, Thank you Stalin for a happy childhood! 1938, poster, 11.6 x 16.5 in (29.7 x 42cm) Auction.ru; Nina Nikolaevna Vatolina, *Thank you dear Stalin for a happy childhood!* 1950. Poster, 86 x 57 cm. Arthive; Dmitrii Grinets, *Thanks to the Party, Thanks to Dear Stalin for a Happy, Joyful Childhood*. 1937.

[3] Kelly, *Children's World,* 105.

[4] Kelly, *Children's World*, 93, 105.

[5] Kelly, *Children's World*, 108.

throughout the Union. Besides bread, there were also shortages in milk, meat, butter, vegetables, salt, soap, kerosine, and matches–all of which were crucial for survival year-round.[6] Simultaneously, clothing shortages resulted from the Five-Year Plan, which gave heavy industry priority over producing general consumer goods, leaving many items of clothing unobtainable.[7] For example, even if parents could afford shoes, many children grew up throughout the first years of the 1930s barefoot because of material and worker limitations.[8]

Despite these shortages, many children remember their childhoods fondly. Historian Catriona Kelly asserts that this was due to anti-western and bourgeois propaganda that led many children to believe that the USSR was the best place for them to grow up. Children were to be raised without corporal punishment and shown great care by Soviet adults.[9] Some of the individuals in this chapter described their youth as being a "happy time," or were generally too young and ignorant of their life before their parent's arrest.[10] Others acknowledged a shift, describing their childhood abruptly ending the moment of their parent's arrest. Yevgenia Mikhailovna Dalskaya, whom I will introduce in full shortly, described details of her childhood home such as the "embroidered eyelets" on the curtains, dinner with her family each night, and the large shrubs in her garden that made her feel like she played in a jungle. However, this tone of happiness and exploration shifted when she described "a wide-open door" to a dark room in

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[6] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42-43.
[7] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism,* 44.
[8] Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, "Silence was salvation. That's what I knew," interview by Cathy Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 124.
[9] Kelly, *Children's World,* 113 & 110.
[10] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 220; Owen Matthews, *Stalin's Children: Three Generations of Love, War, and Survival* (New York: Walker and Company, 2008), 78.

the distance where there stood an empty bed. She knew something happened, but could only describe it as "terrible" because she was suddenly alone, hiding behind the door.[11]

This sudden shift was a result of the latter half of Order No. 00486. While the main objective of the order discussed the targeting of "wives of the enemies of the people," it was crucial to also determine what came of the suddenly orphaned children. In the sections on protocol for children, Yezhov demanded that children be rounded up and listed in groups so as not to allow any children who knew each other to end up in the same orphanage, including siblings. Further, due to overcrowding at reception facilities and orphanages, he noted that if unrepressed relatives claim a child, they "shall not be hindered."[12]

Before the order, the NKVD anticipated five thousand orphaned children, but received estimates from ten to fifty thousand.[13] As historian Cathy Frierson estimates, about ten million children up to age sixteen had parents who were targeted throughout all of Stalin's campaigns.[14] Frierson further estimates that this accounts for thirty-eight percent of "all affected persons targeted in the Soviet state's various repressive campaigns."[15] Therefore, children were the second most affected group from the family to be effected by Stalin's purges. This contradicts the state's promise of solicitude for children, and reveals the foundations of discrimination against children of "enemies of the people."

There are many objective effects of The Great Purge on children in particular. First, with their parent's arrest, many children lost their homes, and while not all were homeless, they

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[11] E. M. Dalskaya, excerpt from *Zven'ya: Istoricheskii Al'manakh*, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 60-61, in *Deti GULAGa: 1918-1956*, ed. by Semeyon Samulovich Vilenskiy, (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiya," 2002), 241–242.
[12] People's Commissioner of Internal Affairs of the USSR, *Operative Order of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of S.S.R. No. 00486*, August 15, 1937, from *Vikiteka*, https://ru.wikisource.org.
[13] Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 162; Corinna Kuhr, "Children of 'Enemies of The People' as Victims of the Great Purges," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 39, no. 1/2 (1998): 217.
[14] This includes the Collectivization, the Great Purge, Ethnic Targeting, and other intermittent purges.
[15] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 6.

entered into environments that did not provide the same protections and guarantees of safety that their childhood homes provided for them. Further, with the onset of World War II, many of the orphaned children found themselves vulnerable to hunger, homelessness, violence, and witnessed death firsthand without much (if any) emotional support.[16] Outside of their traumas from the Great Purge, each child noted that WWII was their second most impactful trauma, because of these vulnerabilities. However, it took time for the children to blame the Soviet state, and some didn't even reach this conclusion in their testimony, showing the depths of their patriotism and indoctrination.[17]

Psychology of Children

It comes as no surprise that pediatric psychology vastly differs from standard, adult psychology. Three major concepts from child psychology inform this chapter: self-concept, PTSD, and the parentified child.

Self-concept is how children view themselves and their place in the world.[18] Children construct their self-concept socially through feedback and comparison. A child who is discriminated against, especially by an adult, can develop a negative self-concept, such as "I am unworthy" or "I am not good enough."[19] It is important to note that self-concept isn't just a static reflection of feedback, but a dynamic guide for how to act moving forward. Thus, if a child views themselves as a "burden" or "unworthy," they may subconsciously act in ways that reflect this. This is crucial because self-concept is the core aspect of identity that is developed

[16] Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, 1.
[17] Kelly, *Children's World*, 121.
[18] Eddie Brummelman & Sander Thomaes, "How Children Construct Views of Themselves: A Social-Developmental Perspective," *Child Development* 88 no. 6 (2017): 1763.
[19] Brummelman & Thomaes, "How Children Construct Views of Themselves," 1764.

throughout childhood and adolescence, or the time period when many of our subjects had their most traumatic experiences.

This leads to the concept of PTSD. Compared with adult PTSD, PTSD in children has a few modifications that account for their lack of understanding of complex or abstract thoughts.[20] First, for children under the age of six, PTSD can occur when a child learns of a traumatic event that happened to a parent or caregiving figure, such as their parents being arrested or shot.[21] Symptoms of PTSD in children include avoidance, changes in mood, nightmares, and trauma specific reenactment–that is, if the child has space to express their feelings.[22] It is important to remember that the Soviet Union had a culture of silence surrounding the Purges and this was passed down to children. Thus, the most common symptom children experienced was avoidance.

Interestingly, depending on the socio-cultural environment, girls generally tend to report more PTSD symptoms than boys, and this pattern is present in my study.[23] In my research I found a skewed ratio of male versus female testimonials. It seems that women were more likely to share their memories with the rich details that this sort of research calls for. Men tended to recollect with the mindset of contributing to the history of the Soviet Union and the terror in particular, thus they stuck more to the facts than emotion.[24]

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[20] See introduction, pg. 11.
[21] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* 273, 271.
[22] Cheryl Gore-Felton and Cheryl Koopman, "Trauma-and Stressor-Related Disorders," in *Study Guide to DSM-5*, ed. by Laura Weiss Roberts and Alan K. Louie (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2014), 178; Duncan Clark and Thomas Miller, "Stress Response and Adaptation in Children: Theoretical Models," in *Children of Trauma: Stressful Life Events and Their Effects on Children and Adolescents*, ed. by Thomas Miller (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1998), 5.
[23] Clark and Miller, ""Stress Response and Adaptation in Children," 9.
[24] This trend is also seen in many other instances of Soviet testimonials, such as Jochen Hellbeck's *Revolution on My Mind*, about Soviet diaries, and Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*, about female combatant soldiers during WWII. In each monograph, women tended to feel more comfortable sharing their emotions and thoughts, while men stuck to recalling the protocol or military operation they were part of.

The final psychological concept is "parentified children." This term describes children "whose parents and/or siblings implicitly or explicitly" depend on them for "child-rearing and other executive functions in the family."[25] This can look like child-care, providing meals, doing laundry, or paying bills, and it is often at the expense of the child's "development and self-realization."[26] Being a parentified child has less to do with who the child is relieving of responsibility, and more about the fact that they are not equipped to be a caretaker and struggle with their lack of success, a topic that will appear throughout this chapter in sibling interactions and feelings of having to fend for themselves.

The children whom I study in this chapter are Aleksandr Yudelevich Zakgeim, Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, Lenina Borisovna Bibikova and her sister Ludmila Borisova Bibikova, Igor Arkadevich Bochkarev, Yevgenia Mikhailovna Dalskaya, and Svetlana Obolenskaya-Osinsky. These children were chosen from hundreds of testimonials for their depth of detail and emotion, as well as the variety of their experiences. In this chapter I ask how the experience of family separation affected children and their identities growing up and how they responded to their experiences. I argue that besides having to live with lifelong trauma and grief over missed out or traumatic childhoods, altered career paths, and murdered relatives, these children were also eventually responsible for caring for their severely traumatized parents. However, children found some healing along the way through saviors, literature, and introspection.

Oral Testimony

Just like memoirs, oral testimony also struggles with critiques of factual unreliability. While reliability of memory is definitely an important factor of this study, many oral historians

[25] Gregory J. Jurkovic, *Lost Childhoods: The Plight of the Parentified Child* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1997), xii.
[26] Jurkovic, *Lost Childhoods*, 4.

and psychologists have noted that traumatic memories tend to be more reliable than not. In fact, out of all the mental functions that deteriorate with age, emotional functioning is the only one that does not.[27] For example, when oral historian Cathy Frierson conducted her interviews, she noticed that individuals who at the time of interviewing were decades removed from the events, suddenly seemed as if taken back in time. They sat physically and linguistically in a trance, shrinking into their chair, sitting frozen, and shifting their speech from formal to familiar.[28]

Trauma often feels like one is living two lives, the present and the ongoing past life–and this is part of the "need to understand." When Frierson's interviewees sat down to give their testimonies, they put themselves in extremely vulnerable positions and forced themselves to relive the traumas that haunted them. Therefore, I use their testimony as a means of honoring their courage and sharing their story of suffering the way they experienced it. Like memoirs, I do not rely on their factual accuracy, but rather their perceptions of how things happened and how it made them feel.

Meet the Children

While the children I study did not live very substantial lives prior to their parents' arrest, I find that the context of age at parents' arrest and reason for parents' arrest is important for understanding their traumas. Due to the nature of oral history being a briefer source base, or even the situation that orphanages put children in with not knowing their family, there are some gaps in information. However, these gaps are significant, as they clue us into the frustrations of not knowing who you are or whom you come from.

Aleksandr Zakgeim's parents were the aforementioned Olga Adamova-Sliozberg and Yudel Zakgeim. Born in 1932, Aleksandr was six when the NKVD arrested his parents and his

[27] Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, 9-10.
[28] Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, 8.

mother told him that she was going on a business trip.[29] Aleksandr was even bold enough to tell his mother as she was leaving, “How strange! First papa left on a business trip, now you are going away.” He pondered for a moment, then shared his worry with Olga, crying, “suddenly if Marusia [their nanny] goes away–who will we stay with?”[30] It took him about two years to finally understand that perhaps his mother was not on a business trip after all, and two years more to understand the reality of his mother’s circumstances. He shared that his mother’s arrest was so influential on him that for years he remembered the smell of her perfume and the color of her blouse. He further noted that even a similar smell took him back to that tragic day–in psychological terms, he got triggered.[31]

Next is Inna Shikheeva-Gaister, who was born on August 13, 1925. On June 27, 1937, the NKVD arrested her father, Aron Israelevich Gaister, at work, followed by her mother, Rakhil Israelevna Kaplan, one month later. During her mother’s arrest, Inna vividly remembered sobbing as she witnessed an NKVD agent watch her mother use the restroom through a small window in their bathroom.[32] Inna had just turned twelve when the NKVD arrested her mother and within this moment, she assumed the role of “mother” over her seven-year-old and one-year-old sisters.[33] After moving around from unit to unit in their apartment complex, the landlord finally evicted the sisters, and they left to live with her nine other relatives in their grandmother’s twenty-six square meter apartment.[34]

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[29] Aleksandr Yudelevich Zakgeim, “If you are interested in this kind of detail, I have remembered for all these years the smell of the perfume she was wearing and the color of her blouse,” interview by Cathy Frierson, *Silence was Salvation,* 26; Frierson, *Children of the Gulag,* 153.
[30] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag,* 154.
[31] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation,* 27.
[32] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 47.
[33] Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, “And we began to live there in twenty-six square meters; there were thirteen of us,” interview by Cathy Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, 37.
[34] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 49-50.

Our third child is Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, whose father, Andrei Matveev was arrested in 1938, charged under Article 58, and sentenced to eight years of hard labor.[35] When the NKVD arrested Irina's father, her mother was in such shock that Irina's fourteen-year-old sister had to make all the legal and logistical arrangements on her mother's behalf.[36] Irina remembers her father's trial as a literal blur, for she had her father's severe nearsightedness and could only see a "pale spot" in place of his face.[37] Irina contemplated her father's arrest often, as she described how she would go into a corner and "think about how it could be that [her] papa, who was so good, could wind up in jail."[38]

When the war broke out, the NKVD forced Irina and her family to leave her hometown of Stalingrad and move to Ufa. During this time, she did not receive any letters from her father and assumed him to be dead. Little did she know that it was forbidden to send postage from the labor camps during the war years, and when she suddenly received a letter from her father in 1946, she claimed it "was the happiest day of [her] life."[39]

Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, did not remember much of her parents after their arrest. Born on December 16, 1928, to fully realized communist elites, Rudolf Ennovich Yakson and Antonia Konstantinovna Nosovich, Maya's parents were often too busy to spend time with her, as she noted, she could barely recall her mother's caress.[40] When the NKVD arrested her father in 1937, she knew "instinctively" that something very bad had happened, despite him telling her he was going on a business trip.[41] Cathy Frierson who conducted Maya's interview noted that Maya

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[35] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 127.
[36] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 126.
[37] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation,* 127.
[38] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 127.
[39] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation,* 135.
[40] Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, "I have dreamed my entire life, for me this would be a great joy to find my relatives," interview by Cathy Frierson, *Silence was Salvation,* 198.
[41] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation,* 201-202.

wept while describing her parent's arrest, showing the impact their loss of life and dignity continued to have on her throughout her own life.[42]

As for our single set of siblings, Lenina and Ludmila Bibikova, the NKVD arrested and shot their father, Boris Lvovich Bibikov in 1937.[43] Afterward, their mother, Martha Bibikova, sent Lenina to live with her Uncle Isaac in Moscow, where Lenina began processing the reality of her father's arrest. As she told her uncle the story of her father's arrest, Lenina recalled "sobbing" because "she didn't know what her father had done wrong."[44] In response, her uncle promised her that he would use his pull with an NKVD general to get the whole matter resolved. Unfortunately, this only pushed the rest of Lenina's family further along in the NKVD's targeting process and they arrested her mother soon after. The night the NKVD agents showed up their mother was attending to Ludmila's case of the measles, but even still they took the girls and their mother away in two separate cars.[45] Ludmila remembered the arrest in very broken segments. First, she was "standing in her nightshirt holding a doll" when "a soldier pushes past her," and suddenly "everyone screams."[46] Ludmila was three and Lenina was eleven when the NKVD arrested their parents, and upon their arrival at the reception center, Ludmila and Lenina set off on their vastly differing experiences due to Ludmila's illness and Lenina's age.

Similar to Ludmila, Igor Arkadevich Bochkarev was six years old and too young to remember the details of his parents' arrest. Igor did remember that his father's once calm temperament grew shorter and more violent prior to his arrest, which Igor attributed to his father's nervousness. During the Russian Civil War, his father, Arkadii Nikolaevich Bochkarev,

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[42] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation,* 202.
[43] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 50-53.
[44] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 65.
[45] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 69.
[46] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 70.

sided with the White movement, and after missing the original purging of White leaders, he remained a walking target when the Great Purge started.[47] The morning of his father's arrest, Igor remembered a group of three individuals arriving and taking his father away. While he did not understand the specifics, Igor knew that it was something terrible. He described it as "not a tragedy," but "unnatural, frightening, gloomy," and "this black feeling of such heaviness."[48] The NKVD arrested his father in October 1937 on charges of spying for Japan, and he was shot within twenty-four hours of his conviction.[49] Though Arkadii signed a confession, Igor was convinced the NKVD tortured his father into compliance as Arkadii "had never seen even a single Japanese person in his entire life."[50] The NKVD also accused his mother of spying and executed her in 1938. As for Igor's mother, Josefina Moiseevna Gander, Igor remembered less of her arrest than his father's except for a feeling of loneliness, which Igor described like being alone in a desert.[51] Igor noted that his family which already only consisted of twelve people total, shrunk to eight in the matter of two to three months.[52]

Other than scraps of memories, we know little about our final two subjects. For Yevgenia Dalskaya, she knew nothing of her relatives and believed her name to have been changed when she entered the orphanage system. What we know for sure is that she lived in the Kuybyshev region in southern Siberia in the Bogorod children's home no. 35/36. [53] As for Svetlana Obolenskaya-Osinsky, she too was sent to a children's home upon her parents' arrest, and spoke most about the lack of touch she received as a child.

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[47] Igor Arkadevich Bochkarev, "Film #294," interview by Tasiya Krugovikh and Vasilii Bogatov, *Moi GULAG*, https://mygulag.ru/films/film-294-moy-gulag/full/1/, 17:40.
[48] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 26:03-27:06.
[49] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 32:13, 35:30.
[50] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 38:24.
[51] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 46:36.
[52] Igor also had an aunt and uncle whom the NKVD targeted. Bochkarev, "Film #294," 38:24.
[53] Dalskaya, *Deti GULAGa*, 241.

Interestingly, each child recalled their parent's denial of the situation. Parents told their children not to cry, that they would be back soon, and often reinforced their innocence, claiming "I am not guilty" and that "they'll figure it out," whoever the ominous "they" might be.[54] However, the state would not resolve their parents' status until long into the children's adulthood.

As "Children of Enemies of the People"

The severity of children's suffering depended upon their living situation after their parent's arrest. For example, while Inna lived with her grandmother and family in the cramped apartment for a few years, they evacuated without her, her siblings, or her cousin. As the German forces rapidly approached Moscow, Inna fled with her sisters and cousin from city to city, and was repeatedly told that each city had nothing to offer her and her relatives, until they finally landed in an evacuation center in Ufa.[55] While in Ufa, Inna contracted typhus and had to leave her young sisters alone for about six weeks while she recovered. When she finally returned, her sisters were covered in scabies. Unfortunately, Inna's youngest sister died from her condition at only six years old.[56]

For children whose primary responsibility is caring for siblings, their parentification can be detrimental to their social development. For example, parentified children often have higher social anxiety due to their lack of security growing up, since they were the source of security for their siblings. Parentified children also have difficulty experiencing joy while performing generous acts in adulthood because they learned that giving was related to security rather than

[54] Lyudmila Petrova, *The Littlest Enemies: Children in the Shadow of the Gulag,* trans. and ed. by Deborah Hoffman, 116; Natalya Saveleva, *Littlest Enemies,* 118. Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation, 47.*
[55] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation,* 56, 58.
[56] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation,* 58.

intimacy.[57] Thus, a need for security remained at the center of parentified children's experiences and motivated their anxiety. In Inna's case, her anxiety and fear most likely doubled when she realized she was unable to save her dying sister. As she stated during her interview, "We left as a foursome…two of us returned."[58] While objectively, Inna was a sixteen-year-old girl with no medical training, in her mind she was the source of security for the remnants of her family, and her failure to maintain that security haunted her.

Illness also haunted others' memories, such as Maya who was unable to say goodbye to her dying mother because she caught her tuberculosis and was rushed to a clinic. Upon reflection of her mother's passing, Maya described her memories of her mother as dim. Due to her mother's attempts at not infecting her children, she initially kept them at arms-length, however, once Maya's mother learned of her husband, Rudolf's, death she pushed them away more.[59] Maya's mother knew that Maya and her siblings would soon be orphans, and did not have the strength to confront this tragic reality.

The trend of illness exacerbating separation continued with Ludmila and Lenina. Instead of going to a reception center, the sisters first encountered a juvenile detention facility. Upon their arrival nurses rushed Ludmila off to a clinic to try to cure her measles and newly founded infected leg tissue, leaving Lenina alone in a cell with delinquents. It is important to note here that the juvenile detention facility was full of unusually violent children who throughout the 1920s were known as *bezprizornye*, or homeless children. In line with the goal of familial stability and disciplining children was a renewed attempt to corral and reeducate the *bezprizornye* rather than left to terrorize citizens in the streets.[60] Guards often left the

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[57] Jurkovic, *Lost Childhoods,* 64.
[58] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation,* 64.
[59] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 209-211.
[60] Kelly, *Children's World,* 222.

bezprizornye unchecked in the cells and did little to prevent them from cursing, pinching, and stealing food from other inmates. When Ludmila and Lenina were finally reunited, Ludmila recalls Lenina crying from the severity of the conditions she experienced in the cell.[61]

When they entered the orphanage system, Lenina begged to remain with her sister and was granted this rare privilege on account of Ludmila's chronic illness. Lenina was very aware of her matronly authority over her sister, as she reflected that she "became a mother at the age of twelve" and that "Ludmila was [her] first child."[62] However, with the start of WWII Lenina was sent away with other older children to dig trenches near the front, leaving Ludmila behind at the orphanage.[63] As the Germans quickly overtook Ukrainian territory, the orphanage director pushed Ludmila and her fellow orphans on life rafts into Dnieper river current, for them to float down to Zaporizhzhia where they were handed over to authorities. Now Lenina and Ludmila were physically separated without any means of communication–Lenina's "first child" was taken from her.

Lenina and Ludmila's relationship tells of the chaos that many children endured alone. Upon arriving at an orphanage, children who found comfort and safety in the familiarity of their siblings suddenly were stripped of that familiarity and forced to "start over." Some orphanage directors sought to take advantage of younger children's newly developed memory and changed their names in the hope that they might forget their past life and begin a better, socially correct, life.[64] Such is the case with Yevgenia who, upon learning of this potential truth, questioned, "who am I in reality?"[65] To her, the circumstance of becoming "Yevgenia Mikhailovna

[61] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 74.
[62] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 69.
[63] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 80.
[64] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 190.
[65] Dalskaya, *Deti GULAGa*, 241.

Dalskaya" was confusing, she couldn't explain the origins of even her replacement name. In the idea of self-concept and trauma, the realization that she didn't know a core aspect of who she was–her name and family–was especially jarring, and we can see this with Yevgenia's existential question: who am I? And this is just internally. Socially, the question of name and family is extremely common: it appears on identification papers, asked at check points, on applications for school and jobs. Thus, as society repeatedly asked Yevgenia for something as simple as her name, she relived the trauma of not knowing who she was, and not understanding why this came to be.

The orphanage system was also traumatic in other ways. Svetlana recalls lack of touch having a significant impact on her life, noting that "truly, nothing replaces it."[66] In the orphanages, distance was a norm; nobody sat down to cuddle with a child, or kissed their cheek, or said tender words of comfort. As Svetlana put it, children "unexpectedly find themselves out in the open in the harsh and clear world" that a parent would have protected them from.[67] Staff were even so cruel as to tell children that the "apple doesn't fall far from the tree" and that they deserved to be insulted and hit.[68] Ironically, violent directors and staff went against the view that corporal punishment was intolerable and in doing so compromised the states' efforts at molding model Soviet citizens.[69]

After living with his Aunt Vera for two years in Petersburg, Igor, too, was eventually sent to an orphanage.[70] While Igor did not recall the exact reason for his separation from his aunt, he speculated that it was difficult for her to manage him considering his "child of an enemy" status.

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[66] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 195.
[67] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 195.
[68] Kelly, *Children's World,* 238.
[69] Kelly, *Children's World,* 228; Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 192.
[70] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 48:29.

As Igor stated, "I was toxic."[71] Therefore, from an early age, Igor's self-concept was warped as he viewed himself as a danger to others. However, this was not an idea that originated in Igor's mind, but one that the adults surrounding him led him to believe.

Igor's family sent him to an orphanage in Leningrad at the age of nine. When the war began, his orphanage migrated farther and farther east until they finally resided in the Kurgan region behind the Ural mountains.[72] Interestingly, Igor was surprised by the care taken to move him and his fellow orphans away from the conflict, questioning, "I don't know who cared about us," but they continued to evacuate his orphanage as danger approached.[73] This exhibits the depth of Igor's self-concept.

This leads to the idea of children having to fend for themselves. While orphanages could provide the necessities of survival, they did not consistently provide a respite for tired, overwhelmed children.[74] For example, Ludmila especially had to fight for her own survival. After landing in Zaporizhzhia, the Germans advancement continued to push her group further and further east, leaving Ludmila and her fellow orphans to be treated with lower priority compared to the soldiers they came across. Ludmila, whose surgeries on her leg left her with a permanent limp, was forced to beg for food by trading crude cigarettes she made, and running to patches of tall grass during air raids.[75] Throughout the war, Ludmila's stomach became distended from hunger. This was perhaps one of the most traumatic memories for Ludmila, as she noted that even when she finally got ahold of an American food package, she was never satiated. As

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[71] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 51:12.
[72] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 54:02.
[73] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:01:27.
[74] Kelly, *Children's World,* 253.
[75] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 84-85.

she stated, "childhood hunger stays with you your whole life…You can never feel truly full again."[76]

There is an interesting connection between the hunger for affection and hunger for food. Both are forms of sustenance that Ludmila, along with many other children, lacked for the majority of their childhoods. Besides having to provide both of these for herself, the treatment she received in seeking out both affected her self-concept as she was often treated as a repulsive "other." Whether it be from the adults surrounding her, the older orphans, or the soldiers and civilians in the streets, Ludmila understood from a young age that she was a burden–but for some reason she kept surviving.

As for Lenina, she eventually pushed east, too, but authorities abandoned her at a collective farm. While working at the farm, she negotiated a deal with the wife of the home she resided in for a ticket to Moscow where Lenina reunited with her uncle, Yakov.[77] Similar to Ludmila, Lenina was given a harsh dose of reality from Yakov's wife, Varvara, who told Lenina that she would probably never see Ludmila again and to not speak of her family to protect herself.[78] Fortunately, Lenina's age allowed her to land a job as an airplane radio operator which led to a task of flying to retrieve an orphaned boy in Solikamsk. As she walked into the orphanage, she noticed a bald girl with a limp and eyes of her own and quickly realized it was her sister, Ludmila. After all the shuffling around during the war, Ludmila and Lenina finally found each other and Lenina's boss permitted her to bring the boy *and* Ludmila back to Moscow. After three long years the sisters were at last reunited.[79] Now, the girls could lean on each other

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[76] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 95-96.
[77] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 90.
[78] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 91.
[79] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 92-93.

for love and guidance. This was especially important for Ludmila, who at the time still struggled with hunger, disability, and loneliness.

Other aspects of parentification appear in Irina's story, as she recalled being "very self-contained in those years" and feeling like she had to "defend [her]self at every opportunity."[80] Where Ludmila struggled with her self-concept, it seems that Irina knew who she was, even stating that she was a "very, very strong woman."[81] Perhaps this was due to the fact that Irina lived with her mother which allowed her to experience life as a mature child, rather than an adult-child. This was significant enough difference to allow Irina the space to figure out her identity as she grew up.

Still, even if a child knew themselves with confidence, this did not prevent other children from reminding "children of enemies of the people" of their status. Discrimination was common among children and adults alike due to the state-led push for social vigilance. Some children proudly donned their "enemy" identity, believing firmly that it was not true. As Aleksandr stated, "it happened–so it happened."[82] For Aleksandr, he worried about the direction the Soviet government was heading in, and continued to develop this belief throughout his life.

Targeting like this also occurred on a smaller scale. Irina was asked to leave and stop attending her local Komsomol meetings and hid this information from her mother, telling her that she was simply not admitted.[83] Generally, children often don't talk about their trauma with their parents out of fear of upsetting them, as Irina reflected that she suffered deeply from this exclusion.[84] This event shaped Irina's self-concept to believe that she was unworthy and

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[80] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 213.
[81] Levitina, Silence was Salvation, 213.
[82] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation*, 30.
[83] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 133.
[84] William Yule, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Children and Its Treatment," in *Children of Trauma,* 223; Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 133.

deserved to suffer because of what her father did, an image later reinforced when Leningrad State University rejected her application, despite her being a straight-A student. By the second time Inna applied, she stopped sharing her father's status on her applications and was able to experience the joys of being a "normal" child. She was included in activities, and even became the head of her local Komsomol. However, she made a drastic mistake when she confidently reveled her true identity, and her peers quickly "othered" her yet again.[85] This experience allowed Inna to see that perhaps she didn't "deserve" to be treated poorly, but was treated this way because of an arbitrary title the Soviet government gave her, and that society reinforced.

Maya, on the other hand, experienced a mixed discriminatory situation. When she applied to be admitted to her local Komsomol, Maya's school director fought for her admittance on her behalf.[86] The students who initially refused claimed that Maya was a relative of an enemy of the people–but Maya had never heard of this term before. "How can it be that my father is an enemy of the people?" Maya questioned.[87] Though she was admitted, this question haunted her, and altered her entire mindset on her situation. This is the power of social interactions on a child's self-image. What did it mean for Maya to suddenly be a "child of an enemy of the people?" Afterall, she was already an orphan and suffered enough, but something in this specific labelling captivated her. Perhaps it was an acknowledgement of how others viewed her, that her peers "othered" her when she already felt different for being an orphan. Perhaps it was the alteration of her image of her late father, whom she viewed with respect and adoration. This thought process highlights the internal dialogue that trauma often provokes. There emerges a back and forth between truth and confusion, leaving the individual stuck in a loop of misunderstanding.

[85] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation,* 142.
[86] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 227.
[87] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation,* 228.

As for Igor, he perceived less discrimination from his peers, and more from the adults who surrounded him. At the orphanage he recalled a "sadistic bias" that he was "contagious."[88] This manifested in name calling, which was mostly performed by his peers who called him "a spy of technological sciences" as a reflection of his father's conviction. Still, Igor questioned where the children got this information from and strongly suspected that it was fed to them by the orphanage staff.[89] Similar to Maya, Igor was socially influenced to believe that he was "contagious" or an "enemy," but rather than believing it, Igor rebelled and ran away during the war, where he experienced extreme hunger and even more discrimination. During this time, he came across a boarding school with other children from Leningrad who had much better food than his orphanage had provided. From this, Igor deduced that their identities as "children of enemies of the people" and orphans warranted the authorities discrimination.[90] This reflects Igor's understanding that others viewed him and those of his status as unworthy of privileges and deserving of their struggles.

As Survivors

As the children physically grew up, they were forced to mature much faster than their peers due to the conditions their status as "children of enemies of the people" put them through. This maturity allowed them to survive the hunger, homelessness, and abuse they experienced and pushed them to reflect upon and evaluate their traumatic experiences as they aged. Research has shown that children who survive trauma usually have one or all of the following: strong self-image and autonomy, family cohesion, or an external support system.[91] While children definitely

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[88] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 54:59.
[89] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 55:51.
[90] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:02:28.
[91] Clark and Miller, "Stress Response and Adaptation in Children," 9.

struggled with their self-image and family cohesion, they were not completely lost when it came to their external support systems.

One such support system are "saviors" who were able to nurture the children. Nurturance first and foremost includes providing a child's basic needs, like food, water, clothing, and shelter. But it also includes "acceptance, closeness, sharing, warmth, protection, love, and understanding" and manifests through "affectionate stroking, hugging, kissing," and loving language.[92] For many of the children, their relatives provided them this nurturance. For example, Aleksandr's grandmother prevented NKVD agents from taking him and his sister to an orphanage by locking the children in a room and hiding the key in her bra. She put herself in harm's way to protect the children, and as a result, the children felt safe and loved. Aleksandr reflected that the rest of the family was equally affectionate, noting that "they tried very hard to compensate for [their] loss," leading the children to never feel like victims.[93] This is crucial because their families intentionality allowed Aleksandr to live a fairly "normal" childhood despite his situation.

This love continued with family friends too, such as Maya's mother's friend, Dora Mikhailovna Minkina, who took Maya and her sisters in as their mother was dying. In her interview, Maya referred to Dora as "mother," "grandmother," and "adoptive mother," showing all the roles that Dora fulfilled as a nurturer for Maya.[94] In fact, Maya repeatedly mentioned how much she knew Dora loved her and her sisters, as opposed to Maya's own mother, who remained faint in her memory. This juxtaposition reveals the impact that nurturance had on these children. Still, Maya struggled with understanding Dora's love for her, questioning "why does she love me

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[92] Frank John Ninivaggi, *Biomental Child Development: Perspectives on Psychology and Parenting* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 48
[93] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation*, 28.
[94] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation,* 192-193.

so much?"[95] For Maya, her established self-concept that was she was not a priority for her parents. Thus, when Dora fully prioritized Maya and her sisters, Maya had to rework her understanding of herself and the idea that she was "unworthy" of love.

Occasionally, orphanage directors were also proponents of nurturing children. On average, a single orphanage director oversaw more than 240 children, many of whom had behavioral issues related to trauma.[96] Orphanage directors had control over how their charges were treated, in both positive and negative ways. For example, an orphanage director had almost total control over where a child would end up.[97] Ludmila remembered the head of her and Lenina's first orphanage, Yakov Abramovich Michnik, who allowed the sisters to stay together rather than be sent to separate orphanages.

Even more, orphanage directors and staff could intervene when children physically, verbally, and sexually abused each other. In rare cases where orphanage personnel were trained in dealing with traumatized and ill-behaved children, they could step in and create a safe environment for the other children. One example of this is by projecting positive examples of coping with difficult emotions, as children learn this through socialization.[98] However, on average orphanage staff and directors were too overwhelmed by the overcrowding of children to take the time and patience to provide a safe and calm emotional environment.[99] This shows the significance of the positive impacts that some orphanage personnel were able to have on children. If someone could step in, protect a child, and provide a place of refuge, this was monumental for children's emotional recovery.

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[95] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation,* 233.
[96] *GARF, f A-2306, op.70, d.5578, 1.5.* in Rachel Green, "'There will not be orphans among us': Soviet orphanages, foster care, and adoption, 1941–1956," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2006), 121 & 128.
[97] Green, "There will not be orphans among us," 132.
[98] Asi, D. S., et. al. "Emotional correspondence between preschoolers and teachers: what are the effects on child–teacher relationships?" *Education 3-13* 47, no. 8 (2019): 970.
[99] Green, "There will not be orphans among us," 131.

Teachers and school directors also supported their "enemy" students. Teachers, for example, would often just ignore the child's situation for the sake of the child.[100] Such is the case with Inna who worked herself up for days to tell her teacher that her parents had been arrested, to which her teacher responded, "Well, so what. That happens," and ordered her to go back to class.[101] Along with ignoring Inna's situation, her teacher even paid for her school tuition so Inna could continue attending that school.

Igor described his teacher, Olga Petrovna Sokolova, as a "warm-hearted, good woman."[102] Upon recalling how he and his peers were traumatized by hunger, he noted that Olga Petrovna sat him down and shared her ration cards with him and the other children so they could eat. He claimed that there were "few like her" who were willing to stick their neck out for a "dangerous" child like him.[103] After years of being treated as an "other," Olga Petrovna finally treated Igor as worthy of love and care. By describing her in such purity of character, Igor viewed her character as genuine, rather than obligatory, like the orphanage director and staff members who surrounded him. This shows how observant children were to their surroundings and how quickly they picked up on the nuances of their interactions. This is even seen with Igor's description of his father's personality leading up to his arrest. While Igor did not recall the specifics or anticipate why there was a change, he noticed the nuances, nonetheless.

Ludmila also had support from her teacher, Maria Nikolaevna Kharlamova, who taught her Russian literature and history.[104] Maria Nikolaevna treated Ludmila as her own daughter, from helping her get through the recurring surgeries Ludmila needed for her leg to even holding

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[100] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 220.
[101] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 43.
[102] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:11:48.
[103] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:11:53.
[104] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 100.

onto keepsakes and memories.[105] Thanks to Maria Nikolaevna's dedication and support, Ludmila even eventually got into the most prestigious university in the Union, Moscow State University.

Adults, like Maria Nikolaevna, further allowed space for children like Ludmila to develop healthy emotional regulation skills.[106] When Ludmila was young, she began to understand these emotions from the adults at her orphanage, but this was cut short when the war started. Thus, Ludmila had to look elsewhere for a positive adult relationship, and she found it in her teacher.

Children also found solace in literature.[107] As children sought to understand their emotions surrounding family separation, they looked to Holocaust and American slavery literature, one example being *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel follows a series of Black slaves who either ran away or were sold from the Shelby plantation. Throughout the novel, characters share long monologues about their experiences of being separated from their families and their rage over the continuation of slavery. While no child spoke directly of what particular part of the book impacted them most, one can assume that the overall theme of family separation helped legitimate their feelings. Considering the children were encouraged to live in silence about their experiences, having a book that so openly expressed what they felt–the frustration, sadness, and confusion–must have been comforting for them.

Fantasy books also allowed children like Ludmila to imagine and dream of a life better than her own. Fantasy was a form of escapism from the discomfort of her chronic illness. Having to live for weeks at a time recovering in hospitals left Ludmila particularly lonely and exposed her to death at a young age. The reality of her condition was also generally uncomfortable due to

[105] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 101 & 107.
[106] Asi, "Emotional correspondence between preschoolers and teachers," 972.
[107] Dubrovina, *Silence was Salvation*, 127.

her lack of control over her condition and treatment, and the stress that frequent surgeries and treatments put on her body.[108] Thus, books provided Ludmila with an accessible coping mechanism considering her restraints.

As an Evaluator

Ultimately, as the children matured, they also had to confront their ideas about important institutions in their lives. Through this introspection, they were able to better understand their own feelings toward their trauma. For example, many children shared their evaluations of their parents ranging from love to confusion to hatred. For example, Inna expressed a close bonding to her mother. When she went to go visit her mother in 1941 it was the same day the Germans invaded and the Gulag administration only allotted Inna half of her originally promised time. Still, Inna sat close with her mother and fed and talked with her. [109] Inna recalled having a hard time looking at the "lifeless, immobile expression" her mother developed.[110] Nonetheless, Inna empathized with her mother's suffering over missing the children, of which Inna noted was "the most difficult thing" for her mother.[111] Inna's evaluation is generous compared to other evaluations. However, when children take on caretaker roles from the traumatized, they can either develop empathy for or anger toward their survivor parent.[112]

For example, when Svetlana visited her mother for the first time, she could sense "falseness" and distance from her mother's world and life. She noted that she didn't remember how long she had stayed "at Esther's" as much as how much she wanted to leave.[113] When her

[108] Cindy Dell Clark, "Imagination and Coping with Chronic Illness," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Development of* Imagination, ed. by Marjorie Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 550-551.
[109] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 53.
[110] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 318.
[111] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 55.
[112] Aphrodite Matsakis, "Trauma and Its Impact on Families," in *Handbook of Stress, Trauma, and the Family*, ed. by Don R. Catherall, et. al. (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 20.
[113] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 317.

mother finally finished her sentence, their mother-daughter relationship only worsened. She and her family convinced her mother to come "home" to which Svetlana questioned, "But to what home? Where was home?"[114] This was such a poignant question that reflected Svetlana's understanding of her own trauma and her empathy for her mother's trauma. Home often represents a place of safety and comfort, but after being imprisoned in an orphanage or labor camp for multiple years, the idea of "home" became warped and confusing.

Once her mother arrived, Svetlana quickly grew more disappointed in her mother's emotional distance, and claimed that the next twenty years of their lives together were "painful" because they "never found a common language or mutual understanding."[115] Often, grief is easier to process in community, and while Svetlana and her mother experienced different trauma, their grief remained the same. However, trauma can often be so overwhelming that people end up on different steps of recovery, and sometimes don't even make an active effort at all.

Lenina and Ludmila also had a negative experience connecting with their mother. After so many years of Lenina and Ludmila living their adult lives, they received a letter from their mother who was serving out the remainder of her sentence of exile. In the letter, she told her daughters of her camp husband and the baby they had together. Unfortunately for their mother, her camp husband left her to reunite with his family in Altai, Siberia and their mother was left alone with the child. In the letter, their mother asked for assistance and a visit, to which Lenina told her to ignore the city limitations of her exile and come visit them in Moscow.[116]

Upon seeing her mother, Lenina was shocked by her appearance, noting that her mother went from a Party member to a beggar. When Lenina noticed her mother was alone, she probed

[114] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 317.
[115] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 317.
[116] Matthew, *Stalin's Children*, 105.

about the new baby leading her mother to respond simply with, "eh, it died,"[117] Lenina figured her mother gave up the child for adoption after the priest left her, and resented her for this. However, things only worsened between Lenina and her mother, such as when her mother would insult and flirt with Lenina's husband and try to convince them to divorce each other. As Lenina put it: "We tolerated it all...But how much blood she drank! She lived off our suffering."[118] Lenina and her mother's relationship was most likely influenced by her mother's trauma from the labor camps. Many survivors went into states of psychosis, and were repeatedly referred to as different and chaotic upon their return.

As for Ludmila, when she saw her mother for the first time, post arrest, she did not fully remember her emotions of the moment. She recalled that she "probably hugged her" and "probably said 'mother'," but could not remember.[119] Afterall, "mother" was such a foreign concept to Ludmila–for all she knew, she never had a mother. She did write to her fiancé later that she wept when she first heard her mother was alive, but stifled the tears so as not to look weak in the moment.[120] Even when Ludmila wanted to emote, she prevented herself from doing so because she learned at a young age that vulnerability was too dangerous for her. For Ludmila, her emotions surrounding meeting her mother had to stay inside, where they were safe.

Furthermore, Ludmila was not immune to her mother's torment. Eventually, her trips to her sister's apartment grew shorter once she learned that she couldn't handle her mother's "brooding manner and flashes of anger."[121] Her mother would call her an "orphanage cripple" and fall into displays of guilt and affection, clutching at Ludmila and Lenina with a storm of

[117] Matthew, *Stalin's Children,* 105.
[118] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 109.
[119] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 106.
[120] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 107.
[121] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 107.

tears.[122] In response to all this, Ludmila stated that she loved her mother "like a dog loves the person who feeds it"–obligatorily.[123]

For Lenina and Ludmila, many factors contributed to the hatred of their mother. Her insults, tantrums, and chaos made her difficult to live with, but even more difficult to empathize with. PTSD harmed their mother's ability to maintain a safe and loving relationship with her daughters.[124] Plus, Lenina and Ludmila practically had to look out for themselves, and now with the state their mother was in, they had to look out for her too. Even when the symbolic, responsible figure came back into their life, they were still responsible for themselves and that figure.

However, some children's trauma left them confused over their evaluation of their parents. For example, when Maya finally accessed her father's case file, she was overcome with emotion. The "terribly dirty sheets of paper" had "such an effect" on her that at the time of her interview still did not know how to explain the moment.[125] As Maya stated, "They didn't simply die. Having lost my parents in that way. I could not ever forget that for my entire life."[126] It is striking how explicitly Maya vocalized her PTSD in her testimony. She even recalled having triggers while on vacation, noting that whenever she was left alone, she would start obsessively thinking about what happened to her parents.[127] Therefore, it is clear that Maya's definitive evaluation of her parents was not possible without first addressing the manner in which the NKVD killed them.

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[122] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 108.
[123] Matthews, *Stalin's Children,* 107.
[124] Matsakis, "Trauma and Its Impact on Families," 15.
[125] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 204.
[126] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 232.
[127] Levitina, *Silence was Salvation*, 232.

Aleksandr had a similar confusion, noting that until he was around twenty-five years old, he thought that someday he might run into his father in public, even though his father was dead. Aleksandr hoped that fate might have intervened, and everything just a big a mistake. This extent of denial shows how deeply his father's loss affected him and how little he comprehended his trauma as a child.

What is interesting out of all these examples are the similarities and differences between experiences and how these seem to affect the outcome of their evaluations. For those who loved their parents, they recalled memories of mutual compassion and trust–aspects that are important in rebuilding healthy relationships. For those who hated their parents, they recalled memories of abuse, disconnect, and dishonesty–all of which deteriorated any hope of rebuilding their relationships with their parents. For those who were confused, it seems that their parents' death so severely impacted them that they were left in a void of confusion.

Nonetheless, the Soviet system also had a particular effect on the children. Similar to her evaluations of her mother, Inna had nothing but positive reflections of the Soviet system, claiming that she was a very Soviet person, having participated in the Pioneers and the Komsomol, and believed that her parent's situation was all a big mistake.[128]

Still, some children's ideas of the Soviet system shifted over time. For example, Aleksander noted that he had great feelings about Soviet power up until the 1960s. Throughout his childhood, he too was involved in the Komsomol, but his Jewish background mixed with his "child of enemies of the people" status prevented him from getting into the universities he

[128] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 51.

wanted.[129] He noted that he was disillusioned by the time Stalin died, and realized that the worst part of the Purges was that "masses of people lost their moral foundations."[130]

On this note, the children also developed varying views of Stalin. For Ludmila and many of the other children, she believed in his fatherly protection of her and cried the day he died.[131] However, the moment Khruschev's secret speech reached them, stating that "Stalin originated the concept of 'enemy of the people'" and that it "was specifically introduced for the purpose of physically annihilating such individuals," their perspectives changed.[132] In these simple words, Khrushchev finally acknowledged what the children felt all along–that the purges were confusing and arbitrary and that their parents were wrongfully targeted. Upon hearing of this speech, Aleksandr noted that Stalin "fell in [his] eyes once and for all."[133]

Interestingly, Igor recalled Stalin's death with some emotional distance because he did not know how to respond–whether Stalin's death was "an atrocity" or if it was "gradual."[134] He once was a patriot, but he never really formed an opinion of Stalin in the first place because he was too occupied by his own circumstances.[135] This is an idea that many children brought up–that it was a privilege to think outside of survival. For the majority of their lives, these children thought pragmatically and sought for resources to help them survive. For some, Stalin was one of these resources, but for others, Stalin was never even an option.

These evaluations are important, because just like the other saviors in their lives, many children initially viewed Stalin as their ultimate savior who would correct the mistakes made by the NKVD. However, the children's opinions about Stalin shifted as they slowly realized that he

[129] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation,* 31.
[130] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation,* 36.
[131] Matthews, *Stalin's Children*, 113.
[132] Frierson, *Children of the Gulag*, 360.
[133] Zakgeim, *Silence was Salvation*, 34.
[134] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:40:18.
[135] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 01:42:45.

did not have any intentions of helping them. The final nail in the coffin on their once positive opinions of Stalin occurred when they heard the contents of Khrushchev's secret speech. All it took was some clarity for the children to fully understand who was truly on their side.

Conclusion: As Adults

When Inna started having her own children in 1964, she developed an extreme fear of being separated from them and raising her children evoked memories of her own traumatic childhood. She claimed that until she met her husband, she had to struggle all the time, and was surprised at how relaxed he was throughout the child rearing process.[136] When she got pregnant, Inna even told her husband, "You'll probably have to raise her. Don't count too much on me."[137] "Ghosts in the Nursery," a phrase coined by psychologist, Selma Fraiberg, describes the subconscious traumas that are unintentionally passed onto children of trauma survivors.[138] Children "of enemies of the people" often had so much trauma from their childhood, that it was hard to address it all by the time they started having their own children.

This leads to the idea of legacy. Unlike their mothers who had some control over their legacy, children experienced trauma at such pivotal ages that their trauma often outlived them and was passed onto their children. Maintaining silence, lying for the sake of social preservation, reading literature, leaning into saviors, and holding fast to familial ties were all adaptive skills that "children of enemies of the people" gained throughout their lives. While these skills allowed them to survive, they still came at a great cost, as many of these children lived their entire lives working through their trauma. While they survived and found great joy in life, that joy often

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[136] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 63-64.
[137] Shikheeva-Gaister, *Silence was Salvation*, 63.
[138] Selma Fraiberg, "Ghosts in the Nursery: A Psychoanalytic Approach," in *Selected Writings of Selma Fraiberg*, ed. by Louis Fraiberg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 101.

resided in the shadows of their traumas–traumas that were brought on by a government that promised to protect them, and didn't.

Still, the children mentioned in this chapter could all agree on one thing–the importance of family. Perhaps their lack motivated their desire, but as Igor poignantly stated: "I creaked to 90 and maybe I'll creak for at least another year or two, but not because I want to live, but when I'm with my children, with my grandchildren, there's still some interest."[139] Igor like many of the other children reached their old age with great fatigue. Without their family, their life struggles might have taken them from this world sooner. However, as Igor highlighted, his interest in his life resided with his children and grandchildren–the family he created, loved, and protected. His family was his redemption and his second chance at perhaps living a "normal" life that so many of the other survivors so wished to achieve.

[139] Bochkarev, "Film #294," 02:19:10.

Conclusion

As Olga started her journey home all that remained behind her was a wasteland of stumps, woodchips, and seeds. Little did she know that each stump, woodchip, and seed held a trauma just as her own–that of being separated.

For instance, the stumps once united with tall, fortified trunks. Once, these trees existed among many other trees, untouched and unknown. That is until one day, when crunching footsteps broke through the sound of the wind fighting through the needles. Soon after, these crunching footsteps turned into the hacking and chopping of axes followed by thunderous thumps echoing through the taiga. Within twelve hours, the crunching footsteps commenced again, this time accompanied by the sound of sixty-foot wooden corpses being dragged away in the snow.

The stumps that remained either rotted away or harvested new growth. The same is true of the wives and mothers whose husbands were similarly taken away from them by NKVD agents. Even when the NKVD arrested the wives themselves, many chose to lean into their familial identity and navigate their new lives in the same mold. They took the stump that once united with the rest of their family and gave themselves a second chance at life, despite the hardships they faced. They connected with their children, defended their husbands, and grieved deeply–all of which allowed them to endure and tell their stories.

However, the women were not alone in their tales of survival. Next to the stumps laid many scaly, cone-shaped seeds. These seeds once resided high in the sky, distant from the conflict that commenced on the ground until–chop–with the impact of the trunk hitting the ground, seeds exploded into the air. Just as the children once enjoyed their ignorance of the harsh Soviet system, their family separation shoved them into reality and responsibility. Yet, they, too,

were able to start anew. Over time, the seeds shed their scaley exterior and embedded themselves into the earth, growing into a new tree full of its own seeds. Just like mothers and wives, family was both the source of the children's trauma and survival. It ultimately took them building their own families to find the comfort they had been seeking all their lives.

All that remains are the woodchips. What once united the stump with the trunk, the woodchips experienced the brunt of the separation. They were targeted and dispersed with each chop, left to decompose in the snow and soil below. However, in the taiga, the soil's fertility relies on the decomposition of woodchips. Woodchips enrich the soil so new trees can grow around it. Thus, woodchips were the reason the stumps and the pinecones could grow into new trees–they remain integral parts of their lives. This is also true for husbands and fathers. Fathers encouraged and loved their children and wives regardless of the harshness of the Gulag. Those who survived the Purges and Gulag often preserved their dignity, innocence, and past lives through their familial relationships and identities. They leaned into their past and generated new life from the waste the NKVD left behind.

After Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech was sufficiently spread across the Union, survivors were left with the reassurance that the Purges were a ruse thought up by Stalin, but they lacked an essential piece of closure. Unlike the Nuremberg trials following the Holocaust, Gulag survivors lacked international and domestic acknowledgment of the atrocities they experienced. The prison guards, Gulag bosses, NKVD investigators, and even Stalin himself were never publicly tried and punished for their crimes against humanity. Sure, many of these perpetrators were consumed by the Purges themselves, but it was rarely, if ever, for their role in destroying thousands of lives and families.

However, this lack of reconciliation is not the only problem Gulag memory continues to face. This is part of a long-standing trend of Soviet, and now Russian, officials diluting the severity of the Stalinist Purges and Gulag camps. For example, the Butovo firing range is home to thirteen mass graves containing over twenty thousand victims of mass shooting who were killed between August 8, 1937, and October 19, 1938.[1] Although around five thousand of the victims were posthumously rehabilitated starting in 1956, that left seventy five percent of the victims unacknowledged. Moreover, also in 1956, the Supreme Soviet allowed the KGB (Committee for State Security, formerly NKVD) members to build summer dachas meters away from the grave sites. Not only did the KGB know what had occurred there, they actively prevented digging more than fifty centimeters into the ground as dachas were constructed.[2] The same party that killed thousands of innocent people now relaxed by their graves.

It took until the fall of the Soviet Union for the newly formed Gulag advocacy group, Memorial, to finally start protecting Gulag memory–but even this came with issues. With the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) under Putin, Memorial has found some support in their fight to preserve memory but have struggled to reach an agreement with the church leadership over how the Gulag and mass grave sites should be commemorated. Where Memorial hoped for transparency and honesty regarding the severity of the Purges and the Gulag, the ROC sought to highlight primarily practicing Orthodox Christians. The church claimed that around one thousand priests had been executed in the range, with even more imprisoned at Solovki camp, and were thus justified in having full control over the memory of these spaces. Despite Memorial's counterargument for a more inclusive memory that included

[1] Tomas Sniegon, "Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia? Making "Patriotic" Sense of the Gulag in Present-Day Russia," in *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia, Vol. 11,* ed. by Niklas Bernsand and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (BRILL, 2018), 114.
[2] Sniegon, "Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia?, 115.

acknowledging the suffering of a diverse range of people, from non-believers to non-Russians, the Russian Federation sided with the ROC honoring only the Russian religious "martyrs."[3]

Time and again the authentic and tragic memory of the Gulag is substituted or altered for whatever Russian leaders prioritize. Perhaps the biggest case of this is Gulag memory contrasting the collective memory of "The Great Patriotic War." Since Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea, Putin has used the memory of the Great Patriotic War and Stalin to patriotically unite the Russian people. The war is painted as a feat that could only be done under a strong and focused leader such as Stalin. Those who died are remembered as sacrificing their lives for the sake of survival of the Soviet Union.

When paired with the reality of the Gulag, this patriotic idealism becomes murky. The same strong and focused leader also murdered thousands of innocent individuals during his time in power. Thus, for the sake of modern Russian glory in their fight against the "fascist" Ukraine, the Gulag must take a backseat in public memory. This is reflected in the dwindling numbers of visitors to the Gulag Museum in Moscow and the Perm-36 Gulag Museum in Perm, Siberia.[4] What this shows is that those who dissented against Soviet power (as many of the survivors discussed in this thesis did) were ultimately motivated to highlight an extremely significant, yet neglected, aspect of Soviet history. The courage this required deserves to be acknowledged, not only for their sake, but also for the sake of their surviving families.

Courage is also important when accessing traumatic memories. In analyzing their stories through a psychological lens, we find significant details and aspects of their survival that might not have been noticed otherwise. Behaviors and reactions are a significant part of history that tell of the inner workings of the human mind. Though this form of historical analysis is often

[3] Sniegon, "Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia?, 120.
[4] Sniegon, "Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia?, 124.

contested or unpopular in academia, I have found that it is especially engaging for those outside our community, and I encourage other academics to remain open-minded when analyzing history.

Whenever I was asked about my research, I received responses to the likes of "Wow, how sad." While this project has been heart-wrenching, tear-jerking, and often kept me up at night, I found the research incredibly fulfilling. From the tales of their suffering, their darkest moments, and their survival, the intimacy in which these individuals shared their stories was incredibly special for me to consume. At times I read the letters nervously blushing, thinking "should I be reading these romantic words?" They seemed so private. At other times I sat, haunted by Olga Adamova-Sliozberg's dream of death–it surprised me how someone could share something so intimate and vulnerable. However, this, too, inspired me to write with the compassion, reverence, and sensitivity these individuals deserved.

The stories of these survivors are as inspiring as they are tragic. In fact, the depth of their tragedy speaks to the courage required of them to keep surviving. It seems counterintuitive to lean into the identity that haunts one the most, however, for these individuals, they partially could not help but do so. Where they did have a choice was whether they would let the haunting kill them–or make them stronger.

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