Part Three

Peter Stilianovich Stavrakis' Youth

Pyotr Stilianovich Stavraki sitting on his father's lap.

Peter during his youth.

Portrait of Peter for his graduation from medical school.

INTRODUCTION

The births of our parents, Pyotr Stilianovich Stavraki and Yelena Vasilievna Sochanskaya, coincided with the painful birth of the Soviet Union. They both entered this world in Kiev during one of the bloodiest and most turbulent periods in European history. Peter's birthday, on 27 February 1917 (12 March 1917 in the New Style), came only a month after the February Revolution — the first of a pair of revolutions that brought down the existing order in Imperial Russia and forced the tsar's abdication, ending more than 300 years of Romanov rule.

Pyotr Stilianovich Stavraki around 1932, Kiev, Ukraine.

Pyotr Stilianovich Stavraki (also Petros S. Stavrakis and, in the US, Peter S. Stavrakis) sitting on his father's lap 19 May 1923, Kiev, Ukraine. Peter was about 9 years younger than his sisters, the greatly longed for son. Thus, he was indulged.

In October 1917, after defeating a number of competing militant groups, Lenin's Bolsheviks seized control of Russia and its dependencies. In response, various militant factions emerged, taking advantage of the breakdown of order. Desperate to control Ukraine, groups of nationalists, liberators, and just plain bandits roamed the city, gaining and losing ground as their fortunes changed. This continued until the Bolsheviks finally won against the Tsarist forces in 1922 and established their own brutal version of iron-fisted order.

A photo of the UNR Army in front of St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kiev. Between 1917 and 1921 various armies and bands, some with outside help, fought for Ukraine. Ultimately, the Bolsheviks won and established the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The monastery was demolished by the Soviets in 1935 and rebuilt and restored in 1997. Many of the original frescoes and icons reappeared from where they had been hidden for over half a century.

Pyotr Stavraki, 19 May 1923, age 6, just after these events took place and the Revolution started reorganizing society into the Soviet Union.

Peter was born in the midst of this violence. The scene outside his door was described to him by his mother. Shots rang out in the night. Shrieks, furtive figures scurrying along abandoned streets, and conflicting rumors — all right just outside their door!

He was about five years old when the violence started to subside, leaving the country economically and socially devastated. Agriculture was destroyed; teachers, doctors, scientists, and skilled workers had been specially targeted by the Bolsheviks, and the country's basic social framework ceased to function. Ukraine lay in ruins.

It soon became clear to the Bolsheviks that they needed the very people they had been trying to eliminate. This was a hard lesson, but the policy of persecution and elimination was temporarily reversed, and according to Peter's early recollections, a small measure of social order was restored. He remembered the respite lasting about ten years. Then began the reign of terror with its purges and night-time disappearances.

During the period of respite and until the mid 1930s Peter's family fared better than most because his father was a successful physician whose skills even the Communists needed. They were given privileges denied to others, and the authorities looked the other way when Stilian Emilianovich, Peter's father, accumulated some material wealth in the form of artworks, carpets, and gemstones.

Portrait of Pyotr Stilianovich Stavraki around 1926.

When others were starving, Peter had food. He was one of the few children in that era who had a bicycle, a camera, a kayak, and a few other material things. He valued those things all his life, and when he finally had money in the US, then all he ever purchased for himself was a camera, a small boat, and a bicycle.

He grew up in perhaps the most violent period of one of the most violent societies to have ever existed in Europe. Three themes dominated Peter's youth: Terror, Death, and Hope. He knew no other life but this until they reached the US in 1950. Our father's story is one of coping — of joy and sorrow in a brutal time. And yet, he always remembered his youth as a happy and fulfilling time, full of adventure, exploration, and wonder.

Peter was very focused and goal-oriented. From an early age, he knew he wanted to be a physician. The workings of the human body fascinated him, and the power to fix it gave him great satisfaction, so he became a surgeon. He had strong, very steady hands that performed stunning surgeries. In later life in the US, he dedicated himself to reconstructive and plastic surgery for accident victims that would leave patients virtually without scars. He proudly displayed before and after photographs on the walls in the house until our mother got tired of the bloody scars and sedated faces one saw as entering the house.

He had a brilliant mind that worked in a mathematical and orderly fashion but never delved into philosophy or the arts. He always interpreted situations as he saw them and as the evidence supported and was not interested in speculating about hidden meanings or underlying literary themes, even though he enjoyed literature immensely and read Russian classics out loud daily with Helen.

Growing up, his favorite author was James Fenimore Cooper, and his favorite book was the *The Last of the Mohicans*. Of course, books were heavily censored in the Soviet Union, so this one happened to have been considered politically acceptable. Long before he came to the US, he had memorized the names of all the Great Lakes, although he had no romantic desire to ever visit them. He just loved learning.

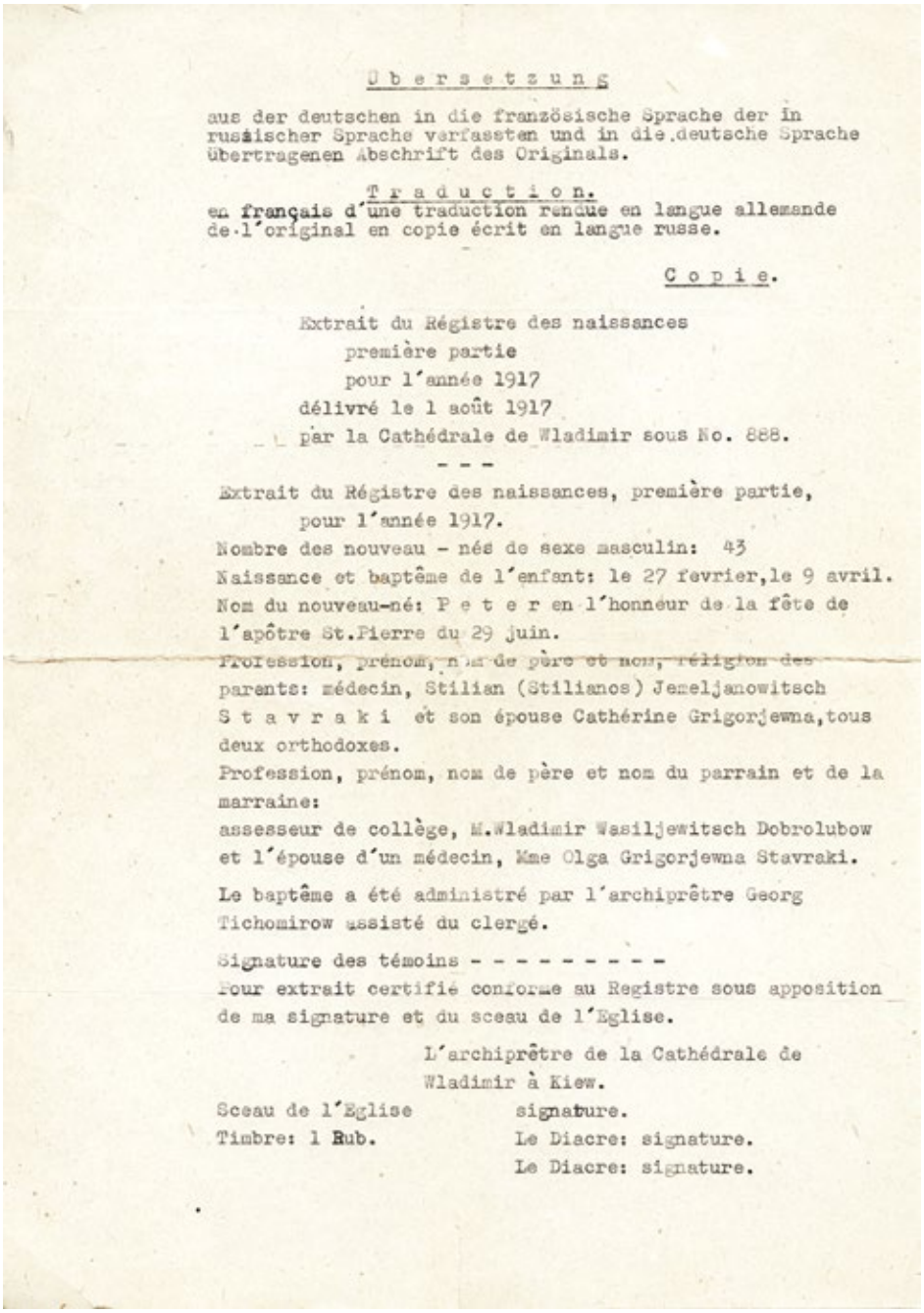
From youth, he was highly disciplined in his studies, never procrastinating and always preparing in advance. The day before an exam, he rested, explored the river, and hiked. He believed that physical activity and resting helped him perform, and indeed he graduated with honors.

As a physician and surgeon he probably surpassed his own father in skill and talent, which, like his father, he continued to hone and sharpen all his life. He mastered German and French in his youth and learned Greek and English during and after WWII. His skill with languages made it possible for him to use his medical talents in Germany, Greece, and the US and probably saved our lives. By the time he opened his own practice in Maryland, USA, in 1953, Peter had passed medical certification exams in Ukraine, Germany, Greece, and the US.

CHAPTER 1

Peter's Childhood

Three days after Peter's birth on 12 March 1917 (26 February 26 [*OS*]) the Tsar abdicated, and the Russian Empire came to an end.



Übersetzung

aus der deutschen in die französische Sprache der in russischer Sprache verfassten und in die deutsche Sprache übertragenen Abschrift des Originals.

Traduction.

en français d'une traduction rendue en langue allemande de l'original en copie écrit en langue russe.

Copie.

Extrait du Régistre des naissances
première partie
pour l'année 1917
délivré le 1 août 1917
par la Cathédrale de Wladimir sous No. 888.

- - -

Extrait du Régistre des naissances, première partie,
pour l'année 1917.
Nombre des nouveau - nés de sexe masculin: 43
Naissance et baptême de l'enfant: le 27 fevrier,le 9 avril.
Nom du nouveau-né: P e t e r en l'honneur de la fête de l'apôtre St.Pierre du 29 juin.
Profession, prénom, nom de père et nom, religion des parents: médecin, Stilian (Stilianos) Jemeljanowitsch S t a v r a k i et son épouse Cathérine Grigorjewna,tous deux orthodoxes.
Profession, prénom, nom de père et nom du parrain et de la marraine:
assesseur de collège, M.Wladimir Wasiljewitsch Dobrolubow et l'épouse d'un médecin, Mme Olga Grigorjewna Stavraki.
Le baptême a été administré par l'archiprêtre Georg Tichomirow assisté du clergé.
Signature des témoins - - - - - - - - -
Pour extrait certifié conforme au Registre sous apposition de ma signature et du sceau de l'Eglise.

L'archiprêtre de la Cathédrale de Wladimir à Kiew.

Sceau de l'Eglise signature.
Timbre: 1 Rub. Le Diacre: signature.
Le Diacre: signature.

Translation of Peter's birth certificate probably made during WWII. The Old Style date for his birth is 27 February 1917. His mother's patronymic here is given as Grigorievna, after her mother's father because she was considered illegitimate. Her sister Olga Grigorievna Stavraki was Peter's godmother. When Peter's mother (Baba Katya) immigrated to Canada with her daughter, Nina, she used her proper patronymic and her husband's last name in English: Ekaterina Vasilievna Stavrakis.

Peter is the baby held by the nanny on the left. The two girls marked with "X's" are his sisters, Olga and Nina (left to right). The location is unknown, but this is the earliest photo of him we have. Most people did not have access to cameras or photographers at the time, so this is a rare picture.

Children on a staircase in 1917. Peter is the baby in the nanny's arms. In front of them sits his sister Olga, and Nina is at the bottom on the right. This must have been taken at some summer house and not in the city.

Monument of Alexander III toppled in Moscow in 1918. Tzar Nicholas II abdicated on 15 March 1917 (*NS*) just three days after Peter's birth. But the Revolution continued until about 1921 in Ukraine.

He was the third child and long-hoped-for son, of the prominent Greek physician, Stilian Emilianovich Stavraki and his Russian-Ukrainian wife, Ekaterina Vasilievna (also known as Grigorievna) Farimskaya (see Part 2 for her family history). His whole family doted on him, and he was especially indulged by his two sisters, Olga and Nina, 8 and 9 years older, respectively. His recollections of his family life were always extremely warm and happy.

At the time of his birth and until his family fled Kiev in 1943, they occupied the second-floor apartment at 36 Funducleevskaya Street (Later called Leninskaya, and now Bogdan Khmelnitsky St.). The building ran the length of a nondescript clapboard structure hastily slung between two large elegant apartment houses.

Stavrakis family around 1913 before Peter was born and before the Revolution. Left to right, Nina, Olga, Ekaterina, and Stilian Emilianovich Stavrakis.

Ekaterina Farimskaya and Stilian Emilianovich Stavraki around 1937, Kiev, Ukraine. Stilian died in January of 1938. He was already unwell when this photo was taken.

The house Peter grew up in, with him and his daughter Katheryn standing in front. It had various numbers, and the street changed names many times. It appears as #36, #37 and even #34 at various times. The street also changed names from Funducleevskaya to Lenina to Bogdan Khmelnitsky Street after independence.

In 1909 the Stavrakis family lived at #26 on the Grand Jitomirskaya Street (later Helen referred to it as the Jitomirskaya Chaussee). In 1913 the family is found living at 34 (sic) Funducleevskaya Street in the house owned by G. I. Meklenburg. All property was nationalized after the Revolution.

The family occupied the second floor. Peter's room was on the far right with a window opening out over a roof. The first floor seems to have had storage and utility rooms, and the groundskeeper, Svistoon, lived there with his eight children. In 1995 we learned from his son that he was a KGB informer. (Photo taken in 1995.)

Before the Revolution it was probably considered no more than a makeshift worker's house. After the Revolution when all property was nationalized and cut up into communal apartments, it had become a luxury dwelling where the family inhabited the whole house without other tenants.

The house stood behind an ornate but weathered, antique wooden building, across from a small, cement courtyard accessed by a narrow passage. Sometime before 1995 the wooden house was dismantled, exposing the Stavrakis house and courtyard to the street.

Dinner at the family apartment. Baba Katya leaning over Stilian with their daughter Olga on the right. Stilian provided Baba Katya with a cook, laundress, maid, and nannies as she was not trained to do housework. She was raised in an upper-class household and was, as her son Peter described, "very pleasant but disorganized."

The Stavrakis family apartment consisted of four bedrooms, some makeshift, a small medical consulting office and surgery, dining room (which doubled as the patient waiting room), kitchen, bathroom, and an alcove where the maid slept. Because the building was small and almost free standing, the family had no immediate neighbors to contend with.

In reality, they were crammed in much like everyone else in the city, for as the family grew, spouses moved in and children appeared. At the time of Stilian's death in January of 1938, the apartment housed him and his wife, our Baba Katya; their daughter Nina and her first husband Nicola; Nina and Nicola's daughter Lena; and later (after Nicola's death) Nina's second husband, Zamryi; and their son Yura. Stilian and Katya's daughter Olga also lived there with her husband, although her children were born later, and there was young Peter, who had a tiny but private room opening out onto a roof. In 1938 he brought his new bride to live with him, although they ate with her parents in their one-room komunalka (a Soviet cut-up apartment with shared bathrooms, kitchens, and even bedrooms), and she did not find this loud and emotional family congenial. At times, Peter's nephew Andryusha, who had been abandoned by his parents, also lived there or came daily to eat with the Stavrakis family.

Andrei Storozhenko was Peter's cousin's son on his mother's side. They were best friends and the same age. In 1938 Andryusha was imprisoned and tortured for 9 months. After his release he was sent to the front, where he died in the first attack on the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in WWII.

Stilian's good fortune derived from his medical renown as a life-saving surgeon. He was one of the few people in Kiev, perhaps in all of Ukraine, who could perform the delicate and dangerous surgery known as "trepanation," necessary to save lives in cases of severe inner ear infection before the era of antibiotics. He was especially adept at drilling through the bones of the mastoid process to drain the infection, thus saving the patients' life.

As Peter said,

> ...If not done, the patient was dead. If done, in most cases, the patient survived. But to do it, was not very easy. Especially because of the nerve that passes near there. You had to go around that nerve. If you damage the nerve, half of the face is completely and permanently paralyzed. My father never had that complication.
>
> "The steady surgical hand and the ability to reconstruct injuries I inherited from my father, and I have distinctly good luck with those procedures, as you know."

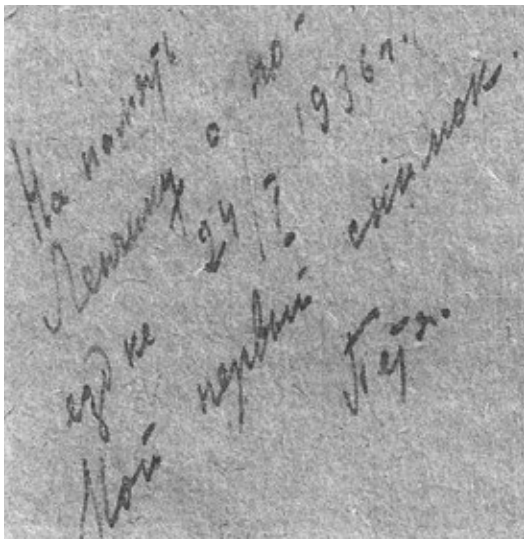
Grateful officials looked the other way from Stilian's relative privileges — at least until about 1935. He had a whole apartment and his independent business practice, for which he charged a fee if the client could pay, and officials generally had money. The poor paid him in eggs or milk or flour or not at all. Whatever of value he got, he converted to precious stones, gold, paintings, rugs, and furniture. The family lived well.

In the early years, the Soviet Union suffered from severe shortages of all consumer goods, and food was often scarce. Famines swept through the city periodically, and people scrounged around to survive. Stilian had purchasing power and a good information network, so when rumor had it that something desirable was about to appear in this or that shop, he often knew in advance, which gave him a competitive advantage.

Peter with his kayak in 1936. His father was permitted special economic privileges because he was so well regarded by the officials who depended on his treatment and were grateful when he saved their lives.

Thus, he received gifts of money and was permitted to charge for certain services. Stilian accumulated wealth and converted it to previous stones, which were all seized after his death, but it was said he also treated the poor for free, served in a charity hospital, and when offered, accepted eggs, bread, and food for payment.

Peter also got a camera, another luxury not available to other families. This was his first picture and shows his nephew and best friend, Andryusha, paddling a canoe on the flooded Truhanov Island in the spring of 1936.



On the back he inscribed a dedication to Helen, confirming that this was Peter's first photograph. In his life Peter stood out for his exceptional talents. Photography was not one of them, although it never dimmed his enthusiasm.

Stilian particularly indulged Peter. One time, he heard that a shipment of brand new bicycles was scheduled to arrive at a particular shop. Bicycles were rare and in very short supply. Stilian himself went to the shop at night, well in advance, so he would end up near the front of the line that inevitably formed as hundreds of people queued up around the city block for hours on end. It turned out that only twelve bicycles had arrived, and Stilian, who had waited the longest near the front, managed to acquire one. Later, again receiving tips from his patients, he also managed to purchase a camera and a kayak for Peter.

Taken in Chincoteague, Virginia, USA, circa 2000. In 1926 Stilian managed to acquire a bicycle for Peter, standing in a line all night waiting for a store to open. Only twelve bicycles were available for sale, and he managed to purchase one.

Thus, Peter learned to ride. Most children in Kiev did not have such a luxury, and Helen never learned to ride. In the US, he bought a tandem, and she always rode with him.

These were rare and expensive items that most other families could not afford, and our mother, Helen, like most of that generation, never learned to ride a bicycle. Many years later in the US, Peter bought a tandem, and the two of them enjoyed riding together.

Peter around age 5 toward the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the Bolshevik period.

Peter's memories extend far back into his infancy. By the time the Revolution ended in 1922, he was already 5 years old.

> I remember the day the Bolsheviks arrived in Kiev. Kiev was taken by different forces and changed hands on several occasions. One time, it was taken by the White Army of the tsar which was pushed out by Ukrainian War Chieftains. Some of them were just plain bandits. One of them was called Makhno and another, Petliura.

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, the leader of the Black Army which fought for control of Ukraine but eventually lost.

Makhno's Black Army in Kiev. They were probably in one of the parades that Peter witnessed with his nanny.

A parade on the Kreschatik in 1920, similar to or an actual parade that Peter had witnessed.

From our street we could often see the parades because various troops liked to march down this street. It was wide and important and everybody came out to see. I will remember forever one parade in particular. The commander or leader was sitting on top of a carriage and on both sides of him his bodyguards wore live shells attached to leather ribbons crisscrossing their chests (bandoliers).

Those people were later knocked out by some White Army general. Then the Bolsheviks took over. They were kicked out again but eventually they came back and I remember that morning particularly clearly.

I was in my room in bed, early morning. I woke up and I guess I called my mother and she walked in and sat on my bed and looked at me. We could hear shooting in the distance. She looked at me and she said, "Peter, the Reds entered again." And she started to cry. That was the last time they entered and they never left. From that time on we lived under the Bolsheviks until we left Kiev in 1943.

Peter and his mother, probably in Crimea. It is one of the few we have of the two of them together.

Peter's mother's family in 1898 when our grandmother, Katya was 17. Seated, from left to right: Mitya (Dimitry) Stein, Elizaveta Farimskaya, Vasily Lashkevich, Katerina Farimskaya, Olga Farimskaya, woman on right possibly Alexander Lashkevich's wife. Standing from left to right: Ana Farimskaya, Vasily Dobrolyubov, possibly Vsevolod's wife, possibly Vsevolod Lashkevich, Olga Farimskaya, possibly Alexander Lashkevich, and possibly Alexander Lashkevich's wife.

Peter's mother's family before the Revolution and before they were all scattered around the world. Peter did not know his grandparents, and their story is presented in Part 2. Because they were landed gentry, they were more heavily persecuted than others in the Soviet period.

Peter's mother, Ekaterina Grigorievna (Vasilievna) Farimskaya, around 1910.

Peter's mother, Ekaterina Vasilievna Farimskaya (also called Grigorievna). Peter was very fond of his mother and got on well with her.

She was raised in a life of leisure and had few practical skills and no domestic skills at all. She played the piano somewhat badly and did not cook, clean, take care of children, or run her household. Her husband, Stilian, provided her with maids, cooks, laundresses, nannies, and tutors for the children.

She was a quiet and gentle person of quiet temperament, who showed little emotion. Her grandchildren knew her to be almost joyless, sunken in the tragedy of her life as it turned out.

I do not think my mother was much involved in my education or upbringing. She was a nice and pleasant person but pretty disorganized, and she spent most of her time at home. She usually had household help. I always had nannies who took care of me.

Olga Grigorievna Farimskaya, sister of Peter's mother Ekaterina and Peter's godmother. She married Stilian's younger brother, Vladimir Stavraki, and after both got to America around 1950, the two sisters stayed together all their lives.

Peter's mother, our Baba Katya, had been prepared for a life of leisure by her wealthy landowner father. She was a placid person, who basically had no skills except playing the piano. She could not cook, embroider, or handle a household. Stilian accepted this and always hired help which included a maid, cook, laundress, and nannies for Peter.

Stilian arranged tutors for all three of his children, especially in German and French by native speakers. At age five, Peter started academic lessons as well, and the home schooling continued until his teens. Later, at age 12, when the Soviets had finally organized the education system, he was enrolled in the higher education track of the 10-year school so that he would get a formal diploma, but the home tutoring continued, and he missed a lot school. He hated language study, although he excelled at it, much as he excelled at everything he worked on. His knowledge of German came in very handy during WWII.

Nannies and Early Childhood

I have some memories of the ladies who took care of me when I was a little boy. One of the first ladies whom I remember well was Natasha, a Ukrainian from a peasant background.

She was probably in her forties, and I had a special affection for her. She was really my good friend. Natasha was not an educated woman, but she knew how to approach a child, and we spent many pleasant hours together. I remember clearly when we were sitting by the fireplace reading children's stories and she spread her long black hair on both sides of her face.

When Natasha married, I was chosen to play a special part in the wedding. According to Russian custom, the bride and groom travel to the church in a carriage, and ahead of them a big icon is carried by a little child. The child selected was me. I remember clearly how I sat in front of them holding the huge icon as the procession moved slowly to the church. It was impressive. Unfortunately, it was not a fortunate marriage and broke down shortly thereafter, but that was probably not her fault.

In the early days, Natasha took me to the military "parades," when various groups fought for control of Kiev. Roving bands of "liberators" marched or rode through the city on trucks and horses carrying machine guns, wearing short fur vests. I remember how Natasha watched transfixed by the fighters, and her eyes glowed with the exciting promise of nationalism and freedom.

When I was about five, my parents started my study of foreign languages. I always hated those lessons, especially the French, which was exceedingly difficult because of the grammar. My teacher in French was a nice young man from Switzerland whose last name was Cartier. Messier Cartier gave me a lot of homework, which was not pleasing, but I enjoyed the lessons themselves.

The most popular language in Russia at that time was German. So a German lady by the name Frau Hedlich gave me lessons. She was in her forties, I imagine. Rather short. The problem was that I hated to learn languages. Actually, that was a shame because the lady persisted. My parents persisted. And I'm glad they did because eventually I learned German quite well, and in the future it helped me considerably.

Frau Hedlich usually came early in the morning and stayed with me all day. She did not live in our home. She had some friends in Kiev, and sometimes when she visited them, she took me along. One day we went to visit her good friend.

When we arrived, the friend's 16-year-old son let us into the house. We walked in, and I remember thinking it was a nice house. But there was a strange situation in the house. It seems there had been a break-in during the night. A ladder was standing outside against the house up to the attic. I don't remember if anything was stolen or not, but there was some talk about something odd going on.

We entered on the first floor then went to the next room, which was more or less like a living room. In the first room there was a steep wooden stair, like a fixed ladder, going up to the second floor.

Frau Hedlich sat me at the table and said that I could wait there while she spent some time with her friend. I got bored.

The 16-year-old boy came to me with a puzzle. I still remember that puzzle. There was a pair of shoes dangling within a frame. He said if I take them off without damaging the frame, I can keep the frame as a toy. Then he left me and I went to work on the puzzle.

A few minutes later we heard a loud pistol shot in the attic. Frau Hedlich and the boy's mother ran up to the attic, and a few minutes later they climbed down the ladder carrying the boy. He was bleeding from the stomach where he had shot himself. They took him to the hospital, but he died shortly thereafter. Today, he would have been saved because the shot went through his liver, but medical science wasn't as advanced as it is now. I don't know the reason for his suicide.

Three days passed and there was a funeral in Vladimirski Sobor (St. Vladimir Church). I was there. The body was lying in the nave, with flowers around. Face up, his face pale. I came closer. I had never seen a dead body before. So, the first thing I did was take my finger and press it to his nose to see if it was not artificial or that of a living person.

The Cathedral of St. Vladimir (Vladimirski Sobor), where Peter was Christened and where he later played, as it was near his house. It was here that the family stopped to say farewell to their homeland in October 1943, as they were leaving the burning city forever. (Photo credit: antikvar.ua)

During the Soviet Period Vladimirski Sobor was converted to the Museum of Atheism, which saved it from demolition. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it was reconsecrated and restored, and today it stands as one of the most beautiful examples of Slavic religious art and architecture. (Photo credit: unknown)

In 1932 the Soviets brought down the church bell in their "War on Religion." Many churches and monasteries were blown up and levelled to the ground. Luckily St. Vladimir's survived by being converted to a museum. (Photo credit: retroua.com)

Peter was about six when this tragic suicide occurred. By the time he was 10 or 12, all the churches were closed. St. Vladimir Church, where this funeral took place and Peter was baptized, was turned into a Museum of Atheism, although in the 1990s, it was restored back to being a church.

Peter during his youth. This must have a been a series taken at one time because #35 was actually a postcard sent to Peter in 1947. It appears #34 was in the possession of Peter's niece, Elena Bernotas, whose son scanned it for this manuscript.

Later on, I had another German lady. She told me a story from WWI, when her husband was fighting there. He and some other soldiers were hidden in an underground pit she called a "trunche," and they decided to come out and get past the Russian troops, but they were kind of concerned that their number was not very large. (Peter Germanized the English word "trench" by mistake). So the commander got an idea to pull a little trick. They climbed out of the trunche one after another. They kept coming and coming and coming... The Russian troops thought they saw more men than were actually there, and they left the area. (Presumably they were going back into the trench and then coming out again to give the impression of greater numbers.)

The one thing I know, is that all these German ladies were very successful in making sure I learned the German language very well. When I was in Germany later during the war, and during our troubles there, the people sometimes thought I was German. They were a little skeptical of my pronunciation, which was somewhat harsh like in Prussia. Well, I didn't try to change their opinion about it.

Peter at about age six with an unknown girl. Given the formality of the pose, it must have been a relation. He had a number of cousins on his mother's side who might have been only a few years older than he was.

The second German tutor had a Russian name, probably from her husband, but I do not remember it. The one interesting thing about her was that she gave me some advice that was rather simple but that I remembered all my life.

Peter at about age 8.

She said, "Peter, if you decide to do something, always ask yourself why you do it. In German this is expressed in one simple word 'warum' which means 'pochemu', or why." From that time on, every time I have to make a significant decision, I remember the German lady from my childhood who told me, "Peter, ask yourself warum."

Around five years of age, I was sent to kindergarten with other children of our friends to a lady whose name was Yelena Vladimirovna. She was over 70, white haired, tall, and she had a small kindergarten for maybe a dozen children. It was a private institution. I will always remember her, for she was an outstanding teacher for small children. She taught me a number of things, and they have remained more or less cut into my memory forever.

She showed me her third finger which had a little lump on the side and she said that was the result of holding the pencil incorrectly. From that time on, I always write the way she taught me.

According to her, the pencil should be held with three fingers: the thumb, index, and middle finger. In such a manner that only the very tips of the fingers touch it. That way it does not press on the side of the fingers. THIS IS THE SINGLE PROPER WAY TO HOLD THE PENCIL. I learned it and I always use that method.

(Peter was somewhat dogmatic. Once he decided there was a right way to do something, everyone was required to do it only the RIGHT way. In the medical profession, that was a tremendous plus. In his informal dealings, it sometimes drove people crazy.)

Unfortunately, few people use this method, and it always amuses me to see that virtually nobody follows this advice. Some people even hold the pencil as if it were a piece of junk or a poker or something of that kind; some hold it in the fist, which certainly is not the proper technique.

Holding the pencil properly helps considerably in writing well. Of course, the type of writing still depends on a lot of other things. My writing is not the best, but at least I don't have any lumps or calluses on my fingers from improper pencil holding. With the years and with my desire to be fast, my writing kind of got worse.

(That is an understatement. His handwriting was abominable and unreadable.)

Being a physician, Peter's most vivid memories have always focused on illness and treatment. During his early years, the child mortality in Ukraine was extremely high, and Peter did not totally escape the brush with the common childhood killer — diphtheria.

Before antibiotics appeared, the Centers for Disease Control estimate that up to 50% of small children infected with this disease did not survive. Peter got it when he was only two.

Diphtheria starts with a sore throat and cough, but as it progresses the causal bacterium can give off toxins that damage the heart and other internal organs and obstruct the airways resulting in asphyxiation. In the past, a desperate treatment of last resort was a tracheostomy, although there was no guarantee of survival due to the overall damage the disease could cause and the lack of proper tubing and equipment.

At around age two, I had diphtheria. Diphtheria, in our times, it was a pretty common condition. Children suffered from it severely and sometimes died. In my case, I was probably not older than two years old. My respiration was impaired, and the only treatment at the time was steam and aspirin. They were administered, but I did not improve. I had trouble breathing.

So, my father took me to his operating room, which we always had available at our home for minor surgery. Everything was ready for a tracheostomy, to open up an artificial airway. I vaguely remember how I was wheeled in there. I remember my father in a white gown and some people who assisted him. But then, apparently at the last minute, my breathing improved and I was wheeled out. Eventually, I recovered.

Years later, my nephew, Yura, my sister Nina's son, developed diphtheria. She sent for me, but for some reason or another I did not go to see him until the next day. I tried to do what I could, but the child died. I have never been able to excuse myself for that. I always had the feeling that if I had gone to see him that same night, he might have been lived.

As long as I am talking about diphtheria, I thought I would mention a couple of other cases which come to mind. I worked for a few weeks in a village in

Ukraine and a five-year-old child was brought to me with severe diphtheria. He was a nice, little child with curly blond hair and suffered from severe respiratory distress. His breathing got increasingly worse, and at that time, somebody in Russia had developed tubing to insert into the throat to make breathing easier.

But the tubes were not made too well, and we had no experience with them. I doubt that we had the proper size anyway. I tried my best but was unable to insert the tube into his trachea. I went out to the father who was waiting in the waiting room and told him that the single way to save that child was to do a tracheostomy. But our people in Ukraine and Russia were backward quite often. He looked at me and said, "I will not allow my child to be cut." No matter how we tried, we could not convince him. He refused. The child died.

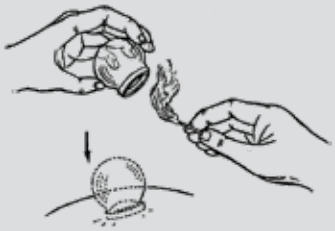
I had pneumonia twice as a child, at two years of age and again around ten. Of course at that time we did not have as good treatment as we have now. I was told that the first time I was very seriously ill, but somehow I made it. Antibiotic treatment did not exist at that time, and treatment basically consisted of bedrest, aspirin, liquids, and the famous banki "cupping," which were little glass suction cups that were attached to the patient's back.

I remember the second time. I was treated with the "banki." There is no scientific basis for this treatment, but I was very surprised that it did have some positive effect because after the application of those banki, I remember my cough got looser, and I felt better for a while. Some things in medicine we do not understand.

Cupping

Cupping is a western European form of folk medicine (on the order of a Mustard Plasts in the US), still practiced in many parts of the world today. Peter used it on his father-in-law in the US, as the latter insisted it relieved symptoms of cold and congestion.

The cups were thick glass containers that were attached to the patients' back by creating a vacuum inside them. A small flame on a stick was used to create the vacuum and then the cup was quickly applied to the back. Normally 12 cups were used, six on a side.



The cups pulled the blood to the surface, leaving a purple or red circle underneath. It was supposed to be beneficial for a number of ailments affecting breathing as it drew the congestion from the lungs up to the skin. Usually the red circles turned to blue spots which remained for several days.

Even though Peter did not place much credence in folk medicine, he continued to use cupping until we came to America, especially on the older family members who put their faith in the treatment. Throughout the 1940s in Germany, he travelled everywhere with a set of cups. In 1950 he bought a spare set in Athens to bring to the US in case they were unavailable. His father-in-law, our grandfather, Vasily Ivanovich, always demanded cupping when suffering from a cold. Eventually, Peter gave up the practice, although he kept a set of 12 cups among his medical things until his death.

Peter also brought some dietary rules with him from the old country — one being the prohibition of consuming milk together with cucumber because, supposedly, the latter curdles the milk within the human stomach causing digestive distress. Those ideas also faded away in the US.

Education — Tutors

I really never went to school until the age of twelve. As I got older, my father added lessons in geography, mathematics, history, Russian literature, and other academic subjects. He hired private teachers, selected from the best in Kiev.

One teacher was Mr. Zhuk. In Russian *zhuk* means bug. He was an outstanding teacher in mathematics, geography, and I think also biology. His main subject was math, and he was extremely good at explaining everything. His lessons were very interesting and useful.

On the day that we parted, he told me that I was extremely capable in math. It probably was true because I also liked math very much, and in our medical school in Russia — they don't have it here by the way — we had calculus for six months. I was so absorbed in calculus that sometimes I worked extra — until 2 in the morning solving some complex problem in math.

Olga (his oldest sister) went to college to study architecture. She did quite well, and her projects took a lot of time. She usually did them at the last minute and in a great hurry. Olga and her friends worked together, sometimes half the night or even all night through. I was 10, and I liked to hang around and help.

Mademoiselle Lucie tutored Olga and Nina in French before Peter was born. In the fashion of Odessa Greeks, Stilian arranged for language tutors for his children. Greeks preferred the German language, but Stilian made sure his children also learned French. He himself was fluent in German.

After the Revolution Stilian hired tutors for academic subjects as well as language because schools were in total disarray until the Soviets restored social order. Peter continued tutoring at home, even after he enrolled in school at age 12.

One day Olga asked me to do some calculations for her. I especially liked to perform calculations in my head, and I did them rather fast. Most involved multiplying two digit figures, like 28 times 33. I did it so fast that she was impressed. She tested me against the slide rule, and my calculation was faster, so from that time on I had a job. I would lie on the sofa or easy chair and, with my body completely relaxed, did one calculation after the other for her and her friends. That was lots of fun. Her projects were successful, and she got the highest grade for all of them. So it turned out that my help was very useful.

I did not go further in math because medicine took over all my interest.

The other teacher I had was Father Grosso, a priest from the Russian Orthodox church, who was very knowledgeable in Russian literature, which is what I studied with him. We reviewed almost all the main Russian writers and poets, and I wrote reports on them. He gave me oral quizzes, and I always did well.

Lessons on Russian history, I received along with some of my friends from a very talented professor by the name of Vasilievich. He was later arrested by the NKVD and sent to Siberia to a place called Rudnick Tamir Tau. The ending *nick* means it was a mine for metals. There was a rumor that he was a homosexual, but I don't think that had anything to do with his arrest. The arrest was on general principles, because he was from the educated class, and many people of that class were arrested around that time in Russia.

About six month later, I received one communication from Vasilievich — a small, open card — letters probably would not have arrived. The card described briefly his life and conditions there…he couldn't write the way things actually were but he used some circumspect language. He mentioned that the snow was about a meter high and he had to use summer sneakers to walk in it. He also said that he was cutting trees with a hand saw, and he mentioned something about the food. That is the last I heard of him.

My parents also tried to teach me music and painting… unfortunately; but that was eventually abandoned.

Peter's sisters had great hopes for him in the theater and got him a part in a play. The rehearsals went well, and he showed some promise.

During the first performance when his part came up, he stood in front of the audience and very earnestly and clearly uttered only one word, "Semenya!" sticking his hand up into the air. No one could get him to say anything more, and his promising theatrical career ended.

CHAPTER 2

Peter's Youth

Life at 36 Funducleevskaya Street

Funducleevskaya Street transects the vibrant historical and cultural heart of Kiev to this day, although with a different name. Just up the hill, a few blocks from Peter's home, stands the surgical amphitheater of the university where Peter trained. It is now converted to a medical museum. Also close to Peter's house stood the Zoological Academy, where his friend Misha Voinsvensky later served as director; the Natural History Museum, whose director in 1995 was the son of the Stavrakis groundskeeper (and KGB informer); the main building of the University of Kiev; and St. Vladimir's Church where Peter was baptized and often played as a child. Further down the hill stands the Kiev Opera, St. Sophia Cathedral, the Golden Gates, and the political and commercial heart of the city on Kreschatik Street.

The Stavrakis family lived at 36 (also appearing as #34 and #37 in some records) Funducleevskaya Street, which was renamed Lenina in Soviet times and is now Bogdan Khmelnitsky. In these pictures, the house is not visible, as it stood behind an antique wooden building that was demolished before 1995 and then replaced with something modern several years before 2014.

The street was a major, upscale thoroughfare located in the historic center of old Kiev in the area of St. Sophia, St. Vladimir's, The National Opera Theater, the Golden Gate, and the Mikhailovsky Monastery.

Along the descent from the upper old city to Kreschatik and the Dnieper, a funicular transported pedestrians down along Vladimir's Hill, to the famous monument of St. Vladimir.

Peter described the hill: "The monument in honor of St. Vladimir (who Christianized the Kievan population in the 10th century) is on the shore of the Dnieper hills. It is beautifully made. His huge bronze figure stands on the hill overlooking the river and he holds a giant cross in his hand. The cross is brightly lit at night."

One of Peter's favorite landmarks in Kiev was this illuminated statue of St. Vladimir, at the top of Vladimir Hill. The lights were only turned back on recently after years of neglect. St. Vladimir faces out to the River Dnieper celebrating the location where the Kievans underwent the first baptism in the tenth century, when he forced his population to accept Christianity after he had converted in Chersonese, Crimea.

Established in 1939, the Kiev Botanical Garden covers over 22 hectares of land and has at least 8000 species of plants, many considered rare and unusual specimens.

During Peter's youth it was covered with woods and crossed by trails with occasional benches. There were remains of old buildings that the boys used to explore.

Botanical Garden and Babki (A.V. Fomin Botanical Garden)

The Kiev Botanical Garden, founded in 1839, is an enormous park and repository for exotic and rare plants. Covering 22 hectares of both forested parkland and special collections, it offered a wonderful and mysterious play area for Peter and his friends.

(Peter told his stories in English, and we have kept them in his words with only minor editing.)

The famous Kiev botanical garden, only a few blocks from our home, was particularly attractive to children and especially young boys like ourselves who liked to explore its many hidden places. We played there whenever possible. We called it *botanica* which means "botany" in English.

When you entered the garden, there was a big wide pathway lined by ancient stone statues (*babki*) from about the sixth or seventh century. I will never forget the appearance of these pagan gods! Now all these statues have been removed to the Anthropological museum (1995). At that time, they were not even guarded, and for little boys like us, the greatest fun was to climb onto their heads.

In 1995 we found the two standing on both sides of the entrance to the Anthropological museum where they had been brought for safe keeping. Peter recognized one as "Ded" (grandpa) and the other as "Babka" (grandma), as they used to call them.

These two ancient stone statues known as *babki* stood at the entrance to the botanical garden when Peter played there as a child. He and his friends climbed onto their heads and named one "ded," or "grandpa," and the other "babka," or "old woman."

When we visited in 1995, Peter recognized them at the entrance to the Archaeological Museum in Kiev, which is where they had been moved to from the Botanical Garden.

When I was small I went there with a nanny or some other person. Usually we went to a quiet place where there was tall, green grass. The climate in Kiev was much different from what we have here in the United States. We

had beautiful weather in the summer, which permitted us to fully enjoy the garden. There were no ticks — no poison ivy. So we often sat there on a blanket, usually reading books. Before I learned to read, someone read to me.

One thing I always remember was a lot of grasshoppers. There was a tremendous number of them, and they were jumping from one place to another all around us. Some were big, entirely green, and very beautiful.

There was one plant in our area and in the botanical area, called *krapiva* (stinging nettle). This plant grew in certain areas, and it has small tiny needles which, if touched, cause rapid inflammation with rash and itching at the place of contact. There is an illness called *krapivnitza* which means "nettle rash" in English.

It really did not bother us because we avoided it, but once I had an unpleasant experience with this plant. I was probably not older than 7 or 8. There was a foundation of an old ruined building. I can't remember now what it was before. It was a remnant of a wall, and in the middle there was a deeper area, maybe three or four feet deep, filled with nettles.

Now, of course, we had to explore everything, and we climbed around on this old foundation and jumped from wall to wall. Somehow or other my foot slipped, and I fell down into the old building space right into the nettles. I had only shorts on, so most of my body was exposed to that plant. It was a sad experience.

Another experience I had in the garden was very peculiar. Some parts of the garden were fairly isolated, and it was probably not a good idea to go there alone. But you can't control little boys. I don't recall anyone else being with me at the time.

I remember sitting on the bench in this isolated part of the garden when two fellows came into the clearing and sat down on the same bench but paid no attention to me. They were grown ups — maybe in their 20s or 30s, and they had a bag with them.

Out of the bag they pulled some clothes and spread them on the bench. It turned out to be a man's gray suit! They admired that suit; examining it carefully and — what impressed me — was that one of the collars was cut clear through by a razor or some sharp instrument, and around the cut there were several bloody spots. It was immediately clear to me that they had taken the suit off somebody by force.

I just sat very still, watching, but they totally ignored me. I did not run away. Probably, I was so frightened that I couldn't move! After a short while those guys got up and left without paying any attention to me.

Generally speaking, this kind of violence was not very common because crime was not too prevalent at that time. I still liked our beloved "botanica."

The Body on the Dnieper — During Famine

We had another interesting incident some years later during the great famine. It was after midnight, and my friends and I were wandering around the banks of the Dnieper. It was a moonlit night and we found a wooden boat lying upside down on the beach.

When we got close to the boat, something caught our attention. So we lifted it, and there lying underneath was the body of a young man. He was dead. About 25 years old. We put the boat back over him and continued on.

This wasn't unusual, because we had a terrible famine at the time. It was more or less common to find dead bodies. He wasn't necessarily killed but probably died of hunger.

The origin of this old photo is unknown, but it was carefully preserved by Peter and Helen in the old album, and in several accounts, they mention the wonder they felt as the "moon rose over the Dnieper," especially when it was full. Possibly, it either was a photo of their river or it reminded them of it.

Crimea and Other Dachas

Peter and his mother in Crimea. During the years of the NEP (New Economic Plan) around 1924–25, Peter recalled that things had improved, and the family started to take vacations in Crimea. Occasionally, they visited Stilian's brother's family in Odessa or took vacations together.

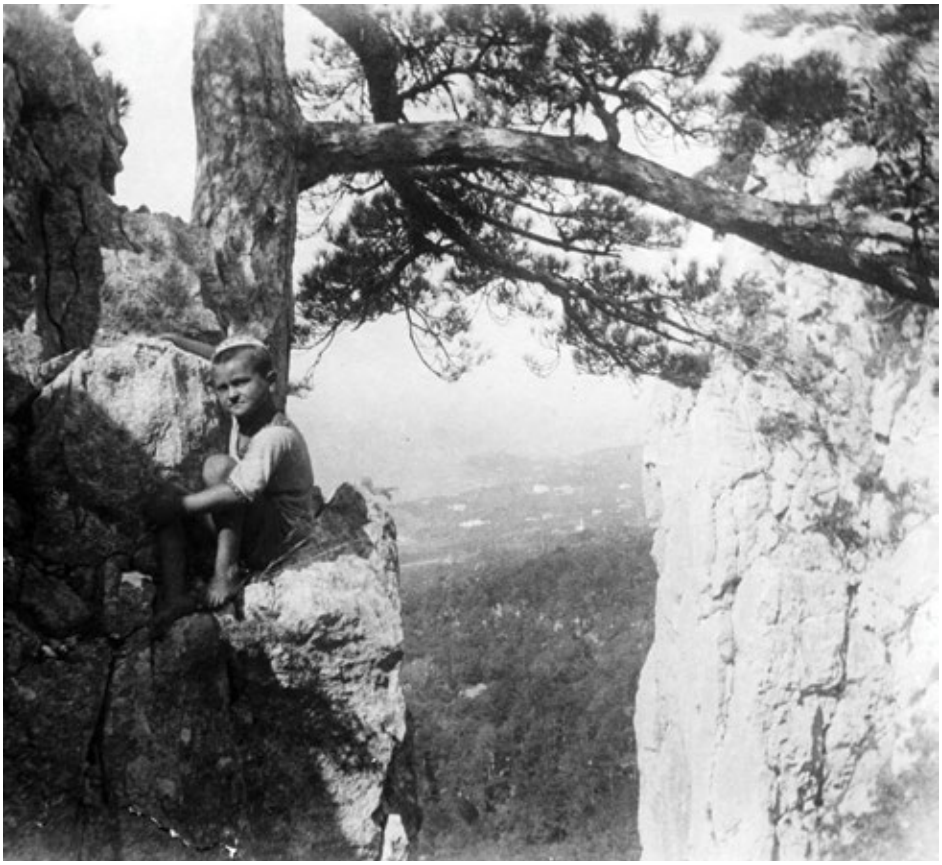
They rented a house, often from local Tatars.

During the NEP (New Economic Plan), things got better. We had some fuel, a bit more food, and we were even able to take summer vacations in the Crimea. It was a pretty nice time.

The years 1924 and 1925 particularly stand out in my memory because during those summers we went to Crimea. We stayed at the shore of the Black Sea and the places were absolutely unbelievable for their beauty and pleasant climate. The Black Sea water was so clear that when we went fishing, we could see the fish 10 to 12 feet down on the bottom, and it was rather easy to land the hook with the bait right in front of the fish's nose and just pull it up.

At one point, my cousin, (this must be Shura) who was about ten years older than I, dropped his diamond ring into the sea. He wore it on his little finger. Of course everybody was upset and started to jump into the water to look for that ring. After about ten or fifteen minutes of searching, I was actually exhausted and as I came up out of the water to my surprise, I saw my cousin's hand with the ring on the little finger. He found it down on the bottom of the Black sea among the pebbles!

View of Crimea. Peter always talked about this area as one of incomparable beauty. These times delighted him.



Peter sitting on a ledge in Crimea 1924. That season he fell out of a tree and hit his head.

Peter posing on a horse, although he did not ride himself.

One of the other boys posing on a horse. This may have been Vladimir, who later fell and hurt himself.

Boys catching fish in the clear water of the sea. They said they could practically snatch up the fish.

Peter and an unknown young man.

Yura (left) and Shura, sons of Vladimir and Olga. He was Stilian's brother and she was our Baba Katya's sister. They lived in Odessa and often joined the family vacations to Crimea.

Like Stilian, Vladimir accumulated wealth, furniture, and precious stones, which is why Peter tells how Shura lost his diamond ring in the sea but found it.

It may be curious that during this early Soviet period a boy in his teens would be wearing a diamond ring. However, this was a time before Stalin had fully grabbed power, and people were optimistic about the future as the economy improved.

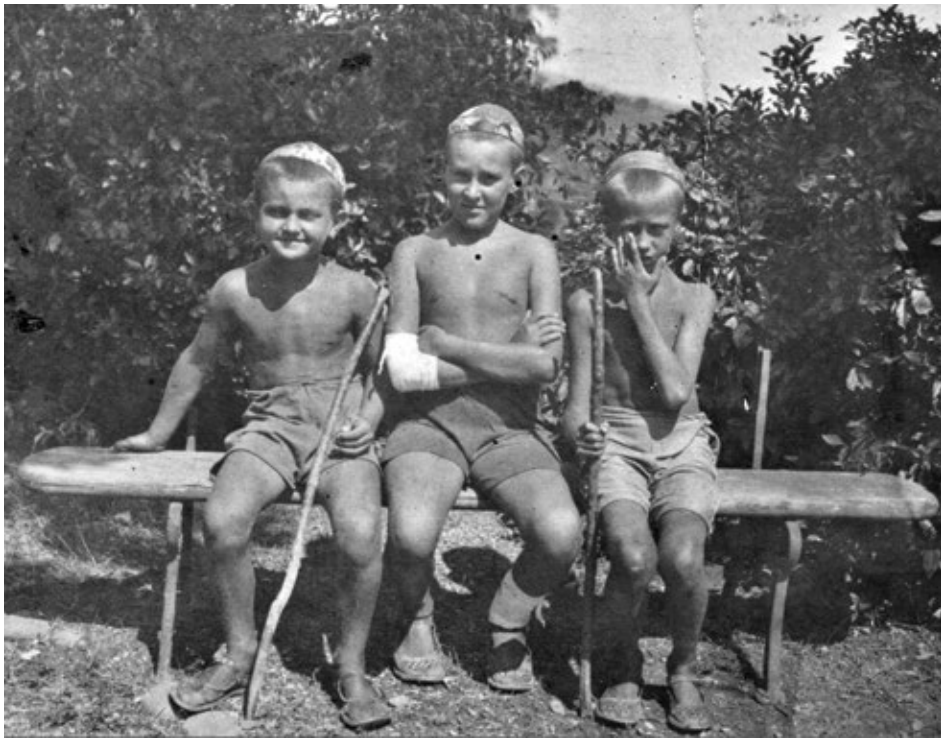
Both Stilian and Vladimir were still in a privileged position and made money, but not fully trusting the Bolsheviks, they converted it to precious stones. In this last memory Peter refers to Shura, who is the second son of Stilian's brother, Vladimir, who lived and practiced medicine in Odessa. Shura's mother, Olga, was sister to Peter's mother, Ekaterina (Baba Katya).

It was important to expose the children to the sun, but this was done according to strict supervision so that no one would get sun stroke. We all ended up with a nice tan but exposure to the sun started with 2 minutes on the first day and was increased daily up to about 45 minutes maximum.

Peter implemented these rules also in the US after the family had purchased a cottage at Henderson's Shores on the Elk River in Maryland. However, he soon lost control as we, his children, went out on our boat on all day excursions, sunbathed on the beach, and played badminton in the hot sun. He gave up.

We also took walks and played in the mountains which surrounded us, catching lizards, looking for snakes, and so on. Then, of course we had nice food to eat, and the time we spent there was absolutely beautiful.

One time, we had a rather unpleasant experience, when one of my friends had an accident. There was an old rock wall at least 12 feet high, and of course, we boys had to climb up all over it. When our friend Volodya climbed on top of the wall — he was much heavier than any of us — as he grabbed a rock, it slipped out of its place, and he went down with it in a considable crash. The dust billowed up in a big cloud, and we were so scared that we did not know what to do.



Peter sitting next to Volodya, who had fallen climbing around a stone ruin and hurt himself. The wound on his foot did not heal for several months. This photo was taken at a rented summer cottage in Crimea.

Peter is wearing a *tubeteika*, an Uzbek hat, popular at the time with both men and women.

I was sent to tell his mother. I rushed over to their house, which was not far, and she was sitting on the porch writing a letter home. I told her that Volodya had an accident. Of course, from my appearance, she understood there was a serious problem. She rushed back with me, and he seemed to be conscious but apparently not acting too reasonably because he had a big wound on the lower leg into which he stuck his finger. Well, we stopped him.

A doctor was called, and he was treated. But the whole time we stayed in Crimea that wound did not heal. It probably took 3 or 4 months to heal. At that time the repair of wounds was not done as it is today.

Later, we took vacations in the vicinity of Kiev in the pine woods. Also extremely beautiful. At various times we spent vacations in the area of Svyatoshina, east of Kiev, in a village called Bucha, where many Kievans kept *dachas*, including the famous writer Bulgakov.

Peter's family did not own a *dacha* but always rented. Their friend from the polytechnic university, Yura Siemensov, whose father was an eminent chemist and whom the authors maintained a friendship all their lives including in the US, also had a *dacha* there. The Siemensovs settled in Allentown, PA, where Yura's father got a job teaching chemistry at the local college. Yura later was given that same post. He and his wife, Rufa, came occasionally to visit our family especially at the cottage. They had no children.

A page from a book about distinguished families who summered at Bucha. The seated man is Anatole Siemensov, father of Peter and Helen's friend Yura who ended up teaching chemistry at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania after the war.

Anatole and his wife lived with Yura and his wife, Rufa, in Allentown, PA, and they sometimes visited our family at our *dacha* in Maryland. (Photo credit: a book about Bucha by unknown author)

Peters and His Sisters as Children

I had two sisters, Olga who was 10 years older than I was and Nina, 8 years older. I had much less contact with Nina than with Olga and spent a lot of time with her, which was mostly enjoyable. Occasionally they both played tricks on me, which were not enjoyable. One night the girls decided to scare me, and they succeeded very well!

My father used to have skulls at home for teaching, and one day the girls decided to make a ghost. One wrapped herself in a sheet and put a skull on top of her head. Inside the skull she placed a burning candle to light up the eye sockets. They called me into the room, which was dark except for the glowing skull, and the ghost started throwing lit matches at me. I was only about one and a half or two years old, so I was terrified. I ran out of the room screaming, and they could not calm me down for several hours. It is strange — from that time on I was afraid of darkness for many years. I don't think I'm afraid now, but that joke was not very nice.

Left to right: Nina, Peter, and Olga around 1918.

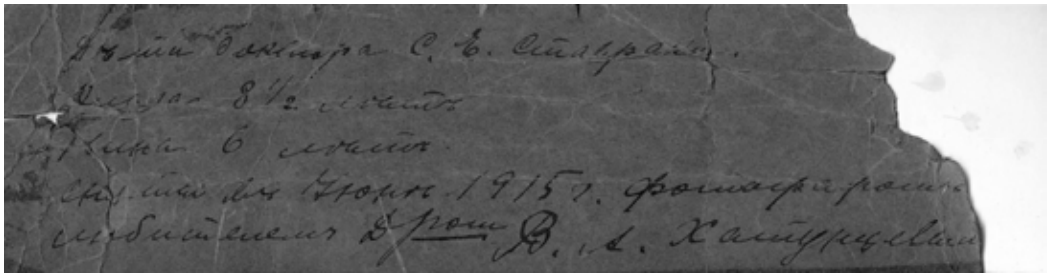
Stilian Emilianovich and his two daughters, probably before Peter was born in 1917.

Olga (left) and Nina, Peter's sisters. Olga was always considered the more poised and attractive of the sisters. Nina always felt somewhat awkward, and she often had her head shaved for health reasons.

As the girls got older, both girls and their mother had dark brown hair that was long, thick, and beautiful and was sometimes plaited into thick braids that extended almost to the floor.

Nina (left), Peter and Olga. Peter came from a large and tightly knit family and missed them all his life. Helen found the family overbearing and worked successfully to sever all ties with them.

Olga (left) and Nina in 1915. Peter always kept this photo on our kitchen wall throughout his life. After leaving Ukraine he saw his sister Olga once when she came to New York. He saw Nina occasionally as she lived in London, Ontario, Canada.



Peter and Nina against a tree. Peter had this photo always in his kitchen although he always said that Olga paid more attention to him than Nina did. He even helped Olga with her calculations when she studying architecture at university.

Olga and Peter.

Olga Stilianovna Stavraki taken 6 November 1908.

Peter's older sister, Olga, in various portraits. She became an architect and married one as well. During the war they fled eastward, then settled in Moscow where she and her husband continued to work.

They designed a number of prominent buildings in Kiev and in Moscow. Her husband designed the GUM department store building in Kiev on Kreschatik, which is hardly a resume builder as it was created in the austere and bland Soviet style.

Left to right front row: Vladimir Stavraki, Olga Stilianovna, Olga Vasilievna (Vladimir's wife and Baba Katya's sister); Back row left to right: Ekaterina Stavraki (Stilian and Vladimir's sister), Shulgina (her daughter).

Vladimir and his family left for Athens in 1932. It is possible that this picture was taken during a farewell and possibly when they went to visit Emilian and Elena's grave in Odessa. They never met again.

Olga top left and Nina bottom right — Peter's sisters, with two unidentified riends.

Olga liked to take my friends and me out, and one day we went to the movies. As I remember, it was an American movie played by the famous Harold Lloyd. We were laughing all the time and enjoying the comedy. It was winter, and Olga had her winter coat, which she threw over a seat with the fur collar hanging behind the seat.

Unfortunately, at that time people in Russia had rather rough manners, especially in the movies. The guy sitting behind her was stone drunk and suffered a spell of vomiting, and he threw up right into the collar of her winter coat.

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One day there was a fire in the house next door. It was during the time of the different groups fighting for Kiev. This was the time of civil war and unrest. There were explosions, fires, unrest, killings, and everything else you can imagine. The building next to ours at 32 Funducleevskaya Street started to burn. That fire was terrible and lasted a week. Our building was 3 stories high, and the other was 6 or 8. As soon as it started to burn, the fire company was called, but they were pretty helpless because there was no water.

All they could do was to try to keep the surrounding area from catching fire. Even though so many years passed, I still remember planks of burning wood falling from upper stories. They fell down in the yard with a crash, and red embers from the wood flew up in all directions.

Finally, the decision was made to evacuate. We gathered all our most valuable things, though there weren't really many of them. The most valuable things we had, as I recall, were my father's surgical instruments. At that time, the instruments were not disposable and they were very difficult to get. The best were imported from Germany, so several dozen were carefully packed and taken out as the most valuable possession in our house. Some jewelry and money also. Nothing else.

Actually, I was also removed as a valuable possession! I was entrusted to Olga. It was fall, cool, chilly. Melted snow was lying all around and burning planks of wood kept falling into it. As we ran through the yard, Olga's foot slipped, and we both fell down in wet snow. This episode I remember clearly just like if it happened yesterday.

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At age of 22, my sister Olga developed an odd cough and fever. An examination showed nothing significant. However, that cough and hoarseness didn't leave her. So my father decided to look in her throat. I recall that day. She looked bad. When he looked in her throat, he got shaky and pale. He was a very strong man, and for him to change this way would take a lot.

He turned to my mother and said he thinks Olga has a rather advanced case of tuberculosis, which already started to settle in her throat. This was considered especially dangerous. At that time there was no specific treatment for TB, only general supportive measures such as fresh air and vitamins.

Further examination showed lesions in her lungs. So she was immediately moved to South Russia to the Caucasus. My mother went with her, and they stayed probably 8–9 months. We got letters from them frequently. Surprisingly, her condition improved. Her treatment included vitamins, fresh air, rest, and a new treatment called an artificial lung collapse, or as we call it "Artificial pneumothorax (APT)".

(Note: Artificial pneumothorax (APT), discovered in 1882 in France, was the first positive treatment of tuberculosis to cause improvement. Olga's case shows how advanced Soviet medicine was at the time. When we arrived in the US in 1950, many of the houses on Broom Street across from the Wilmington General Hospital were boarded up because the residents had died of TB, and it was assumed the infection lingered in the homes. No such cure was available to them at the time.)

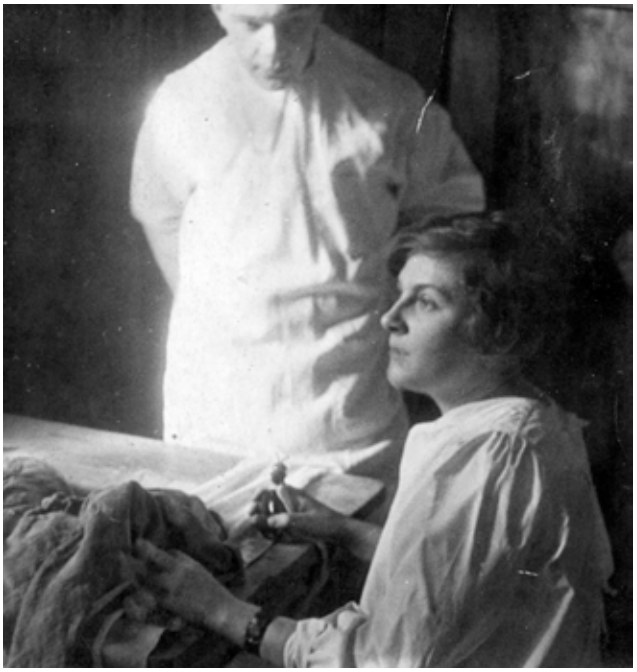
(It will be remembered that Stilian introduced roentgen to Kiev and established the first service, so he must have given Olga an X-Ray).

This (the APT procedure) was done every 6-8 weeks by a specialist of diseases of the chest. Eventually, she recovered completely, but it lasted 2–3 years, and it was a tough situation for our family.

Peter's Higher Education

Medicine always fascinated Peter, and he started honing his skills at an early age. His first "operation" was painting a sick dog with ink. "The poor animal quickly died. I always remember my first patient who did not make it after my treatment was administered."

Much later, probably when he was old enough to be in school, he and some friends removed the kidney of a dog. This operation also failed and this patient died. He organized this surgery in his home, with his brother in law, Zamryi, taking photographs. All wore scrubs probably borrowed from Peter's father. In the photographs, Helen is pictured assisting with this surgery, though later she avoided medical procedures.



Kiev, 22 January 1937 photos taken by Vladimir Zamryi, Nina's husband. Peter organized his first surgery to remove the kidney of a dog. Unfortunately, the dog died.

Helen assisted, but she did not like medicine at all. Years later, in Elkton, MD when Peter opened his practice in 1953, she served as office manager, nurse, and bookkeeper until they had enough money to hire a nurse.

She also tempered Peter's rough manner, teaching him to soften his approach to people, even when he felt they were not taking good care of their bodies. His war experiences had not demanded a good bedside manner.

Peter also conducted other experiments on himself as well as on animals. Once, he injected himself with ink and had a blue line on his middle finger all his life.

He disjointed then reassembled a live cat. Much to his surprise, the cat just walked away, unharmed following this procedure.

Peter also conducted medical experiments on himself. One time he ate a sandwich and drank a glass of milk while hanging upside down from a tree branch, hooked by his knees. To his surprise, the sandwich and the milk defied the laws of gravity and went to his stomach normally.

Peter liked hanging upside down from trees, but once he hooked his legs around a branch, and when he swung down, his head hit a large rock, almost breaking his skull. It left a lump on his forehead that remained for the rest of his life, and whenever he retold that story, he would encourage us to feel for the lump with our fingers.

One time, Peter and some friends dug up a skull from a graveyard at night in order to study it.

> In 1929, at the age of 12 I finally entered school and into the fourth class. The first day of school, one of my friends was showing me around and introducing me. That is when I first met Helen, my wife. I always remember the day I met Helen — actually I did not meet her, I only saw her.
>
> She was standing talking to another student. My friend told me who she was. The students were usually divided into two groups: A and B. It so happened I was put in B and Helen was put in Group A, so we did not have much contact until a few years later.
>
> I went through grades 5, 6, and 7 and finished the seven-year school. The first three grades I did with tutors at home. I usually got good marks, but it was not easy for me because my home lessons still continued. So, I missed a lot of school, but officially I was there and received the diploma at the time of graduation when I was 16.

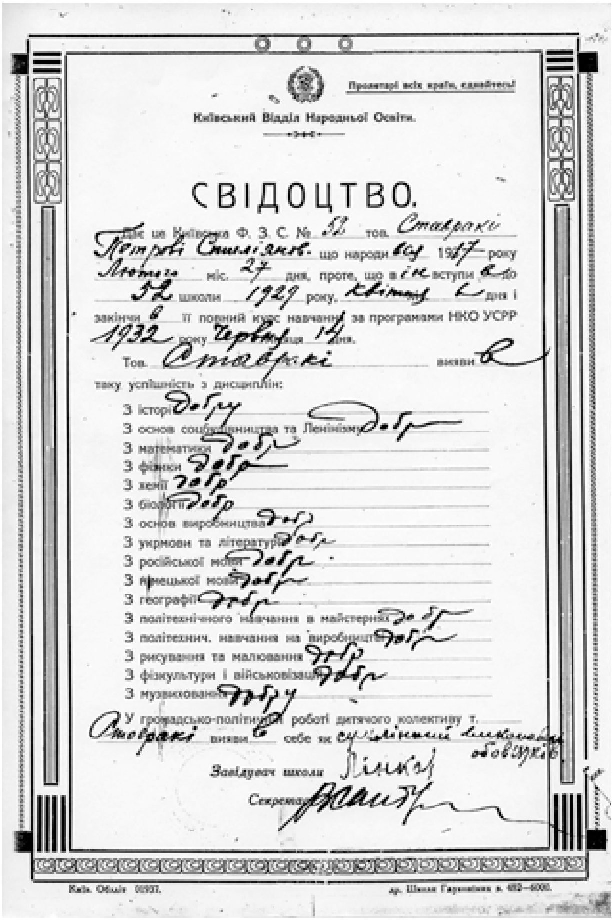
Helen remembered his mother, Baba Katya, bustling into the school quite often, saying "Peter has to miss class. Poor Petya is a very sick boy!" Of course, that was just an excuse. He was being tutored at home. In later years whenever he talked of his childhood exploits she ribbed him by reminding him how he had been a delicate and sickly child because his mother had always come to school to make excuses for his absences, and always said he was "sick."

Peter with his school class. To his left and one over is his nephew and closest friend, Andryusha Storozhenko.

Peter was tutored at home until about the age of 12, at which time he was enrolled in the same school as Helen, although in a different section. However, his family continued with the tutors, so he missed a lot of school.

His mother used to come to school, Helen recalled, and make excuses saying that poor Peter was sick. In reality, he was studying at home. His father felt that a high school degree may be necessary in the future, but he did not trust public education.

Peter with three friends on a bench.



Пролетарі всіх країн, єднайтесь!

Київський Відділ Народньої Освіти.

СВІДОЦТВО.

Дає це Київська Ф. З. С. № 52 тов. Ставраки Петрові Омеляновичу що народи[вся] 1917 року лютого міс. 27 дня, проте, що він вступи[в] до 52 школи 1929 року, квітня 2 дня і закінчи[в] її повний курс навчання за програмами НКО УСРР 1932 року червня місяця 14 дня.

Тов. Ставраки вияви[в] таку успішність з дисциплін:

З історії добру
З основ соціального виробництва та Ленінізму добр
З математики добр
З фізики добр
З хемії добр
З біології добр
З основ виробництва добр
З укрмови та літератури добр
З російської мови добр
З німецької мови добр
З географії добр
З політехнічного навчання в майстернях добр
З політехнич. навчання на виробництві добр
З рисування та малювання добр
З фізкультури і військовізації добр
З музвиховання добру

У громадсько-політичній роботі дитячого колективу т. Ставраки вияви[в] себе як сумлінний виконавець обов'язків

Завідувач школи [signature]

Секретар [signature]

Київ. Обліліт 01937. — др. Школи Гарнеціани в. 612—4000.

Peter’s school report card. He always got good marks and finished lessons on time. He never procrastinated or crammed for tests and was always ready well in advance. The day before a test, he always relaxed and went hiking or exploring the river.

He was particularly talented in math and could do complex multiplication and division in his head quickly. His sister tested him and discovered that he could calculate faster than she could find the answer with her slide rule.

Peter with a book by a window.

Peter around the time of his medical studies. He started university at age 16, switched to medical school at 17, and graduated at 21.

University and Medical School

After finishing school, I decided that I should go to university. I was only 16 and rather young, but I applied to the biological department of Kiev University and was accepted. Kiev University was established around 1832, and it was considered the oldest university in the Russian Empire.

It is still there without much change, and the color of the building is still red. The story goes that the Tsar Nicholas I, ordered it painted red because the students were always involved in some kind of protests and bloodshed.

Then the name was changed to Vladimir University. The university was basically not so bad. To some degree, I enjoyed what I was doing, but the study of cells and bacteria and all that part of biology in the first class really bored me. By the end of the year, I decided that I could not stand it.

I was always interested in the human body — the way the human body is built and the way it gets sick — and I always was thinking about doing something to help people who were ill.

The University of Kiev where Peter studied for one year in the faculty of biology and then later in the medical school.

One time when I was ten, my father, tried to explain a few things in the anatomy of the human body and finally, when we got to a difficult part, he said, "You know, Peter, it would probably be a good idea to bring you to an autopsy and show you in more detail how the human body is built." When I heard this — it was late in the evening — I got so excited that I did not sleep more than half the night. I don't recall that he ever took me there, however.

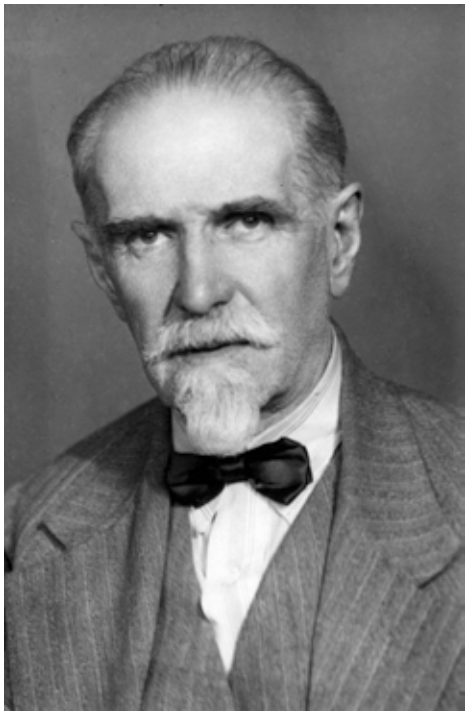
So then, I decided I would go to medical school. I went to talk to my father and told him. To my surprise, he looked at me and said he did not advise me to do that. I still don't know why he said that. However, from the look in his eyes, I kind of suspected that what he said was not exactly what he felt and thought.

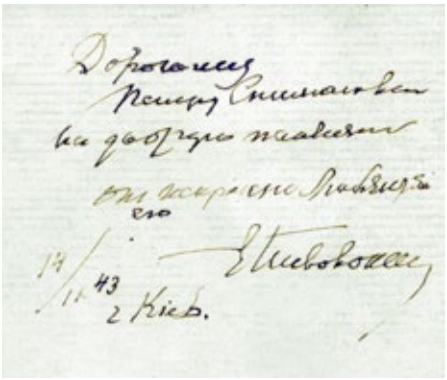
The anatomy building where Peter attended surgical studies is situated only a few blocks from his home. Inside it was built as a theater. Students sat on raised tiers to observe operations conducted in the center.

In 1995, when we visited the theater, it had been converted to the Museum of Medical History.

Going to medical school meant I had to start university all over again. The faculties were all separate, so you had to start each in the first year.

So, in 1934 I went to medical school and my fate was somewhat sealed. I am still in medicine even now (ca. 1990). I never regretted that decision.





Portrait of Dr. and Professor Jakov Pivovonski, Peter's close family friend, professor, and mentor. Peter named his second son, Jacob, in his honor, although by then all contact had been severed by the Iron Curtain.

The back is dated 14 February 1943.

When the Germans took over Kiev, he arranged for Peter to work with him in the local hospital serving Ukrainians by simply refusing to accept the post without Peter as his assistant.

Years later, when our family needed an affidavit of support to get a US immigrant visa, Pivovonski's daughter who was living in New York provided it. None of our relatives would or could provide assurance that we would not become burdens of the state.

Pivovonski was the last person to see our family off as we left Kiev, shedding tears as our overloaded cart and lame horses struggled uphill toward Jitomer.

Peter's grade books from medical school and his registration certificate from secondary school The document with the photo was a temporary graduation certificate. He finished in the top 10 of his class, which would have earned him a gold seal, but the war interrupted, and he never received his final and official certificate of graduation.

Nevertheless, he did qualify as a physician in Germany, Greece, and the US by passing exams. The school and university documents are all written in Ukrainian, even though the spoken language was Russian.

Peter's grades all tended to be "Excellent" or "Very Good."

Підпис студента

Директор Медінституту

Декан

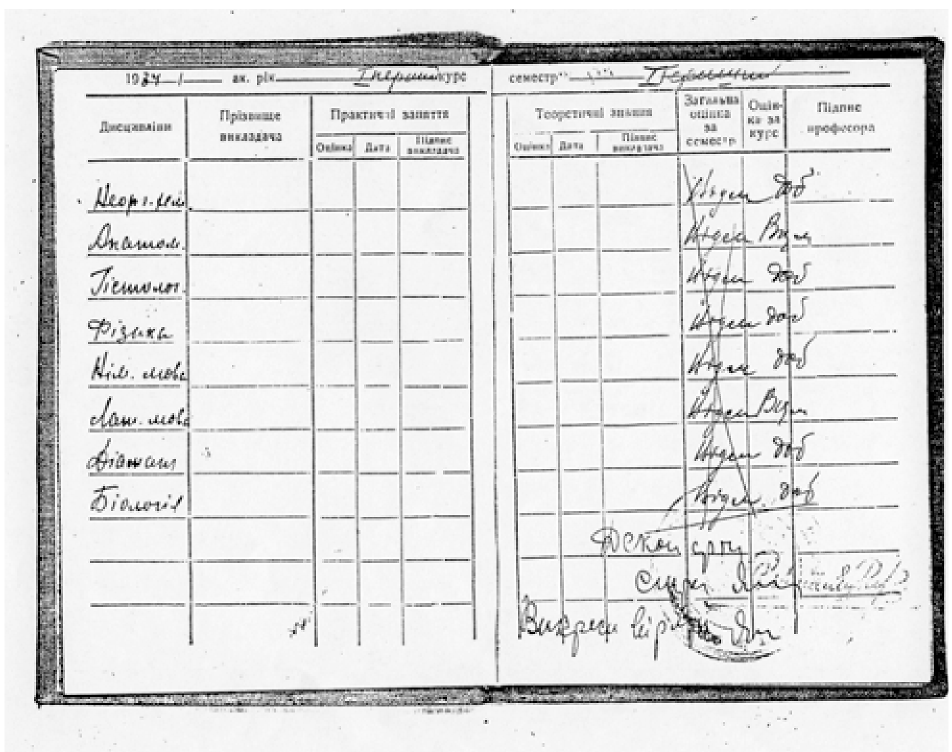
Секретар учбов. справ

М. П.

Обов'язкові правила

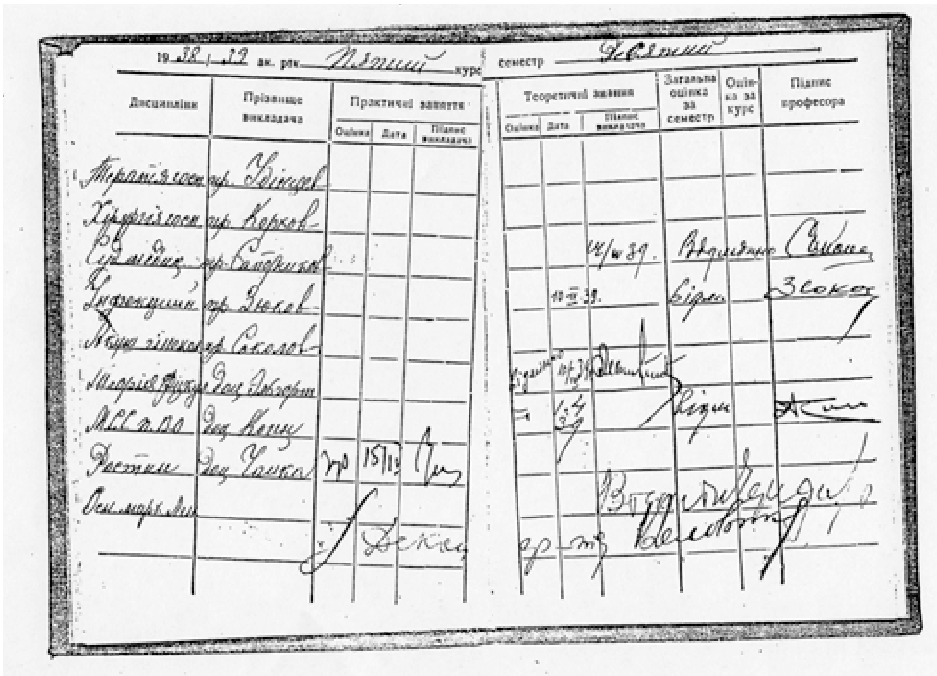
користування заліковою книжкою

1. Залікова книжка без фотокартки, печатки та підписів недійсна.
2. Залікова книжка студента є його особистим документом, вона завжди на руках у студента та на першу вимогу подається до інституту.
3. Перед початком кожного семестра до залікової книжки записуються всі дисципліни даного курсу за списком факультету.
4. Після здачі студентом дисципліни викладач підписує наслідки успішності.
5. У заліковій книжці не дозволяються будь-які підчистки, поправки та заміни аркушів.
6. Наприкінці семестра залікова книжка подається до факультету для відмітки про переведення з семестра на семестр.
7. У нотатках завідувач кафедри записує, скільки разів іспитувався студент з даної дисципліни до одержання перевідної оцінки.



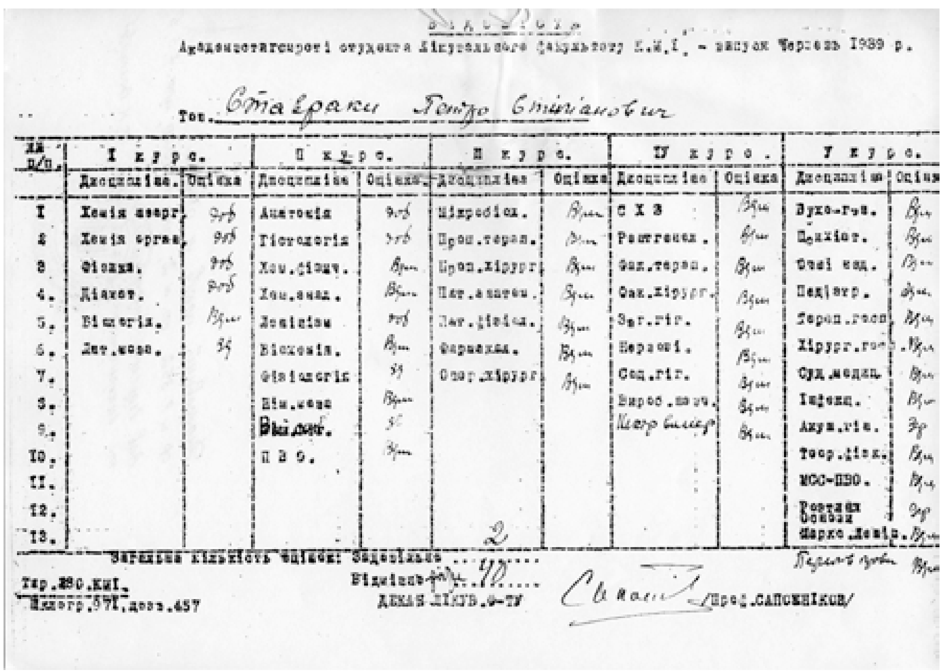
193_—_ ак. рік ______ I курс   семестр ______ I

Дисципліни	Прізвище викладача	Практичні заняття: Оцінка	Дата	Підпис викладача	Теоретичні знання: Оцінка	Дата	Підпис викладача	Загальна оцінка за семестр	Оцінка за курс	Підпис професора
Неорг. хім.								[illegible]		
Анатом.								[illegible]		
Гістолог.								[illegible]		
Фізика								[illegible]		
Нім. мова								[illegible]		
Лат. мова								[illegible]		
Біохім.								[illegible]		
Біологія								[illegible]		



19 38/39 ак. рік. П'ятий курс семестр Десятий

Дисципліни	Прізвище викладача	Практичні заняття: Оцінка	Дата	Підпис викладача	Теоретичні знання: Оцінка	Дата	Підпис викладача	Загальна оцінка за семестр	Оцінка за курс	Підпис професора
Терапія госп.	пр. [illegible]									
Хірургія госп.	пр. Корков									
Суд медиц.	пр. Сапожніков					14/VI 39.		Відмінно		Сапожн.
Інфекційні	пр. Зюков					10/VI 39.		Відм		Зюков
Терап. гінеколог.	пр. Соколов									
Історія партії	доц. [illegible]				[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]			
МСС-ППО	доц. [illegible]					[illegible]		Відм		[illegible]
Ростини	доц. Чайка	Др	15/VI	[illegible]						
Осн. марк.-лен.				[illegible]				[illegible]		



Відомість

Академуспішності студента Лікувального факультету К.М.І. – випуск Червень 1939 р.

Тов. Ставраки Петро Степанович

№№ п/п	I курс. Дисципліна	Оцінка	II курс. Дисципліна	Оцінка	III курс. Дисципліна	Оцінка	IV курс. Дисципліна	Оцінка	V курс. Дисципліна	Оцінка
I	Хемія неорг.	Добр	Анатомія	Добр	Мікробіол.	Відм	С Х З	Відм	Вухо-гор.	Відм
2	Хемія орган.	Добр	Гістологія	Добр	Проп. терап.	Відм	Рентгенол.	Відм	Психіат.	Відм
3	Фізика.	Добр	Хем. фізич.	Відм	Проп. хірург	Відм	Фак. терап.	Відм	Очні хв.	Відм
4.	Діамат.	Добр	Хем. анал.	Відм	Пат. анатом.	Відм	Фак. хірург.	Відм	Педіатр.	Відм
5.	Біологія.	Відм	Ленінізм	Добр	Пат. фізіол.	Відм	Заг. гіг.	Відм	Терап. госп.	Відм
6.	Лат. мова.	Зад	Біохемія.	Відм	Фармакол.	Відм	Нервові.	Відм	Хірург. госп.	Відм
7.			Фізіологія	Зад	Опер. хірург	Відм	Соц. гіг.	Відм	Суд медиц.	Відм
8.			Нім. мова	Відм			Виробн. навч.	Відм	Інфекц.	Відм
9.			Військ.	Зад			Історія партії	Відм	Акуш. гін.	Зад
10.			П В О.	Відм					Теор. фізк.	Відм
11.									МСС-ППО.	Відм
12.									Ростини основи	Зад
13.									Марко-Ленін.	Відм

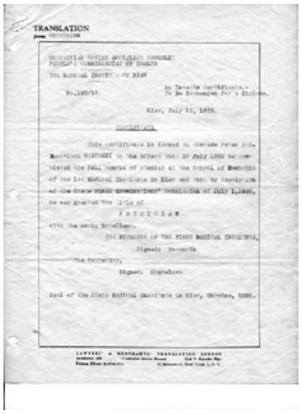
2

Загальна кількість оцінок: Задовільно .... Відмінно 40 .....

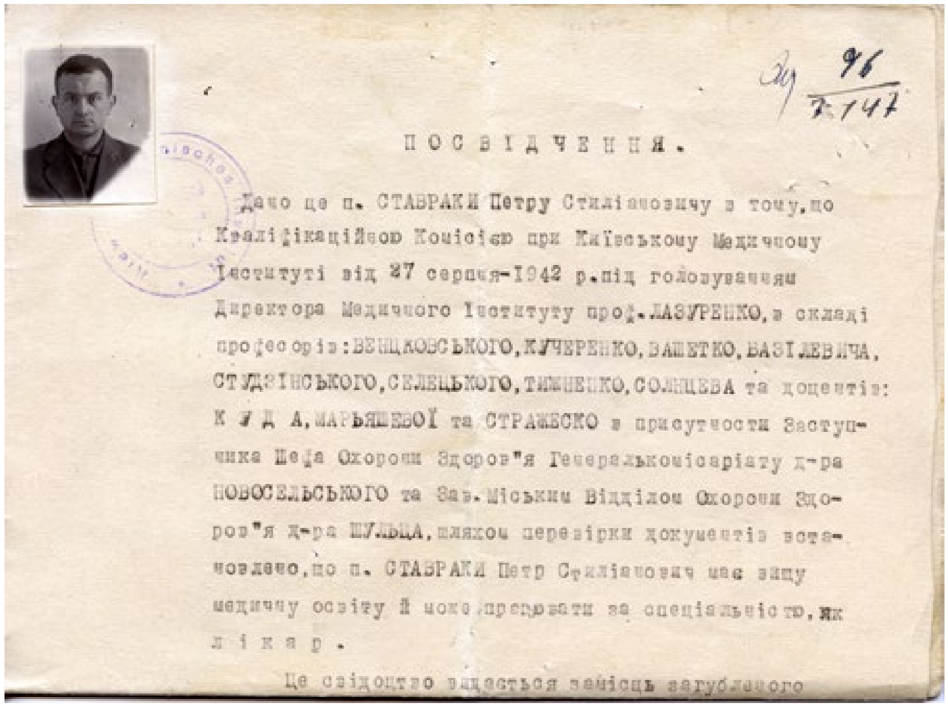
Переклад з основ Відм

Тир. 280. КМІ.
Уповнгр. 971, дозв. 457

ДЕКАН ЛІКУВ. Ф-ТУ [signature] /Проф. САПОЖНІКОВ/



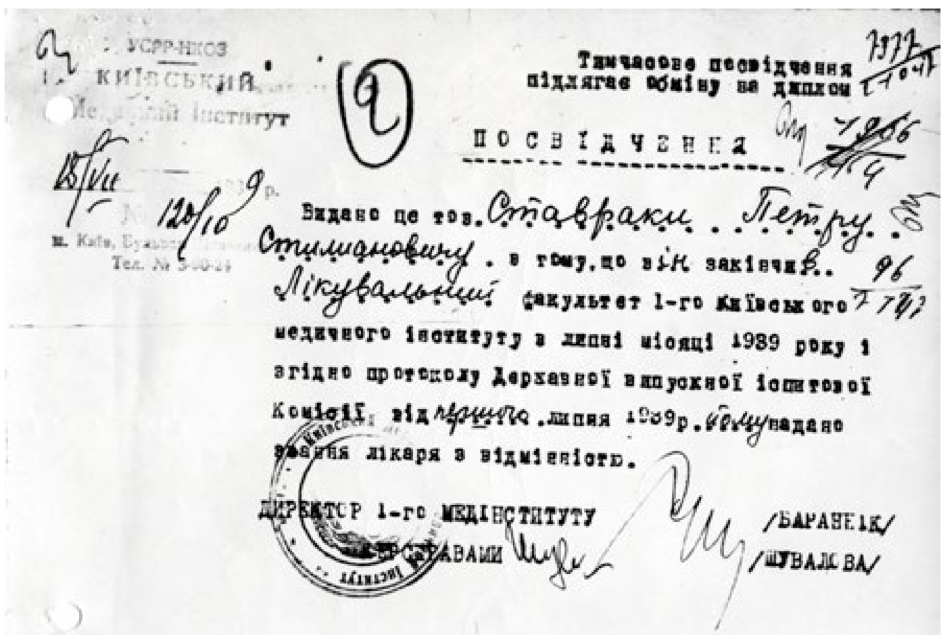
TRANSLATION



ПОСВІДЧЕННЯ.

Дано це п. СТАВРАКИ Петру Стиліановичу в тому, що Кваліфікаційною Комісією при Київському Медичному Інституті від 27 серпня-1942 р. під головуванням Директора Медичного Інституту проф. ЛАЗУРЕНКО, в складі професорів: ВЕНЦКОВСЬКОГО, КУЧЕРЕНКО, ВАШЕТКО, ВАЗІЛЕВИЧА, СТУДЗІНСЬКОГО, СЕЛЕЦЬКОГО, ТИМЧЕНКО, СОЛНЦЕВА та доцентів: КУДА, МАРЬЯШЕВОЇ та СТРАЖЕСКО в присутности Заступника Шефа Охорони Здоров"я Генеральнкомісаріату д-ра НОВОСЕЛЬСЬКОГО та Зав. Міським Відділом Охорони Здоров"я д-ра ШУЛЬЦА, шляхом перевірки документів встановлено, що п. СТАВРАКИ Петр Стиліанович має вищу медичну освіту й може працювати за спеціальністю, як лікар.

Це свідоцтво видається замісць загубленого



УСРР-НКОЗ
КИЇВСЬКИЙ
Медичний Інститут

Тимчасове посвідчення підлягає обміну на диплом

ПОСВІДЧЕННЯ

Видано це тов. Ставраки Петру Стиліановичу в тому, що він закінчив Лікувальний факультет 1-го Київського медичного інституту в липні місяці 1939 року і згідно протоколу Державної випускної іспитової Комісії від першого липня 1939 р. йому надано звання лікаря з відмінністю.

ДИРЕКТОР 1-го МЕДІНСТИТУТУ /БАРАНЕЦЬ/

ЗАВ. СПРАВАМИ /ШУВАЛОВА/

Well, medical school at that time lasted five years. In 1939 I graduated with honors. About 400 students graduated that year, and only maybe a dozen did so with honors. Or "diploma first class", as they call it. With gold letters. The rest were in silver letters.

Unfortunately, I never received that diploma because they were not prepared yet, and we received a temporary certificate stating that we graduated. Later on, the war started, not yet in Russia, but there were a lot of repercussions for us, especially the medical people, and I never received that diploma. Up to today I don't have it. I only have the temporary certificate, which fortunately was accepted in the United States and allowed me to proceed with the medical diploma in this country.

Portrait of Peter for his graduation from medical school.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Tests in all the subjects were easy for me with the exception of the Ukrainian language. The final test consisted of translating a long dictation. One of my friends succeeded in getting the text for that dictation ahead of time from the teacher's girlfriend, and he gave it to me and two other fellows.

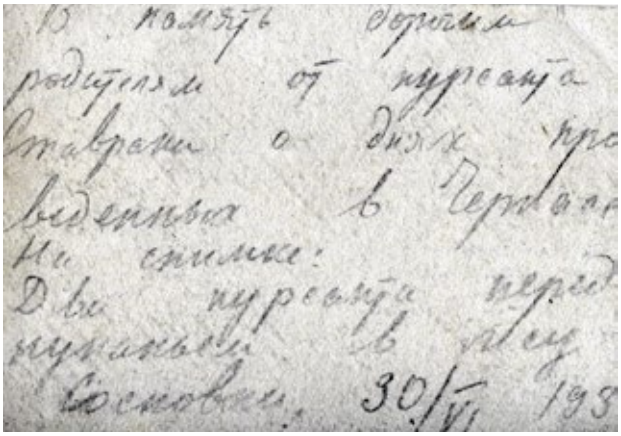
We took the test sitting on the top row of the auditorium and writing feverishly without mistakes, of course, for I had memorized the translation. Unfortunately, I made a fatal mistake. I did not notice when the man stopped dictating and continued writing a couple more sentences beyond the dictation. As a result, I failed and had to take another test, which I eventually did pass.

All youth had to participate in various political brigades aimed at educating and politicizing the peasantry. Peter was sent to a village to fire up the peasants and gain their loyalty. He remembered standing up on a makeshift stage in a village with the peasants gathered all around him, giving a rousing and inspirational speech about the glories of the worker state. Later, he could not remember a word of what he had said, and he doubted that it made any sense, but he admitted that it was eloquent and dramatic — a tour de force of a performance.

I talked "bullshit" for hours about the great Soviet Socialist Republic, the people, how they all had to work for the Glory of the Motherland, etc. — a stream of inspiring stories punctuating the major points with my finger pointing up to the sky. The villagers listened attentively, but whether they were convinced is debatable.

Peter as a cadet. This photo was taken in February 1937 when he finished his service. He is wearing the youth brigade uniform. Youth brigades went out to mobilize the peasants and gain their support for the Bolshevik policies. Peter was assigned the task of building peasant support and gave a speech.

He said it was a very inspired and uplifting speech, such as he never had given before or after, and he remembered not a word of what he said as most of it was gibberish and nonsense. But apparently, everyone was happy with it, and the villagers treated him and his companion to an enormous feast such as they had never seen before in the half-starved city.



His notes that he was discharged on 30 June 193?. Elsewhere it appears to have been 1937.

Ukrainian peasant farmers were famously independent, which is why Stalin targeted them with the famine. However, when we finished, they put on a spread for us that I will never forget. You can't imagine how delicious the food was and how much there was. Tables filled with piroshki, cabbage cakes, beet salads… the best the country had to offer. And there was so much of it! We had not seen so much food in one place before this. So we stuffed ourselves, having done our patriotic duty, and wanting, of course, to show our appreciation to the villagers. Then we headed back to the city.

Pressure of the Purges

Things began to decline for the Stavrakis family as Stalin gained power. Stilian also became a target of persecution. At that time, Greeks were being targeted for arrest, exile, and execution. Stilian Kozmanov, a good friend of the Stavrakis girls, was shot.

Portrait of Stilian Ivanovich Kozmanov, friend of the Stavrakis family, who was shot during the purges.

Left to right: Nina, her first husband, Nicolai Mikhailov; Olga's husband, Lev Kiselevich; Peter; and Olga on the right. In the center is Stilian Ivanovich Kozmanov, a Russian Greek friend who was shot during the purges.

99.	Kazandzhidi Konstantin Panayotovicha	1895	Greece	Asu, Surmen, Turkey	SHOOT
100.	Kasimidi Angela Konstantinovich	1879	Greece	Trapezund, Turkey	SHOOT
101.	Kesis Ogly Panayot Ivanovich	1903	Greece	no / d	SHOOT
102.	Kozmanova Stilian Ivanovich	1902	Greece	Leninakan, Armenia	SHOOT
103.	Koronidi Georgiy Konstantinovich	1895	Greece	Kerasund, Turkey	SHOOT
104.	Dmitry Panteleimonovich Kotidi	1914	Greece	Surmen, Turkey	SHOOT
105.	Kunduriadi Miltiada Apostolovich	1897	Greece	no / d	SHOOT

The list of Soviet Greeks shot during the purges. Stilian Ivanovich Kozmanov is listed with the order given to shoot. During the purges, Greeks were specifically targeted for their ethnicity, although the Soviets were equal opportunity persecutors.

In Odessa the pressure on Greeks was even greater and Vladimir, Stilian's brother, packed up his family in 1932 and emigrated to Athens. His official record, totally fabricated, resides today in the Odessa Archive, reporting that he died that year. And yet that same record goes on to report that in 1938 he was retroactively implicated as a Greek spy in the arrest and torture of another unrelated Greek with the same surname. The KGB record states that Vladimir was recruiting spies for Greece in Odessa from after 1932 to 1935, so presumably, AFTER his death! (see Part 1 for details)

Beginning around 1936 when the purges started and Stilian was already too ill to exert much influence, the family came under pressure from the authorities. Their maid Ksenia brought a lawsuit to court against Stilian claiming he had an extra room beyond the maximum allowable space.

Stilian argued that he needed all the space for his medical practice. The family was already crowded, and the dining room served as the patient waiting area, so the

family could never eat until after his patients left for the day. Stilian lost in court and another couple was moved into the apartment, sharing the kitchen and bathroom.

Ksenia disappeared after the verdict, so presumably she got rewarded with a better place to live. The family always wondered how a simple, uneducated maid knew the system well enough to inform and to file a complaint in court. The probable answer came years later in 1998 when Olga, Peter's daughter, learned a KGB informant lived under Stilian's roof.

Several years before the court case and probably at the time of the Holodomor or Great Famine, Ilya Svistoon, a starving peasant with eight children escaping persecution and starvation in the countryside, came to Stilian begging for a job and a place to live. Stilian took pity on the man, giving him the job of groundskeeper and a small room on the ground floor of the house.

In 1998 that man's son, Vladimir Svistoon, was the Director of the Natural History Museum, and when Olga visited him, he told her how indebted he and his family still remained to our grandfather for saving their lives.

But then, he went on to tell her, without shame or embarrassment, how his father served as a KGB informant in our own grandfather's house. (See Part 1 for more detail). Very likely he encouraged Ksenia to file a complaint with the authorities, getting small perks in return.

Stilian always hoped that one day he and his family would also be able to leave the Soviet Union for Greece. Thus, over the years, he quietly accumulated precious stones, gold, and other valuables, which he carefully hid away. He could not have spent or converted this wealth in the Soviet Union. It had to stay hidden.

In early 1932 Stilian's nephew Shura came to say goodbye prior to his family's departure for Athens. Stilian gave him several gemstones asking him to hold on to them in safe keeping in case any of his children ever got out of the country. One diamond he specifically told him to hold for Peter in case he got out of the Soviet Union. But when we arrived in Greece in 1946 Shura claimed the gems were gone and even charged our family rent in gold coins for bunking in his shack in Paleo Faliro during 1946. Later Shura had a falling out with his brother over the gemstones and furnishings his family took with them to Athens and which he sold in Athens before leaving for the US. Apparently, he never shared the proceeds with his brother in Canada.

At some point before 1937, the Soviet government needed gold and demanded that people donate it "voluntarily," in exchange for worthless currency. This was not openly discussed, as it would indicate economic failure of the new country. Stilian gave a couple thousand rubles, worth of gold but kept another 10–12 thousand in hiding. He hid it in a marble column which stood at the head of the stairs to the apartment and had a lid that unscrewed. He put a drop of oil on the threads to loosen the cap.

Bands of the new "proletariats" ransacked homes, seizing all the valuables they could find "for the Great Socialist State." One such band forcibly searched the Stavrakis apartment, and while looking for possessions to loot, they noticed a drop of oil dripping from the capital of the marble column. They found the gemstones and some gold and confiscated it. A great deal of money was lost, possibly the equivalent of 100,000 rubles or more.

Left to right are Prof. Jakov Ivanovich Pivovonski, Vladimir Ilych Svistoon, Ilya Svistoon and Peter. Ilya Svistoon came from a village with 8 children, probably during the great famine, and Stilian saved him from starvation by giving him a job and a place to live.

Years later in 1998, the son, Vladimir Svistoon, told me (Olga) that his family always remained grateful to our grandfather for saving their family. By then he was the director of the Natural History Museum.

He also shocked her with the revelation that his father had been a KGB informer while serving as groundskeeper for Stilian. This he told without remorse or embarrassment but with a measure of pride. He gave Olga this photo.

For some reason, Stilian did not leave. Some family members felt that he wanted to or tried and could not get citizenship or proper Greek papers. It is possible that his position in Kiev was less flexible than that of his brother in the Greek community in Odessa. In any case, by 1930 he suffered his first heart attack and from then on never regained his full strength.

Peter saw his father as vulnerable. He explained…

> A feature of his character was that he didn't communicate with people too much. But he was very sensitive to various events that took place during his life, in Russia and everywhere else. He really was affected by that tremendously.
>
> I will never forget one time when another of those "kangaroo courts" was carried out by Russian Communists from the government. The final conclusion was to shoot them all, and when I walked in, my father was sitting with the paper in his hand and his face was extremely sad. I asked him, 'Father, what is worrying you?' When he showed me the paper he said, 'It's another kangaroo process which brings people to death.' Probably, this contributed to his illness.

This photo of Stilian was published in a Festschrift to Stilian Emilianovich Stavraki by his students in 1937 when he was retiring due to illness. According to Peter, in this photo his father looks ill and had already lost a lot of weight. His facial expression is both angry and resignedly sad. He was frustrated and angered by the purges and the killing.

The original of this photo was given to Olga in 1995 by the doctor who had taken over that department and Stilian's office and examination room.

Stilian had a heart attack at age 55. Thereafter he continued to suffer heart failure and repeated heart attacks until his death in January of 1938. When Stilian suffered his first heart attack, Peter was out with friends, and someone found him to give him the news. When he rushed home, he found his father in critical condition. Friends and physicians were there, trying to help; though as Peter said, help by present standards was "ridiculous."

Still, he survived, though he never fully recovered and suffered from high blood pressure and several subsequent heart attacks. However, he continued to work up until a few months before his death. Toward the end of his life, he limited himself to three patients a day, and Peter said it was "a pitiful picture…his legs were swollen, and he could hardly walk, but patients still flocked to him." He had several more heart attacks and died at age 63 of "advanced coronary sclerosis and generalized necrosis of the heart."

Puzzled by the severity of his own illness at such an early age, Stilian requested that an autopsy be carried out after his death. It would not help him, but he felt it might contribute to medical understanding. The family agreed to the request. It was done at home, by a pathologist friend of his, and Peter was present.

Stilian was buried in Baikove cemetery, and this photo was taken in 1974 by Luba Kiselevich, a cousin of Stilian's grandsons by his daughter Olga. In 1995 we could not find it. The grave was originally located not far from the chapel and was marked with a huge black marble cross.

According to Peter, when the heart was exposed, everyone was shocked. “The advance of the disease was unbelievable! Indescribable! What was really the reason for that, nobody will know.” His heart was greatly enlarged and covered with a thick layer of adipose (fat) tissue. Peter stared at his father’s heart and could not believe the physical damage and distortion it had undergone.

Stilian died on the 8th or 12th of January, 1938.

The funeral was conducted with an open casket, and when Peter’s brother-in-law Lyosik, came up to pay his respects, he bent over Stilian and, with a sharp razor, cut Stilian’s suit in several places to prevent looters from digging up the body and to steal the clothing.

Stilian had lived well. He loved rich food and he was overweight. But the stresses and pressures of the persecution probably also affected his health adversely.

A few years earlier, Vladimir had also died in Athens of a heart attack. Most likely Peter either knew about it then or learned later when he got to the US and came in contact again with his cousins. We do not know Vladimir’s exact date or official cause of death, as the Athens archive is not open to the public. However, Peter interpreted their health histories as a combination of genetics and lifestyle. After his father’s death and for the rest of his life, he actively worked to alter his genetic destiny and succeeded living until age 89. He had high blood pressure in his later years but no heart disease. He died of prostate cancer. At the same time, in Canada, his older cousin Yura, a physician, also carefully managed his health and habits and lived to at least 90. His younger brother, Shura, always frugal, saved money by eating sparingly and also survived to 91.

In 1998, this photo hung (and possibly still hangs) in the main hall of the Octoberskaya Hospital where Stilian founded the first Department of Otolaryngology. He is still remembered in print and by word of mouth as one of the great medical innovators of Ukraine.

Marriage and the Concept of a Communist "Family"

A few months after Stilian died, Peter and Helen married at the ages of 20 and 21, respectively.

Elena Sochanskaya and Peter Stavrakis in July 1936 on a car trip to Crimea with Peter's sister Nina and her husband, Zamryi.

They married two years later and never ceased enjoying each other's company and the great outdoors.

On the beach in Chincoteague, VA, USA, where Peter and Helen loved to vacation. It was only a couple of hours drive from their home in Newark, DE, and had nice trails in the woods, a lovely beach, and the famous feral ponies grazing all around.

More than half a century after they married, they still enjoyed roughhousing in nature.

In the early Soviet Republic, ideology kept changing, and the concept of marriage and family was continually being redefined. Basic communist ideology contends that marriage is a bourgeois institution which keeps women chained to household labor, and therefore, impedes the development of society and is detrimental to technological progress.

People, it was argued, should form couples as they wish, and when they no longer wanted to remain together, they could dissolve the union. Thus, marriage and divorce were made quick and easy. One simply went to the courthouse, paid a ruble or two, and registered a marriage or divorce, as the case may be.

This was consistent with the idea that women should be educated and channeled into the national work force instead of remaining confined to home and hearth. Thus, the state identified women of ability and placed them in technological and professional fields, equal to males.

Popaganda poster of 1931 saying "Down with kitchen slavery! Get a new life!" to encourage women to get out of domestic chores, get educated and join the national effort to develop the country.

It was considered a waste of talent to fail to take advantage of one's abilities. Potential innovations women could bring to science and technology would be lost.

These were progressive ideas that liberated Helen's and Peter's generation and brought women into the intellectual mainstream.

At the same time, after the Revolution, "family" as an institution ceased to exist in theory. In explaining the world they lived in, Peter and Helen explained that it was a forbidden concept to even mention. The Communists believed it to be a bourgeois institution which had to be destroyed. Since all property belonged to the state, there was no need for inheritance laws. Status was no longer defined by birth or family history but by education and achievement. It was now earned and not inherited. The past was to be obliterated in order to build a new socialist social order.

Peter explained that the state periodically issued decrees with lists of vocabulary that was prohibited or encouraged. For example, in the early days the terms "patriotic" and "fatherland" were forbidden, and their use was a punishable offense. During WWII, these same terms became necessary to rally the public to vigorously defend the homeland against the Nazis.

A lot of the post Revolutionary ideology did not work. The list of failures is long but suppressed because none were ever admitted, and people associated with those failures simply disappeared. Whenever a policy proved ineffective or failed, the authorities simply did an about-face and decreed that this or that concept was now forbidden and another was to take its place. In this context, it was important to be very careful in speech, for as Peter explained, one never knew which terms would be criminalized that day or the next. If the term "family" could be a political liability, then any word could send you to prison.

Thus, Helen explained…

> Then all of a sudden, the authorities did an about-face and said, "Society must build the Soviet family." We asked ourselves, "What is the family?" We only knew that one is a husband, the other is a wife, and beyond that the

ties quickly dissolved. We grew up without the sense of family as a unit of society. So the talk of "family" was quite confusing for people at first, especially since it had been forbidden to even mention the word up to now.

For people like my mother, born before the Revolution, the idea of family was natural. But for us, it was a shock. We wondered what it meant and why we needed to redefine our closest social ties.

We were living communally with lots of other couples and their children, sharing the kitchen, bathrooms, and even sometimes bedrooms. Rooms were allotted according to regulations with so many square meters per person. The large houses and apartments were cut up, and big rooms were divided with blankets and by hacked-together partitions. A couple could find themselves sleeping in a room divided only by a big armoire and blankets.

In that situation you stick closer to your next of kin and shut the neighbors out, but by their physical proximity, they behave as members of a family would toward one another. The result was that technically the family did not exist but, actually, we knew exactly what family was, and it was only family that one could trust.

Helen and Peter and their contemporaries, still considered marriage important, though during these early Soviet years, many intellectuals did not and made all sorts of unconventional living arrangements. For example, the famous Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (a generation older than Helen and Peter), during the Soviet period shared a small apartment in St. Petersburg with her former lover and his wife and sometimes with her son from a previous relationship.

Even in the case of Helen and Peter, they did not have any strong feelings about pre-marital sex, and the significance of waiting until marriage as was still the custom in the US, became unimportant.

Peter went on to say…

Well, a little bit of my private life. I did not have many girlfriends. But I had one when I entered the biological department of the university (ca. 1933). It seemed to be rather serious in the beginning, but a year or so later she left for St. Petersburg, or Leningrad as it was called at that time, I went to medical school, and we drifted apart. I then started to date with my wife, Helen, whom I had briefly seen first in 1929. Little by little, we got acquainted with each other, and then in 1938 I married her.

He used the word "date" because he was speaking in English. In reality, boys and girls did not form couples in high school. They went around in groups. This was

a society without any privacy at all, so the youth were automatically chaperoned until marriage.

Helen was beautiful and extremely capable, and therefore, very popular with the young men, who saw her as a highly desirable future wife. Unlike previous generations, the Soviets managed to turn the feminine value system away from parlor arts to intellectual achievement, and Helen, who was a highly accomplished engineer, enjoyed numerous suitors of which Peter was but one. She kept him at bay, increasing her value, until she turned 18 when they became lovers.

Peter was anxious to get married but she demurred. Even with the new freedoms, women still had domestic responsibilities that husbands escaped. So marriage as a commitment was a bigger issue for women than for men. She, therefore, had mixed feelings about marriage.

Further, she had numerous suitors and enjoyed their competitive attentions. In old age, when she was angry with Peter, she reminded him of this or that suitor she could have or should have married instead of him. And yet, she always came back to the position that Peter was the one and only man she ever wanted. Some of her suitors can be seen in Part 7: Kiev Friends. Kot Gubarov and Yura Duhovichni are just two who stand out.

After two years of a romantic relationship, Helen still refused to agree to wed, so Peter decided to take matters into his own hands and settle the matter. Once he made a decision, Peter generally pursued his goals with exceptional single-mindedness.

He grabbed Helen's passport, then went to the courthouse on 4 April 1938 with their friend Nina Hohutova, who signed for Helen, and the marriage was duly registered.

> We all had passports in Russia, and her passport was always lying in their room on the desk near a big mirror. And I was kind of studying that place for several days or maybe even weeks, until I finally made my decision. One day, I swiped that passport, left the room, and went to meet my friend Nina Hohutova. She went with me to the registry office where the marriages were recorded and we married, well..., in parenthesis.... She signed for Helen. That was on 4 April 1938.
>
> When I told Helen that we were married, she accepted this, and from that time on we were together. I think there is nothing better I could have done in my life than marry her sixty years ago now.

That was the way Peter, the hero of the story as he tells it, remembered the event. Helen recounted it a bit differently. She was horrified when she learned what he had done because she could not tell her parents. She had various objections. Among them — her father would not like her marrying a Greek because he would

take her to Greece with him; they would feel hurt for having been excluded from the marriage; they would not have had a celebratory dinner. Mainly she felt her parents would feel very hurt to learn they had been excluded from her marriage.

She had no objection to marrying Peter, but she had to present it properly to her parents. So she arranged to have a mock wedding and celebration. On 6 April she pretended to go to the courthouse with Peter to sign the papers. She said

> I cried all night before the mock "wedding" because my mother believed I was completely honest and would never have thought that I would lie to her.

Despite this drama, however, all seems to have gone well, and Helen voiced no regrets about the wedding or the marriage (except when she was old and got angry). She believed for the rest of her life that her parents really thought she married Peter on 6 April 1938 instead of 4 April and they always celebrated their anniversary on that date while her parents lived. We, the children, always wondered, however, whether or not our grandfather, Vasily Ivanovich, knew or suspected the ruse. He was not a naïve man, given to trust easily, and he was not unobservant.

In 1995 when Peter and Helen returned to Kiev with the authors and with Olga's son, Cedric, after spending a week visiting the family homes, schools, and childhood landmarks, we boarded the *Alexander Glushkov* for a river cruise down the Dnieper to Odessa. The first night on the river, both Peter and Helen felt tremendously moved by their experience and saddened about leaving Kiev, possibly forever, for a second time in their lives.

As we sat in the tiny, cramped cabin, drinking vodka, Peter tearfully told the story of how he managed to convince the reluctant Helen to marry him back in 1938. Needless to say, that led to a brisk argument between the two of them about various details of who knew what and when, but soon the mood altered from maudlin to humorous.

CHAPTER 3

The War Begins

The War with Finland

Peter and Helen were not married long when war came.

In 1939, just as I was finishing medical school, the war with Finland started. This was a bad situation because it was an idiotic war. Of course, no war is intelligent. But this was a most idiotic war and a tremendous number of our people died there. The Russian army was disorganized at that time, and no one wanted to take part in the war. I received an order to report to Leningrad within 24 hours for military action on the Finnish border. As soon as I received this, I started working on some way to get out of it.

I found a friend who knew a captain in the army who was in charge of the mobilization in our district. The way to reach him was with gifts of vodka and some special food. In this way, I succeeded in postponing my departure for about a week. After that, my orders were completely forgotten.

Russian dead after the Battle of Raate Road in Finland during the "Winter War."

On 30 November 1939 The Soviet Union invaded Finland in a grab for territory. Peter got orders to report for duty, and pulling strings through friends, he managed to avoid getting drafted.

The conflict lasted only three months, but the Russian losses were heavy, and the Finns managed to expel the Soviets, although they had to cede some territory in the end. (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

In that war, the Russian army lost a lot of people. It is a peculiar thing generally speaking, but winning in war does not always depend upon the number of soldiers that are sent to fight. The number of inhabitants in Finland was probably not more than 2 million. At the same time, in Russia there were about 150 million people. But when they came to the border, numbers did not make a big difference.

You cannot put more than a finite number of soldiers on any small space. Russia sent a lot of soldiers to Finland. But the Finns knew their terrain, and they were used to the climate, which was sometimes very rough and cold. So they were able to outsmart the Russians.

As a matter of fact, one of my friends who graduated with me spent two years in that war as a physician for a division, and when he came back, he told me about his experience in Finland.

A division consists of several thousand soldiers. His division was completely surrounded by Finns. There was absolutely no way to get out. The single thing that could be done to help them was to keep the Russians supplied by air drops of food.

Finnish ski troops wearing gas masks. Peter narrowly escaped getting sent to Finland, and a returning friend recounted the horrible situation in which the Russians found themselves. The Finns were masters of their land, especially skilled at fighting in the harsh winter conditions. (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

Unfortunately, they continued to resist, and the Finns continued rather successfully to kill them until there were only about 170 people left of the original several thousand. He described how they were saying goodbye to each other because they knew the end was close. They showed each other pictures of their loved ones — children, wives, friends, and were ready to meet the gruesome end. At that particular moment, the radio announced the war was over.

This was an interesting ending for him. He said that between the Finns and the Russians there was a line called a no-man's-land, where no one could enter for they would be killed there. Some of the airdropped supplies had fallen into this area. As soon as the announcement was heard that the war was finished, both the Finnish and Russian soldiers rushed into the no-man's-land and started to gorge on the food. He said they went first for the sauerkraut and chocolate, which was the favorite. After this, he was released and returned home. Many of our people never came back from the Finnish war.

WWII Begins

WWII started in Russia in 1941. In the meantime, I was accepted as a resident in the surgical department at the university through my father's friend, and excellent surgeon, Professor Jacov Ivanovich Pivovonski. He was probably one of the best surgeons in Ukraine at that time. (A photograph of him can be found in the section on medical school. Years later, his daughter, who had emigrated with her husband to NY, provided the necessary documents for our US visas.)

Now to get that position was also not so simple. A special committee from Moscow arrived after our graduation, and the decision about who goes where was up to them. I was convinced that because of my grades and my interest in surgery, I would receive this position. However, when the decision was announced, I was shocked to hear that they wanted to send me to a remote village in Siberia named Jaskov.

The idea was that because education was free, we had to repay a debt to the government by working in these remote areas. Basically, that is nonsense. But again, it took considerable effort and a lot of connections and friends who got me out of that assignment, and I did end up in the surgical department.

Note: It was always assumed in the family that this decision was political retaliation for Stilian's unwillingness to fully embrace the Communist government. The top ten graduates from medical school were supposed to have their choice of assignments as a reward for good scholarship. Peter was in that number. So to rescind that right was an obvious statement of disapproval.

This may also have been related to something that the informant Svistoon had reported about Stilian or Peter. Our father Peter was always very straight speaking. He never hesitated at pointing out the absurd. This did not sit well in the Soviet Union, which ran on hundreds of absurdities and contradictions. Sending him to an obscure village in Siberia may have been some bureaucrat's nonsensical compromise between losing a talented physician when doctors were needed for the impending war and punishing this outspoken young upstart, son of an outspoken, old upstart. In the end, someone must have pointed out that Peter was going to be useful, and they thought better of sending him into exile.

By early 1941 Peter was drafted into the Red Army. In June, under Operation Barbarossa, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in a direct breach of the peace treaty he had signed with Stalin. Everyone knew an attack was imminent, but Stalin refused to believe the reports and feared arming his own people.

The first attack came on 22 June 1941. On that day, Peter's friend and nephew, Andryusha, was probably killed. His body was never found. Peter was positioned in the Medsanbat, the surgical tent set up behind the front lines of battle.

As the war came closer, I was drafted into the army again, and this time, of course, there was no way to get out of it. My friend and nephew, Andryusha, was in the army already serving as a lieutenant. That is the position we all got when we graduated from the university in non-medical school.

About a week before the war started, he came to my room, and it seemed strange to us that there was not much talk in public about the war being imminent. Yet everyone in the military knew. He said it was reported that they could see the German troops coming closer to the border. They had people out there counting the number of Germans at the border and the numbers were growing.

On 22 June 1941 at 5:00 in the morning when it was dark, the war started for us. We found out about it in a peculiar manner. Our communication was not very good in Russia, and we did not hear about it until 9:00 a.m. I was in the army for some time by then, but I did not see any war yet. I only heard the stories. It was 9:00 in the morning on a beautiful summer day in Ukraine. It was unbelievable how beautiful the day was. I was lying in my hammock in the woods.

In the meantime, Andryusha had been sent close to the border, and apparently nobody knew exactly what was going on — something that should never have been permitted. The Germans started shooting artillery, which is normally shot over the soldiers' head and behind the lines at the towns and villages. But they were so close that they were shooting directly into the buildings where the soldiers were. Andryusha died there and I never saw him again.

We were positioned along the second line. No one was shooting at our line. We went to eat some breakfast in the woods when we heard planes coming in overhead. We were not yet familiar with the sounds of military aircraft and a discussion started.

Medsanbat tent at the Karelian front. (Photo credit: waralbum.ru)

Inside the Medsanbat tent No. 20 of the 34th Army of the Northwest Front. Drawing by F.F. Talizina (Photo credit http://russa.narod.ru/books/memory_book)

Some of my companions said that they sounded like Russian planes. I did not have time to give my opinion when those planes started to drop bombs. So I said to the guy, "They sound like Russian planes but they are dropping bombs like Germans."

Those planes did not do damage to our soldiers, but they destroyed a bridge, which apparently was their objective. Near the bridge there was a whole herd of cows and a number of them were killed. When that happened, of course, everybody lost their appetite, and breakfast was interrupted. The war had begun for us.

I served in the field hospital called "Medsanbat" in Russian. That was a huge tent with two operating rooms with nurses, equipment, and two surgeons: me and a young woman. We had enough work to do.

Sometimes we worked all night through, and sometimes we stood on that wet ground for 24 hours at a time without stopping, doing surgery. Some of the soldiers we treated were very bitter about the situation at the front.

Not everybody had a weapon. There was one gun for every three soldiers. Gradually, the front came closer to us, and the closer it came, the more casualties we had.

In the very beginning of the action, it was particularly interesting to note that a number of our soldiers were shot by their own comrades. There was one case where a soldier was brought to me with a slug in the shoulder. Apparently someone fired it from several miles away from a military gun. The slug flew over everybody's head and hit him in the shoulder. It was unclear who shot him.

Another case, which was actually kind of humorous because it was sunset, and we were in the woods. We saw an airplane coming in from the west. It was a small plane probably used to attack bigger planes. This airplane was zooming in and closing in on us rather rapidly. As it reached our division, we opened fire on him, and the plane was seriously damaged.

We could see the pilot, who was the only one in the plane. We watched as he separated from the plane and parachuted down and landed in a corn field. Our soldiers ran out from different directions and surrounded him, ready to shoot if needed.

I was not far from there, and I could hear it all distinctly. Suddenly, we could hear clear and impressive Russian curses hurled at us. We had shot down our own Russian aviator. Of course Russian curse words are pretty famous, probably among the most colorful in the world.

It is said there was a competition once for the most expressive curse words, and to this competition a lot of foreigners came. The first prize was won by an Irish Skipper. The second place was won by a Chinese, and the third place went to the Russian.

Anyway, he was extremely unhappy that we had shot him down. He was returning from an air battle with the Germans. He said the conditions were absolutely hopeless because our airplanes were greatly inferior to those of the Germans, and he was pessimistic about the outcome of the war.

One time I was called to examine one of our own dead soldiers who was found lying on the ground. Somehow or other, he was also shot by mistake. The bullet had entered near the heart area and hit the heart, killing him. According to the law of forensic medicine, if the shot is made from a short distance, there is usually a burn ring around the entrance. In this case, there was no burn ring.

I turned him over, and there was no exit wound. I could not really understand how this could happen. As I was about to give up, I noticed a peculiar thing. His right wrist was over his chest. Apparently he had been lying on the

ground on his back, sound asleep with his wrist over his chest when he was shot. The bullet went through his wrist and then entered the heart, which explained why there was no burn ring on the chest. It was on the wrist.

In the field hospital we had a tremendous number of patients. Frequently there were fifty for me and fifty for the other surgeon. Work was very hard. Sometimes we started in the morning and worked the whole night through when battles took place at night. I will never forget one particularly gruesome picture that confronted me when I left the operating tent.

American soldiers have dog tags on their chests. The Russians had a small black capsule which held a little scroll of paper with all the information about the soldier. The capsule, about 2 inches long and ½ inch thick, consisted of two parts that screwed to each other. It was kept in a special buttoned pocket where it would not get lost.

When the soldier died, the capsule was removed and set aside. One day in particular, when I left the tent, I could see those black capsules in a pile about a foot high off the ground. Each one represented a dead soldier.

When I was first drafted into the army and landed on the front, I was given a capsule like this with a paper to fill out. I got so mad that I threw away the paper and put Mom's (Helen's) picture into the capsule. I still have the little picture. She must have been about 20 or so at the time. In any case, I did not get killed, the capsule with the picture of Mom arrived home, and the capsule is still here, kept as a souvenir.

WWII Soviet ID ebonite capsule. Each soldier got one and placed his contact info inside on a small piece of paper. Peter wore his with Helen's photo in it. He kept it all his life, but it disappeared after his death.

Before the war started Peter was assigned to train Ukrainian military nurses. Here he is pictured with his students. Not one of these student nurses survived the early German onslaught.

Nurses had a particularly dangerous assignment: to retrieve the wounded from the field of battle and transport them to the surgical tent behind the lines. He tells the story here of one of his students whom he could not save.

A lot of the time soldiers were brought to us having been shot in the left hand. Most of the time two or three fingers were completely smashed or destroyed. Unfortunately, the commanding officer grew suspicious, and he investigated only to learn that these men were shooting their own hands off. We received an order, then, to notify of any gunshot wounds in the left hand.

Maybe only 6% or the population is left handed. They shot their left hand so they could still use their right hands. These soldiers were removed from the operating tent, were lined up behind it, and some were shot right there. The rest were asked if they will fight for Russia and their beloved leader, Josef Stalin. Of course, the survivors said yes, and they were sent back to the front to continue the war.

The shooting behind our tent made everybody "uneasy," but there was nothing we could do about it, of course. (Peter uses the word "uneasy" as irony here.)

Before the war started and before going to the front, I was assigned to teach male military nurses how to handle the wounded. In my case, this consisted of anatomy and surgery. I actually enjoyed these lessons and found these people both receptive and intelligent.

At the beginning of the war, the Red Army did not put physicians near the battle lines. The first place where the physicians were located was with the regiment. Which of course helped save a lot of physicians from being killed. The battalion was closer to the front, and each had one of those nurses with medical supplies and equipment.

He was also responsible for helping to evacuate the wounded to the first aid location, apply first aid, and then transport the wounded to us. The nurses also suffered a lot of wounds. One case specifically remained in my memory. There was a young Russian man who was one of my former students. He was a nurse in a battalion and was hit with a slug in the chest.

He was brought to our place in critical condition. Instead of transporting the wounded this time, he himself was the wounded with a substantial hole in his chest. These kinds of wounds are extremely serious. Today, many of them could be saved. At that time, it was not possible. We did not have any transport to a medical center where a lifesaving operation could be performed. Our means were completely inadequate for his needs.

I bent over him; tried to put an occlusive dressing on his chest. He was getting weaker and weaker, and then he turned to me. He recognized me, of course. He said he has something to ask me. We got his documents out of the little black capsule, and he asked that someone notify his mother that he is dead. Shortly after that he died.

That was a sad picture. You could look at that and never understand why that war was going on and why such massive destruction of young people. In total Russia lost about 20 million people during that war.

One time a fellow was found in the woods who was not very young, maybe around 40. Somehow or other, he raised the suspicions of our commanding officer who brought the man to our tent, not because he needed treatment but because he could not communicate with anyone there. He spoke some language that no one understood.

They knew that I spoke several languages, so they brought him to me to try to find out who he was and what he was doing there. I tried my best in several languages including French and German, but the fellow looked at me sheepishly and kept babbling some kind of nonsense in reply. I listened carefully to what he said and it did not sound like any language whatsoever.

The officer who was standing nearby came to the conclusion that he was a spy trying to avoid getting found out. The penalty for spying during the war was simple. He was taken back behind the tent and shot.

Later I was sent to a much bigger hospital. The Germans attacked the area. Of course, you never knew who attacked whom. That is always a

good question during this type of war. When they went to bomb the area, the bombs were falling not too far from us. We were positioned in heavily overgrown woods.

I looked at one of our surgeons, and I will never forget the picture which I saw. This young man had put a helmet on his head, and he was lying on the ground with his fingers in his ears, in absolute horror until the attack finished. Well, I don't know. I don't like to say I am especially brave, but that scene was so funny that I did not have a chance to get scared myself.

During that time we had to work very hard. All my life later, I worked hard, but that experience of working very hard under stress helped me to learn to concentrate on what I was doing and not to worry about other things or to get distracted. Fortunately, after that, the bombing attacks were never again directed at our positions but at the surrounding area, and they did not directly threaten us.

I remember one time the big commander of the Red Army, who was in charge of several divisions, which is called a "corps," came in for inspection. I had to show him the different tents and explain the work we were doing. Just then, a German airplane passed right overhead, and I noticed with some amusement that the general was somewhat nervous while I felt no reaction to the plane myself.

When the Red Army started to retreat, we had complete disorder and chaos. The roads were packed with soldiers, equipment, wagons, tanks, and everything. The Germans understood this, and from time to time, they attacked from the air. The bombing was very systematic and frequent.

As soon as the attack started, orders were given to clear the road immediately and hunker down along the sides which sloped down into farmland. The Germans knew that, so they did not drop bombs onto the road but about 50 to hundred feet to the side. We still had to follow orders and run to the side.

One time there was a marsh along the road, and the commander of our group, the cook, and I all hid together in the mud where we had found a little heavier brush. The German plane buzzed overhead, and with deadly accuracy dropped bombs to both sides of the road, right over our hiding place. I could hear the whizzing sound as it fell to earth. When a bomb is dropped from a plane, it does not fall directly under the plane because the bomb goes forward with inertia and falls forward of the place the plane was.

One bomb fell 50 or 100 feet before us, then the plane passed overhead. Then came the whizzing sound again, and the bomb landed about 20 feet from us. I looked at the other two fellows, and they looked very white. What my color was, I do not know, but it was a pretty uneasy moment just then.

We watched as it fell and waited. It was not very big, made to kill people and not destroy anything else, about a foot and a half long, and maybe about 8 inches in diameter. It fell to the ground, but surprisingly, it did not explode. It just lay there. I looked at it and remember thinking not of the bomb that fell and failed to explode but that I looked "like a pig lying in the mud."

Further on, we were also attacked by lighter planes with machine guns. At that time equipment was not as sophisticated as it is now. Several small planes flew overhead very low in all directions. No one could do anything to them because they were so low.

One time I could see the face of the German aviator through the wind screen. I could see his head which was covered with a thick leather helmet. He was spewing bullets upon us from the machine gun. I did not get hit, but just several feet away from me two soldiers were injured. One took a bullet in the head and died there. Another was shot in the leg. I was called to attend to his leg.

The Red Army was in complete disarray in Ukraine, and nobody knew anything what was going on and who was where. I decided that it would be the best time to leave and go home, if I could. There was a nurse who did not leave my side because I knew German. With that knowledge of German, I could accomplish a lot.

We decided to go together and took off through the villages toward home. Our first stop was in the morning near a small Ukrainian village where we entered a house. A woman in her forties greeted us in a very friendly manner because her son was also in the army. We were very hungry, and she gave us food. I will never forget the chicken which she prepared. It was something fantastic for our hungry stomachs.

We moved on, and shortly after that we stumbled upon a village which was occupied by the German army. We decided to tell them that we were finished with the war and did not plan to do anything anymore. We still had our uniforms, and we still had our pistols with us. As soon as we learned from the villagers that the Germans were here, I asked one of the villagers to get rid of our pistols, so we would not get into trouble.

We did not plan to fight with anybody. The villager buried out pistols in a pile of manure. Then we walked out of the village, and in a field about a half a mile outside the village, we met a group of German soldiers, about a dozen of them. When they spotted us, they came toward us. I got out my handkerchief and waved it over my head to show that we were not going to fight with anybody.

We came closer, and the officer of the group spoke to me. I explained who we were. I told him that we were going home. The interesting thing was that

he opened his wallet, and in it were several Red Stars from the uniforms of prisoners he had taken. He asked us for ours, and we were only too happy to part with them and contribute to his collection. They probably did him no good, even if he managed to make it back home to Germany later.

After this, they accompanied us to the main village center to talk to their commanding officer, who accepted us into his office. The first thing he asked us was what division we were from and its number. This was before we had told him anything. I was impressed. Apparently, their intelligence was pretty good. Then he said he would detain us there as prisoners of war. We were placed somewhere and stayed there for several days until the whole damn situation collapsed and we were let go by the same Germans. Somehow or other we arrived home. Our homecoming was fantastic.

Peter's elation did not last long, for by 20 September 1941, Kiev fell to the Germans and remained under occupation for the next two years. Peter continued to work in medicine until the fall of 1943 when the Red Army, victorious after the Battle of Stalingrad, stood poised to retake Kiev and force it back into the Soviet fold.

At that point, we found ourselves between Hitler and Stalin (much as described by Timothy D. Snyder in *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, 2012). Stories of Red Army reconquest presented a frightening and gruesome picture. Retribution against professionals working under occupation was severe. Their orders were to punish the population, and for many that meant imprisonment or death, something that everyone had tasted directly or indirectly during the 1930 purges.

Stalin's position, even with prisoners of war, was that anyone who had the temerity to be caught deserved punishment. He did not want individuals who had been on the outside of the Soviet Union repatriated. Thus, anyone who had worked under German occupation was considered an enemy and had to be eliminated. This included pretty much all the professionals in Kiev, if not all of Ukraine, as well as Peter, Helen, and all their family and friends.

In the end, it came down to a choice of stay and face the danger at home or flee. Like millions of others, our family decided to take our chances outside of the Soviet Union. We fled. That story is told in Part 8: Exodus.

Peter left the Red Army during the chaotic retreat from the front. Disorganization was such that no one noticed. The Germans took Kiev and occupied half of Ukraine by 20 September 1941, holding it for two years.

With the help of his father's friends, Peter managed to get assigned to work in a hospital serving local people during the occupation. The Germans had their own facilities and refused to be treated by local physicians.

Under the occupation, free choice was no more an option than it had been under the Soviets. Peter was lucky to at least be working as a physician.

CHAPTER 4

Nina Stilianovna Stavraki

Peter's sister Nina suffered a lot of loss in her life but always managed to land on her feet. She graduated from the Conservatory of Music, mastering the piano, although she was not a sensitive or nuanced musician, nor did she pursue a musical career after graduating.

She married young to her first husband, Nicolai Mihailov, who was a musician and the father of her only daughter, Lena Bernotas, born in 1932. When they emigrated to Canada after WWII, Lena later was given the surname of Nina's third husband, Vladis Bernotas.

Mihailov died on tour sometime after 1932 and before 1936, somewhere "in the east," either of TB or of alcoholism. It seems that Nina's father was not happy with her choice of husband and is known to have remarked that he did not want his older daughter to end up with the kind of man Nina had married. There was some talk that Mihailov was a heavy drinker, although alcoholism was quite common at the time. To avoid a repeat with his older daughter, who was still unmarried, Stilian conspired with a colleague who had a son of the same age and background.

Their efforts succeeded and the children married, although the union was reportedly not a totally happy one. According to their son, their father, Lyosig Kiselevich, was known to have had at least one close female "friend" all his life, and he was seen with one after their mother's death.

After Mihailov's death Nina married a young engineer, Vladimir Zamryi, and gave birth to their son, Yura, in 1937. Zamryi's great passion was a 1920s model car that the couple drove to Crimea in July of 1936 with Peter and Helen (Described in Part 7: Friends). In 1941 he was killed at the German front. His little son, Yura, died of diphtheria a year later.

In 1943 when most educated people were fleeing Kiev before the Red Army advance, Nina took her mother and daughter and fled to Germany. There, they lived by her wits and Lena went to school.

In the meantime, Stilian's younger brother, Vladimir, and his family had emigrated from Ukraine some ten years earlier and settled in Athens, Greece, in 1932 with his wife, younger son, and his daughter-in-law's, Melpomene Karadzas' (Milya's), large clan. Her cousins reported to us that, in total, 16 family members of the family left Odessa together. Vladimir's older son, Yura, had already left Ukraine a few years earlier. Around 1926 he received a scholarship to McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and after some difficulty with bureaucracy getting his transcripts, he managed to leave Ukraine. In Canada he met and married Madeleine, a French Canadian woman with a son by a previous marriage, and after graduation from medical school, they settled in London, Ontario, where he worked as a physician and taught at the university.

During her years in Germany, Nina kept close ties with Yura, and with Madeleine's help she managed to get papers for herself, Lena, and her mother to emigrate to Canada. At the end of the war, just as they were ready to depart for Canada, Vladis Bernotas appeared in Nina's life, a handsome Lithuanian with a persuasive and controlling manner whom she married almost immediately. He did not want to be left behind — and for good reason, as we shall shortly report.

Nina then wrote to Madeleine asking her to reissue all the paperwork in her married name and to include Vladis. This was, of course, a great imposition, for refugee paperwork was not a simple matter, but Nina was at times insensitive, demanding, and unaware or unwilling to note her effect upon others. She was both independent and resourceful as well as dependent and acquiescent. In Germany she cared for both her daughter and her mother, but when it came to Vladis, she let him dominate her.

To her credit, Madeleine complied with good grace, and all four ended up in London, Ontario, where Nina and Vladis spent the rest of their lives together.

Many years later, Peter learned that his brother-in-law had latched on to Nina to escape the allies because he had an unsavory Nazi past that would have led to his arrest. Apparently, he had been an ardent Nazi supporter and had worked as a guard in one of the concentration camps, which may have been Dachau. Had he not fled with Nina, he would have been put on trial after the war.

Toward the end of their lives Nina got another rude surprise. One day two women showed up in Canada on Nina and Vladis' doorstep who turned out to be Vladis' daughters, both born before he met and married Nina. It was also then revealed that he had never divorced his Lithuanian wife but had simply abandoned his family and used Nina as a way to escape — a detail he had neglected to mention to Nina. Of course this would have invalidated their marriage and his immigration status, but so many years had passed that the issue was somehow smothered.

Nina's daughter, Lena, did not like living in Canada, and after finishing university, returned to Europe where she met and married the Swiss national Jean-Luc Diacon with whom she flourished. They had four children and five grandchildren. She made her home in Switzerland and even saw her mother on a few rare occasions, although they were not close.

She also took her children to Russia to meet their cousins and kept up as many family relationships as possible. In Kiev she had been close to Peter, and they had lived in the same house. He adored his little niece, but after the war they never saw each other again, although they continued to correspond.

Nina took care of her mother until her death in 1967 and remained close to her cousin Yura and his wife, Madeleine, with whom Yura's mother, Olga, lived. It will be remembered that she was sister to Nina's mother, Ekaterina, and the two remained close all their lives.

Nina as a baby 5 April 1910.

Nina or Olga.

One of the Farimski children. Could be Nina or Olga but could be from the older generation as well.

Nina posed sitting. The Stavrakis family periodically went to a photographer and took formal pictures such as this one.

Various portraits of Nina at different ages. According to family members, she competed with her older sister, Olga. Growing up she was not as close to Peter as her sister, but in later life they corresponded and visited infrequently but regularly.

She lived in Canada near their cousin and took care of their mother, Baba Katya, all her life.

She was married three times and widowed twice, her last spouse outliving her. She felt incomplete without a life partner. She had one daughter, Lena, by her first marriage and one son, Yura, by her second, but he died of diphtheria at age 5.

Nina with her mother visiting her mother's sister, Elizaveta, and her husband, Dimitry (Mitya) Stein (center), in Austria (?) just before the Iron Curtain descended in 1928. The sign says it was a hunting lodge.

Nina climbing rocks on their trip to Crimea with Peter, Helen, and her second husband, Zamryi, in July 1936.

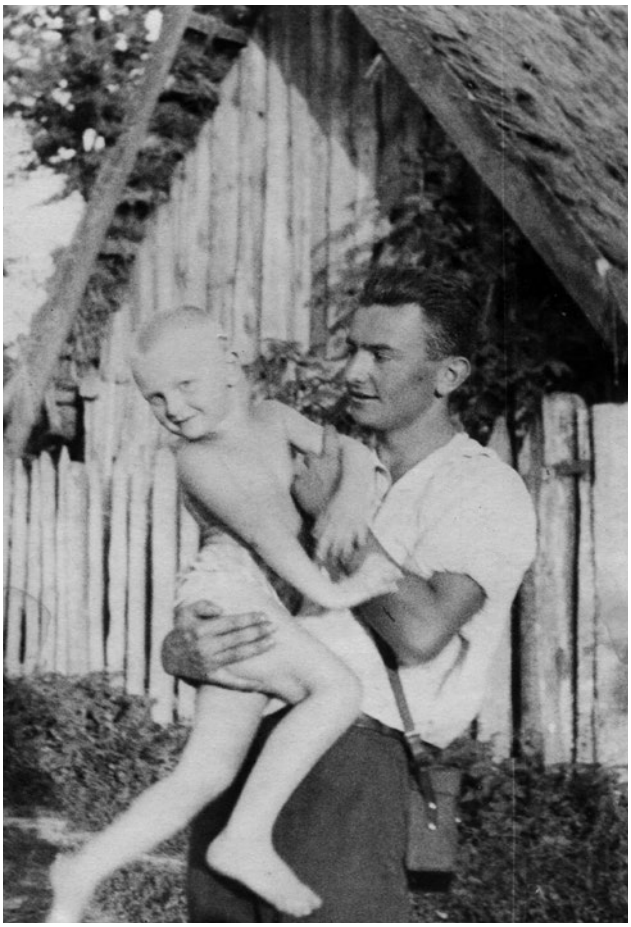
Nina with two unidentified companions in Canada in her later years, elegantly dressed and very attractive. She was a handsome, strong woman who lacked self-confidence at times.

Nina's first husband and father of her daughter, Lena, was Nicolai Mihailov who was a musician, and some said he tended to drink more than was healthy. He died of illness on a musical tour in the east probably before 1935.

Nicolai Mihailov was known to be quite talented and toured throughout the Soviet Union with a musical ensemble.

Lena was born in 1932, a lovely blond child. Later in Canada she took the last name of Vladis Bernotas, Nina's third husband, which she kept until her marriage to Jean-Jacques Diacon of Switzerland.

Peter adored Lena, although once they left Kiev, he never saw her again. He missed her as he missed his sisters all his life.



Peter playing with Lena ca. 1937. For some reason it was the custom at the time to shave children's heads in the summer. Perhaps to prevent lice. Nina was absolutely ferocious with this habit.

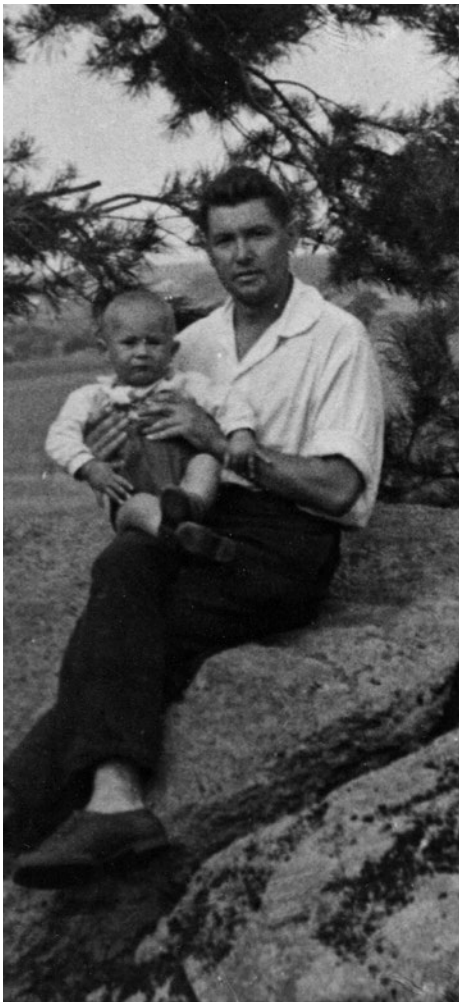
Nina and Vladimir Zamryi, her second husband, sometime between 1936 and 1940.

Portrait of Vladimir Zamryi, Nina's second husband and the father of her second child, Yura, who was born in 1937 and died of diphtheria in 1942. Zamryi died a year before his son on the first front of WWII. They got together before 1936 when they took the road trip to Crimea with Peter and Helen. That same year Zamryi took the photos of Peter's dog surgery.

Zamryi standing next to his beloved car. He was an engineer and loved all kinds of machinery.

Nina with her new baby, Yura Zamryi, born in July 1937.

Zamryi with his son Yura.



Nina with Yura. Behind her on the left is her mother, our Baba Katya, and on the right in back is Elena. Nina always took care of her mother and of all the Stavrakis children. While in Canada, she kept together as much of the extended family as possible.

Nina, Lena, and Yura in various photos some with a goat. The country scenes are taken at Korostichev where they went in the summer.

Lena with a boy who may have been a cousin.

Nina and Lena in the snow in a park, probably in Kiev.

Baba Katya, Nina's mother (left); Lena; and Nina, probably in Germany during the war. Lena spent her teenage years in Germany and always felt more at home in Europe than in Canada.

Lena, probably in Canada. She always sent photos and wrote regularly to Peter, but they never met again after 1943.

Photos sent to Peter from Canada. Lena in the grass and with her mother on a bench. Nina standing with a man who seems to be her cousin Shura Stavraki. Lena went to high school in Canada and then left to study in Paris where she met her husband and settled in Switzerland.

When the war ended Nina got visas with the help of our cousin Yura's wife, Madeleine in Canada, to emigrate to Canada. Here Lena is on the train on the way to Bremerhaven. They, like most refugees, were transported around Europe in cattle cars.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Translation dated 1932 of Peter's baptismal record original performed in St. Vladimir's Church, in Kiev.

(State's coat of Arms)

Extract from the book of registration of births, PartI, concerning the births in 1917.

Record of births male	female	Date of birth	baptism	Names of born	Occupation, surname, name and fathers name of parents, their religion
43	-	Feb&27	April 9	Peter in honor of St&Apostle Peter whose day is celebrated on June 29	Stylian(Stylianos) Emil Stavraki, physician and his wife Catherine, Gregg: both orthodox

Note: ↑ Catherine Gregory

(notary public)

Office of the notary public of the city of
this is the true copy of the signed ori-
June 4,1932 - Nr&8557
(signed) Kolonsky

Tax stamp (seal of the notary public)

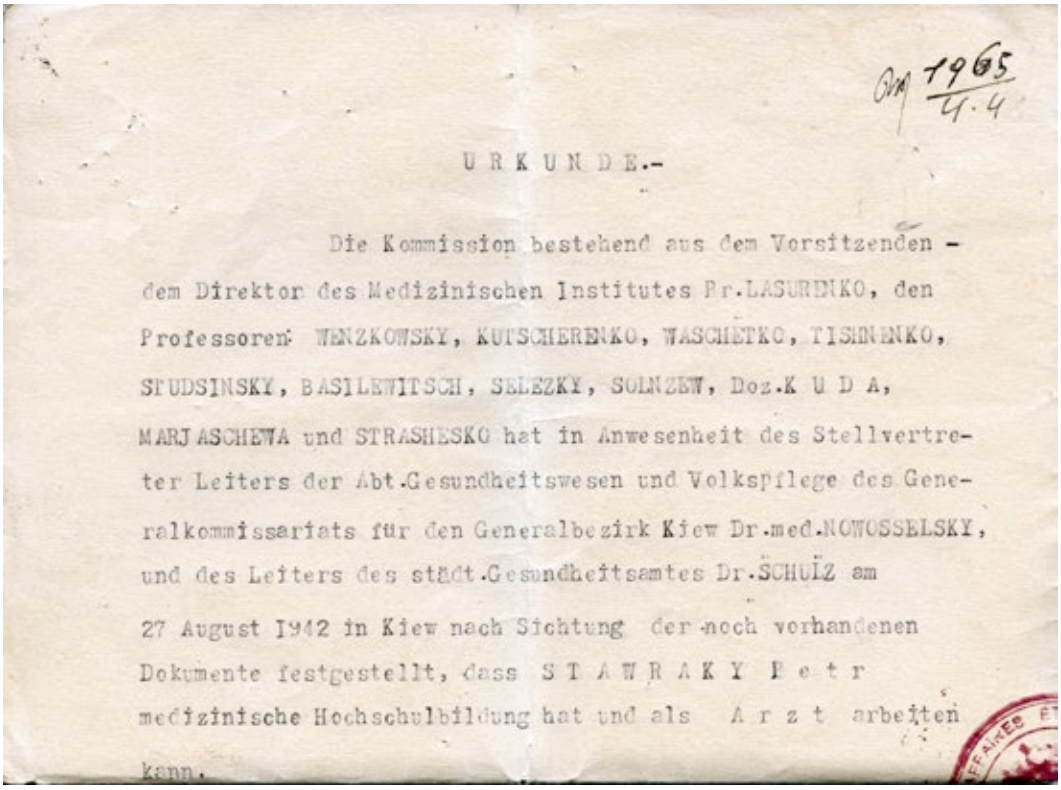
Occupation, surname name and father's name of godparents	Who performed baptism	Signatures of witnesses (if any)
College - assessor Vladimir Basil Dobrolyboff and a physician's wife Olga Gregory Stavraki	Archpriest George Tichomiroff with clergy.	

We certify the exactness of this extract from the book of registration of births by affixing the cathedral seal and by our signatures.

Archpriest of the Kiev-Vladimir's Cathedral:(signed)

deacon: signed
deacon: signed

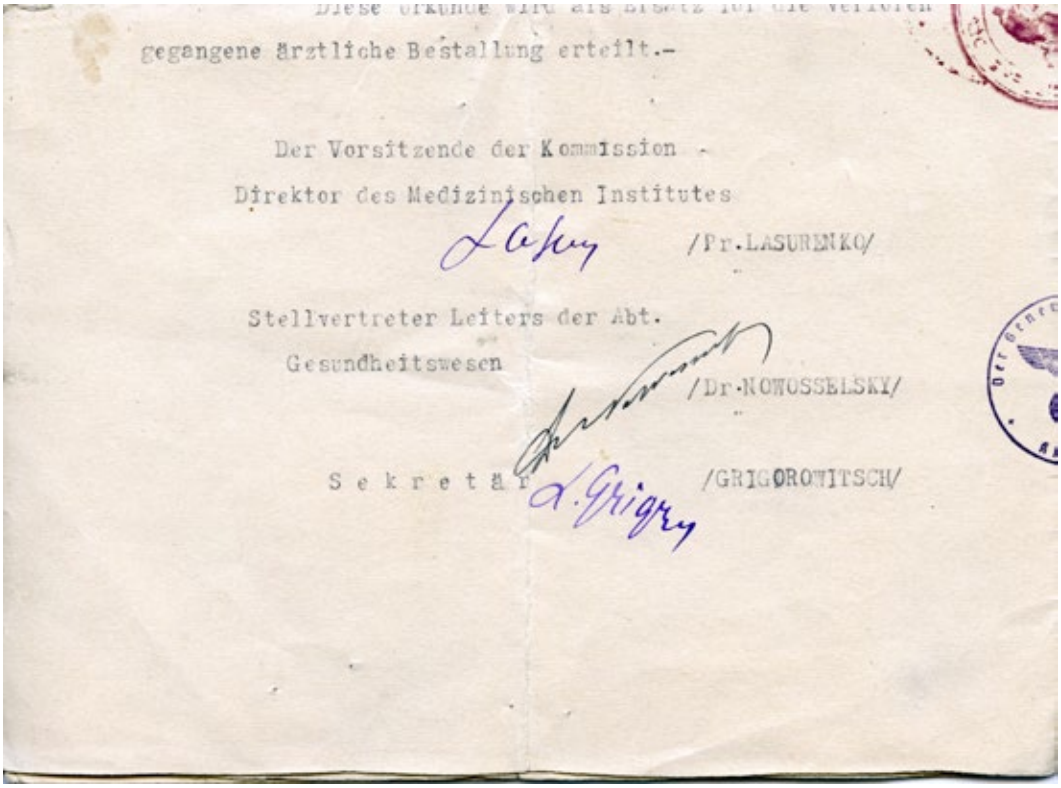
Pop's Baptism in Vladimir Sobor - note Olga Gregory Stavraki



Am 1965
4.4

U R K U N D E.-

Die Kommission bestehend aus dem Vorsitzenden - dem Direktor des Medizinischen Institutes Pr.LASURENKO, den Professoren: WENZKOWSKY, KUTSCHERENKO, WASCHETKO, TISHMENKO, STUDSINSKY, BASILEWITSCH, SELEZKY, SOLNZEW, Doz.K U D A, MARJASCHEWA und STRASHESKO hat in Anwesenheit des Stellvertreter Leiters der Abt.Gesundheitswesen und Volkspflege des Generalkommissariats für den Generalbezirk Kiew Dr.med.NOWOSSELSKY, und des Leiters des städt.Gesundheitsamtes Dr.SCHULZ am 27 August 1942 in Kiew nach Sichtung der noch vorhandenen Dokumente festgestellt, dass S T A W R A K Y P e t r medizinische Hochschulbildung hat und als A r z t arbeiten kann.



Diese Urkunde wird als Ersatz für die verloren gegangene ärztliche Bestallung erteilt.-

Der Vorsitzende der Kommission -
Direktor des Medizinischen Institutes
/Pr.LASURENKO/

Stellvertreter Leiters der Abt.
Gesundheitswesen
/Dr.NOWOSSELSKY/

S e k r e t ä r /GRIGOROWITSCH/

Зр 96
Т 147

П О С В І Д Ч Е Н Н Я.

Дано це п. СТАВРАКИ Петру Стиліановичу в тому, що Кваліфікаційною Комісією при Київському Медичному Інституті від 27 серпня-1942 р. під головуванням Директора Медичного Інституту проф. ЛАЗУРЕНКО, в складі професорів: ВЕЩКОВСЬКОГО, КУЧЕРЕНКО, ВАШЕТКО, ВАСИЛЕВИЧА, СТУДЗІНСЬКОГО, СЕЛЕЦЬКОГО, ТИЖНЕНКО, СОЛНЦЕВА та доцентів: К У Д А, МАРЬЯШЕВОЇ та СТРАЖЕСКО в присутності Заступника Шефа Охорони Здоров"я Генералькомісаріату д-ра НОВОСЕЛЬСЬКОГО та Зав. Міським Відділом Охорони Здоров"я д-ра ШУЛЬЦА, шляхом перевірки документів встановлено, що п. СТАВРАКИ Петр Стиліанович має вищу медичну освіту й може працювати за спеціальність, як л і к а р.

Це свідоцтво видається замість загубленого лікарського свідоцтва.-

ГОЛОВА КОМІСІЇ
ДИРЕКТОР МЕДИЧНОГО ІНСТИТУТУ //Проф. ЛАЗУРЕНКО/

ЗАСТУПНИК ШЕФА
ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ"Я д-р НОВОСЕЛЬСЬКИЙ/

СЕКРЕТАР /ГРИГОРОВИЧ/

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