

# “Overrun and Swept Along by War”: The Gulag in the Memoir of Katharina (Hildebrand) Krueger

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## Introduction

Released from the Soviet Union in 1976, as an *Aussiedler* in Heidelberg, Germany, Katharina “Tin” (Hildebrand) Krueger (1908–2002) wrote a remarkable, candid memoir of her life entitled *Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen (Fate of a Russian German)* published in 1991.<sup>1</sup> Born in the Mennonite colony Neu-Chortitza (Novo-Khortitsa) in Ukraine, and raised in the Orenburg colony in the Ural Mountains, Krueger lived through revolution, wars, famine, and collectivization, and she coped with the dislocation, exile, separation and fragmentation of her family. She experienced a nightmare of interrogation, labour and deprivation in Russian gulags for fourteen years. Krueger’s life was characterized by an absence of men, as brothers, father, husband and lover died or disappeared. Many were sent to gulags in Siberia. Her mother and two sisters were also sent to Siberia, and her mother died

in a gulag. Krueger demonstrated tremendous strength and resilience in the face of overwhelming loss and tragedy as did many of the other women coping alone, described in her memoir.

Co-author Mary Hildebrandt is Tin's great niece. Mary's father, Walter, is the son of Tin's younger brother, Gerhard Hildebrandt, who added a "t" to the end of his name when he came to Canada in 1949. The "t" was added for reasons never explained, but it represented a break with his past, most of which he never spoke about. As Gerhard died in 1976, revealing only fragments of his life in Russia, Tante Tin and her memoir became the only key to understanding this scattered family and their Mennonite heritage, and she was the only link to family remaining in the former Soviet Union, most in Kazakhstan. Co-author Sarah Carter, Mary's mother, met Tin with Walter in Heidelberg in 1981. Mary who knows German, and Sarah, a Canadian historian, collaborated on this article in order to learn more about Tin and Hildebrand(t) family history, and to try to comprehend how this narrative fits into a larger framework of war, dislocation and the gulag experience. Another purpose is to draw attention to Krueger's autobiography that has never been translated into English, and that adds new layers and dimensions to the history of women swept along by war, and to the history of Mennonites who were not able to escape the Soviet Union. Gerhard was the only member of this large family who left Russia until Tin was finally permitted to leave in 1976. The memoir is rich with detail, spanning most of the twentieth century, and to provide a focus it was decided to concentrate on Krueger's experiences in the gulags.

Our main arguments emerge from and are shaped by comparisons of Krueger's memoir to studies of other women's experiences and narratives of war and trauma, particularly those explored in Marlene Epp's *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War*.<sup>2</sup> Krueger exemplified many of the characteristics of Epp's women without men who assumed altered gender roles as they led their families through the turbulent terrain of war, and like these women, Krueger negotiated multiple identities as a woman, widow, single mother, Soviet citizen, Russian German and Mennonite. Like the women in Epp's study, Krueger's ambiguous marital status complicated her life; she was a widow, but did not receive official confirmation of her husband's death for many years, and her son was fathered by another man. Family fragmentation was a constant theme in Epp's study, as it is in Krueger's memoir. Yet Krueger departs from the women of Epp's study in significant ways. For the women refugees to Canada of Epp's book, a source of great strength, comfort and inspiration was found in their Mennonite identity, religious beliefs and cultural practices that shaped their strategies and decisions. Krueger however lost all religious

beliefs, and did not convey Mennonite cultural practices and language (Low German [*Plautdietsch*]) to her son. She turned away from most aspects of her Mennonite heritage, and there is little mention of a Mennonite identity in the memoir following her description of her childhood. Throughout her memoir, Krueger stressed and emphasized her German identity above others, using the term Russian German rather than Mennonite.

A main theme of Krueger's memoir, however, is that she had no home, no sense of belonging to any one community or nation. Her family scattered from their Orenburg village, her home with her husband in Ukraine was shattered, she was torn from the home she hoped to establish in German-occupied Poland, and she could make no home for her son who was raised in the barracks of the gulags. Because of discrimination against Germans that persisted long after the war, she did not feel at home in the Soviet Union once released from the gulag. When Krueger finally settled in West Germany, a goal that she long cherished, she had a profound sense that she did not belong there either. She did not feel welcome, and was never comfortable with the affluence of Germany compared to the deprivation of those she remembered and left behind. A sense of homelessness haunts her memoir.

### Overview/Chronology

Tin was the fifth of eleven children of Johann Hildebrand and Anna Froese who were from the Neu-Chortitza Mennonite settlement in Ukraine. Her parents were among the landless Mennonites of Ukraine who colonized the Orenburg settlement in the Ural Mountains, settling at first in Rodnichnoye, one of the villages established in 1900. Their eldest son Abraham was born in 1900 in Ukraine, and three children, Jakob, Johann and Anna, were born in Rodnichnoye between 1902 and 1906. There were many crop failures and other difficulties in the early years, and the worst year was 1906 when the colonists had to be helped with food and other supplies from other Mennonite settlements.<sup>3</sup>

Like many other Orenburg colony families, the Hildebrands returned to Ukraine by 1908, and Tin and two sisters were born there. But the family was back in Orenburg by 1914. They settled in Dorf Dolinovka, and this was Tin's childhood home. Deprivation and disappointment characterized her early years with frequent bad harvests in the thin, mountainous soil and water shortages of the Ural Mountains. Two of her younger sisters died: Aganetha in 1915 at age five and Olga in 1919, age three. There was a total crop failure and starvation in 1921 accompanied by malaria and typhus.



The Hildebrand farm in Orenburg

Despite years of setbacks the Hildebrands became relatively prosperous, but in 1929, their land, cattle, machinery and outbuildings became the property of the collective. The new Soviet dictator Josef Stalin forcibly created collective farms and state farms with the goal of creating the first modern socialist state. Rations for the family were inadequate, and there was not enough fuel to heat their large house. Krueger was sent to live with her married sister Anna in the Mennonite colony of Arkadak, which was approximately 1,200 kilometers west of Orenburg, across the Volga, in the oblast (province) of Saratov. Saratov was the centre of Volga German culture, which included Lutherans and Roman Catholics as well as Mennonites. In Arkadak Krueger worked in a kindergarten. Her parents and younger siblings, Gerhard, Helena (Lena) and Heinrich, also moved to Arkadak in 1934. Their father was now blind because of a botched eye operation; he died in Arkadak in 1939.

In 1935 Tin married David Krueger who was born in Orenburg, Dorf Nikolajewka. He was a physics and math teacher in Halbstadt, Ukraine, where Tin took a teacher's training course.<sup>4</sup> Their lives were torn apart forever in September, 1941. Mennonites and other Russian Germans were targeted as potential German collaborators. They were condemned for "concealing enemies," and as "diversionists and spies, who on a signal being given from Germany are to carry out sabotage. ..."<sup>5</sup> The Nazi invasion of the USSR provided the Stalin regime with the pretext to eliminate what they had long perceived as a German problem by forcibly deporting Russian Germans to internal exile in labour camps. David Krueger was arrested by the secret police, the

NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), with all other males of German ancestry in Halbstadt aged sixteen to sixty five, and sent to a logging camp in the north Urals where he died in December, 1941. He had a frail constitution to start with, and there was a heavy death toll in these work camps where there was insufficient housing, food and clothing. Cold, exhaustion and malnourishment led to his death, although Tin did not learn the fate of her husband for many years.

The Russian German women of Halbstadt were also ordered to leave. Tin and David Krueger's apartment was destroyed by the secret police in September, 1941 after she was permitted to remove just a few of her belongings. She made her way to the home of her uncle Heinrich Froese in Saporoshje, Ukraine, and then followed him to Schoenwiese. In 1943 Tin became one of the approximately 350,000 Russian Germans, including some 35,000 Mennonites, who accompanied the retreating German army back through war-torn Europe following the defeat of the Nazis at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-3.<sup>6</sup> This was a trek composed primarily of women, children and the elderly.

The Nazis' plan was to strengthen Germany's claim to occupied Poland by re-settling Russian Germans on the land and in homes forcibly vacated by Poles earlier in the war. They were also a source of workers and soldiers as Germany's war losses mounted. Krueger was one of the "re-settlers" in Lager Kirschberg. While she expressed regret about the displaced Poles, she was clearly happy here. She was sent for further training as a teacher to a castle in Winterberg (Vimperk), Bohemia, which was like all the stories of knights' castles she had read as a girl. In occupied Poland she worked as a teacher with Russian German children. She became pregnant, but we learn little of the father or why they were separated. She had hoped they could have a life together: "I had all reason to start a home, because I was expecting a child from a planned marriage which never came to be due to the troubles of war and the interruption of fate."<sup>7</sup>

As the Soviets advanced late in 1944, Krueger and other Russian Germans fled westward. She was in Cottbus, Germany in February, 1945 when it was bombed by the Americans, and then moved on to Gross-Raeschen where her son Gerhard was born in the spring of 1945. She stayed with her infant son at the home of a kind woman named Frau Golze. While other Russian Germans of this town were soon rounded up and sent back to Russia, Krueger hoped that she and her infant son had been overlooked or forgotten. But at the end of May, 1945 Tin was ordered by the Russians to leave. They were sent to Arkhangelsk, in the far north, on the White Sea. Her next fourteen years in gulags is dealt with in the section below. In 1959 Tin and Gerhard were released from the gulag, and thereafter she was often on the move, first to Russian Kameshkir (Penza oblast) where her brother Jakob and family lived,

then, in 1966 to Tselinograd in Kazakhstan, then to Ukraine. In 1976 Krueger became one of the nearly 100,000 Mennonites who relocated to Germany.

### **The Gulag Experience**

Much of the memoir is devoted to her fourteen years in gulags. At least 476 forced labour camps were scattered across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union when the system reached its apex in the early 1950s. As historian Anne Applebaum has written, the prisoners lived

in a country within a country, almost a separate civilization. The Gulag had its own laws, its own customs, its own morality, even its own slang. It spawned its own literature, its own villains, its own heroes, and it left its mark upon all who passed through it, whether as prisoners or guards. Years after being released, the Gulag's inhabitants were often able to recognize former inmates on the street simply from "the look in their eyes."<sup>8</sup>

We think Krueger had that look in her eyes. She was considered a "war criminal" or "political criminal." Krueger was vilified as a German collaborator because she was among the Russian Germans sent by the Germans to "re-settle" Poland. Throughout her memoir, Krueger insisted that she never had any political views of any kind. This may have been a strategic position to adopt; in her later years in Germany she was clearly a critic of capitalism and she admired some politicians, especially Willie Brandt.

Arkhangelsk, Krueger and her son Gerhard's first labour camp, was "one of the capital cities of the Gulag."<sup>9</sup> It was one of five pulp-and-paper complexes built in 1938 that were vital to the military and to industry. Krueger's descriptions of these years are choppy and fragmented. The trip from Germany took two months, and they often traveled in a crowded freight train. Krueger arrived with feet swollen from frostbite, and all of the children on the train were sick. They were always undernourished, and children, who did not contribute their labour until older, were a low priority for rations—they were all weak with hunger. To acquire milk for her son, Krueger and other women of the camp went to the nearest town to exchange their meager belongings. After three years she had exchanged her last summer coat for "bear bacon," and they were grateful for seal meat and other seal products. While most women were compelled to work in the mill or factory, Krueger was more fortunate. Because of her teacher training

she worked in the kindergarten. The children were often so ill that her own health was very vulnerable. There were many children in the camp and daycare was required, as all the parents were forced to work. Like her son Gerhard, hundreds of thousands of children were "arrested" along with their parents. There were occasional amnesties for women with small children, in 1945 and 1948, but these did not apply to women sentenced for "counter-revolutionary" crimes.<sup>10</sup> There were also many births in the camps as women found "camp husbands" for protection from other males and sometimes because of love. Women could be ordered back to work just three months after giving birth. In her memoir Krueger described many camp marriages, with both tragic and happy stories of young couples.

The days were monotonous, long and dark in this northern gulag. "Life went on. One grey day replaced another," Krueger wrote.<sup>11</sup> The living quarters were so cramped that it was "overwhelming." They divided their barracks into tiny "rooms" with cardboard, and Krueger and her son shared their space with another woman. She was in this camp during the "mass death" or famine of 1947 when they scoured the tundra for any leaves and tubers that they could use in soup and ate fox meat. Conditions became more oppressive in 1948 when there was an intensive crackdown on the German "war criminals." They were constantly subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment. The camp commanders made fun of how the prisoners kept their suitcases, taunting them that they would never leave. Krueger always hung on to her suitcase as a last vestige of hope, and did not trade it along with her other belongings. Rumors that the tide would soon turn rekindled hopes and restored a will to live, but a sense of hopelessness always returned. Krueger wrote that "We camp inmates, mostly women and children, almost all doing hard, men's labour, huddled together in the miserable barracks, hungry, with hopeless futures, no access to the media, no cultural diversion, were physically and psychologically blunted to such an extent that politics, and the significance of sensational news was no longer interesting to us...."<sup>12</sup> For Krueger the best times were when she was working which she did constantly: "One could not handle free time."<sup>13</sup>

The inmates had strategies to humanize their surroundings however. Krueger described Christmas in the camp which they would make special for the children. They cut down a fir tree from the taiga forest, and the mothers brought paper from the mill to make decorations and toys. They even sang carols, even though these had been banned from Russian schools and public events since the 1920s. Every Christmas since, Krueger remembered the taiga Christmas tree from those years, with no candles, and how the children loved it. And there were some "light spots" in the grey days, particularly when she received letters

from family in other camps. Throughout the memoir there are many portraits of her fellow women inmates, and she recounts their suffering as well as their resilience and compassion for each other.

Interrogations by the secret police were Krueger's worst experiences, and she was continually questioned about the whereabouts of her younger brother Gerhard. For him the war years were tumultuous. He too spent time in a gulag but was then trained as a spy by the Russians, and was sent behind German lines on several expeditions before he was captured, and eventually sent back to the Russian front in a German uniform. At the end of the war he was in a British prison camp in Germany. Released from there he worked on a farm in Germany where he met his future wife Ilse, who had been widowed in the war and had a young son. The secret police demanded to know why Krueger had named her own son Gerhard. She dreaded these sessions, and to avoid them she tried to make herself ill by going out in freezing winter weather without a coat so she could be put in hospital where she could not be interrogated. (She later regretted this, believing that it permanently damaged her health.) After one interrogation session she spoke in Low German (*Plautdietsch*) with another Mennonite inmate, Heinrich Dyck, whom she first met on the train to the camp. He reassured her that he and many others were continually being questioned by the secret police and this comforted her—she had believed she was being singled out.<sup>14</sup>

Krueger became very ill in the Arkhangelsk camp and was told that she could transfer to another camp, as only a change in climate could save her. She had little freedom to choose. She was told that if she had relatives in other work camps she could be transferred to one of them, accompanied by the police. Krueger knew that her mother and sisters Lena and Anna were in a camp in West Siberia, Tyumen Oblast, where Mennonites from the Arkadak settlement had been deported in the summer of 1941. Krueger and her son Gerhard left Arkhangelsk at the beginning of 1953. She had become close to Heinrich Dyck and he saw them off at the train station. Her money was stolen from her while on the train by the train staff. As a war criminal, she wrote, there was no way for her to protest, to “defend” herself, as no one would believe her. They arrived at the camp by sleigh in a blizzard. She was happy to be reunited with her sisters but very saddened to learn that her mother had died. Krueger was again immediately under the scrutiny of the local police once they saw her file full of “innumerable” statements she had made to the secret police. She was given a “black visitor’s card” (*schwarze Visitenkarte*) but did not tell her sisters about it, for fear that she might get them involved in her troubles.

At first Krueger was made to work in the livestock barn, shoveling frozen manure, breaking it up and taking it to the fields on a sleigh. But



this work was "beyond her strength." She then worked as a seamstress, although she had little expertise, sewing for the Indigenous people and others in the camp who could not afford more skilled work. Milk was her payment. Altogether Krueger found life to be much better in the Tyumen camp than in Archangelsk. There was greater freedom of movement and the climate was much better. The summers were beautiful and warm, and having grown up in Orenburg, she was used to harsh winters. She found Siberia beautiful: "An endless, bluish sea of waves from the blowing snow, flooded by the light of the morning sun, seemed to transfer us into a fairly-tale-land."<sup>15</sup> She was happy to be reunited with her family. To comfort her younger sister Lena, she "sang all the songs I knew, and with abandon. Starting with the Low German (*Plautdietsch*) songs from the times of our great-grandmothers and great-great-grandmothers."<sup>16</sup> Yet, Siberia was also a place of great suffering. Likely thinking of her own mother, Krueger wrote that when people died, their graves were not even marked: "How many unmarked graves could there be in these vast Siberian regions and virgin woods?"<sup>17</sup>

In 1953 Krueger was given permission to visit her home town of Dolinovka, although she was told she could never move back there. She saved for the trip that she made with her sister Lena and son Gerhard. Unlike most other Mennonite settlements of Russia, Orenburg was not evacuated when the Germans invaded. Krueger found their family house still standing but her main thought was that she no longer belonged here, and that it was not her home. She was also critical of what she termed the "so-called" Mennonite brethren: "After twenty-four years absence from here, where I spent my childhood and youth, I didn't feel at home anymore. Here, where many inhabitants had never left these remote towns, the old agendas and prejudices from the old days prevailed."<sup>18</sup> She did not specify just what the "old agendas and prejudices" were, but as Marlene Epp found, after the war single/widowed female heads of families "represented a discomfoting aberration to the Mennonite communities."<sup>19</sup> Tin would have been particularly "discomfoting" to the Mennonite brethren as she had never been married to the father of her son.

In the early 1950s Krueger learned in a letter from a friend in Arkhangelsk that Russian Germans might be able to "return" to Germany and soon forms were distributed and filled out. Hopes died however, as nothing came of this. (When she finally received permission to leave for Germany in 1976, an official at the German embassy in Moscow found the forms she had filled out in the 1950s.) She recalled the lifting of mandatory, permanent surveillance following the 1955 visit to Russia of Konrad Adenauer that awakened more expectations. They no longer had a commander at their camp, but had to report to the local police station every month. She always had the burden of

her *schwarze Visitenkarte* to show to authorities. The inmates were eventually freed, but were not permitted to return to where they used to live, or to recover their lost property. Russia was an intolerable place for Russian Germans after the war, and after they were released from the prison camps. Many Russians continued to believe that ethnic Germans were “war criminals.” Krueger had great difficulty finding work and lodging: “How will the hate against us Germans ever diminish, if one still, in 1972, decades after the war, finds that people believe in these published lies?”<sup>20</sup> She emerged from the gulag feeling entirely homeless, both in the sense of a space or place, and in the sense of a spiritual, cultural home. She retained little attachment to a Mennonite identity beyond her love of the traditional songs, and she had no religious beliefs.

### The Memoir

Krueger saw writing her memoir as the main purpose of her life after she left the Soviet Union in 1976 at age sixty eight. She had hoped her son Gerhard would join her but he died in the Soviet Union before she left for Germany. In her memoir she wrote that it was her son who had given her a reason to persevere through all of the difficulties and challenges of her life. After her release, she looked forward with great joy and anticipation to a reunion with her beloved brother Gerhard who had four children, and was a teacher in Saskatoon. Gerhard and his wife Ilse visited Germany every few years, and in fact were there just months before Krueger immigrated. Ilse was terminally ill and they wanted to visit her family and friends for her last time. Gerhard and Tin corresponded about their planned visit but then he died suddenly of a heart attack in November, 1976, ten days after Ilse’s death. All of these absences and deaths pervade the memoir. Krueger sought to knit her dispersed family together through her memoir, back from the fragmentation and loss.

The memoir has a somewhat unconventional structure. It does not begin with her birth, but rather with the German invasion of Western Ukraine in 1941. *Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen* is a story of Krueger’s trauma. She starts the memoir with what is surely one of her most traumatic life events. When her husband was violently removed from her life, a normal life course of marriage and having children was denied her. Her true *Schicksal*, or fate, is what follows—years in the gulag, and years afterwards of severe discrimination. This was a fate which she could never have foreseen.

About halfway through the memoir, Krueger goes further back in time to give brief accounts of her parents and siblings. Understanding

her family helps the reader to appreciate other dimensions of her war time and post-war trauma: her family was strewn all over Asia, Europe and North America, never to be reunited. The memoir begins with the loss of her husband, and ends with the dashed hope that she will see her brother Gerhard again. She added this loss to the other tragedies that were such a feature of her life. "Of my siblings, four were still alive [when she immigrated to Germany]. But they lived very far away from me. ... [T]hey were all dragged into the hinterlands during the war."<sup>21</sup>

In the Soviet Union, Krueger would have been unable to publish her memoirs as authors risked sentences of exile or imprisonment for the offense of "slandering the Soviet system."<sup>22</sup> But she may have been planning her memoir during her years of trauma, preserving what records she could. Memoirs and autobiographies from the former Soviet hemisphere have proliferated in the perestroika era.<sup>23</sup> *Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen* shares many of the characteristics of the testimonies in the collection, *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag* by women imprisoned, sent to labour camps or exiled during the Soviet era. Like these authors, Krueger had many reasons for writing. Deprived of her son and the brother she hoped to connect with after decades apart, she had to pass along her knowledge through her writing. Her memoir is an incredible gift to her relatives in Canada—Gerhard's children and grandchildren—who knew almost nothing of their family history. In the attention paid in the memoir to the fate of the people, mainly other women, who shared her experiences of the gulags, Krueger likely wrote out of a sense of obligation, speaking for those who never returned. As translator John Crowfoot wrote in the Afterword to *Till My Tale is Told* women authors of gulag memoirs were "[o]ften deprived of families themselves [and felt] a compelling duty to pass on to others the unique and terrible knowledge that their generations possess: that 'these things did happen'—and thus could happen again."<sup>24</sup> For the women authors of gulag memoirs, the will to record and write was compounded by an officially enforced collective amnesia following their release that continued to deny and ignore the individual and collective trauma suffered by millions. Like these authors, Krueger showed great compassion for those who shared her gulag experience, and for the family and friends left behind. Her memoir is "an assertion of human values in the face of an impersonal system of numbing scale and barely credible humanity."<sup>25</sup> Yet for Krueger, the persecution did not end after she left the gulag.

Despite her own eventual distance from her Mennonite identity, Krueger's memoir should be situated within the context of Mennonite women's writing. Recent memoirs include those by Justina Neufeld, Mariechen Harder and Ann Dyck, ordinary Mennonite girls born to lives of comfort and security who grew up to experience war, revolu-

tion, famine, destitution, turmoil and pain.<sup>26</sup> Marlene Epp has provided the most comprehensive analysis of the memoirs and testimonies of Mennonite women, and Krueger's departs in significant ways. *Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen* does not exemplify the "social memory" or "collective plot," a framework of meaning for the Mennonite community, that historian Marlene Epp found in other women's narratives.<sup>27</sup> Krueger's narrative is not shaped by biblical images of the "exodus" or a firm belief in the guiding hand of God.

Nor did we find obvious evidence of a central theme identified by Epp, that the strategies, decisions and interpretations of situations of the women in her study were influenced, even determined, by ethnicity and by Mennonite heritage. There is almost nothing about religion and Mennonite identity in the memoir following the descriptions of her childhood. She primarily identified herself as German, and wrote of her German and not her Mennonite heritage. This could be for many reasons. She told Sarah and Walter in 1981 that no one could witness what she had and continue to believe in a God. It was also the case that the Stalin regime sought to eliminate the Russian German minorities not only through deportation and forced labour but through other repressive policies aimed at eliminating their language, religion, education system and media.

But the experiences Krueger details in the memoir share characteristics identified by Epp, in particular the absence of men and the striking disturbance of traditional family life. The death and disappearance of adult males is a startling feature of Krueger's narrative. It is overwhelmingly the story of how she and other single women, often also widows and heads of families, survived the war and then the gulags, detailing their strategies for survival under the weight of their burdens and responsibilities. Epp found that "each woman acted and thought about her gender in ways unique to herself. Some women responded to their situations with bravery, strength, and spirit; others were resigned, selfish or bitter."<sup>28</sup> Krueger's is more a story of independence and strength, rather than resignation or embitterment: "Some people, who weren't even old, could have persevered, but they had no more hope for the future and gave up. ... Whether I would have fared better in their position, I will leave open. Only one thought guided me: to care for the child; and that gave me, like all other mothers, sometimes superhuman strength to persevere."<sup>29</sup> In 1981 conversations with Sarah and Walter she expressed bitterness only toward the Soviets; she always insisted she loved Russia and the Russian people.

Krueger wrote her memoir from a tiny apartment in Heidelberg, where she lived among a community of elderly Mennonites, some distant relatives, and some close. She was eventually joined by her sister Lena. She was surrounded by the tragedy and pain of those who

had suffered like her. But in Germany they did not find the welcome and friendliness they might have hoped for. As her brother Gerhard wrote to her: "It is tragic, that one can't feel at home in the land of our forefathers. ... Instead of the friendship and charity that was cultivated in our towns in Russia, one finds here, especially on the part of the well-off, heartlessness and egotism."<sup>30</sup> During Sarah and Walter's 1981 visit Tin spoke about how the Germans made the elderly people in her building feel like outsiders, welfare cases and a drain on resources. She was criticized for having luxuries like a TV (she loved the news, particularly news that was not propaganda, that was not censored and edited).

### Final Thoughts

*Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen* awaits deeper and more complex analysis and we hope this article might inspire such a study. Experts in memory and the autobiographical process for example, and scholars of Russian German/Mennonite history could better evaluate both what Krueger remembered and what she forgot or chose not to mention. Memory is not an archive or warehouse where the past is stored waiting to be retrieved and released or dictated onto the page.<sup>31</sup> Our modest goal has been to draw attention to the memoir, to place Krueger in the context of her time and place. In a letter sent just after Sarah and Walter's 1981 visit when we had listened to her talk about her life and memoir, Tin wrote to say that she was concerned that two young people from Canada born after the war would find it impossible to understand what she had lived. She was right; it remains difficult to comprehend. But through researching and writing this article, we now have a better understanding, and we also have begun to comprehend that thousands of Mennonites and other Russians suffered similar experiences, and many worse. We want to conclude with Tante Tin's words: "By no means do I want to say that of all people our family suffered the most. All the Germans in Russia who survived the war have similar fates and even worse. And not only them, but all peoples, who have been overrun and swept along by war."<sup>32</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Katharina Krueger, *Schicksal einer Russlanddeutschen. Erlebnisbericht* (Goettingen: Verlag Graphikum, 1991).
- <sup>2</sup> Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

- <sup>3</sup> *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/O753.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> As an anonymous assessor of this article pointed out, teachers were expected to follow an atheistic Soviet education curriculum and relay Leninist thoughts in their classrooms, and in order to get a high school and university education it was necessary in the Soviet Union to approve or accept the regime and policies such as collectivization. We could not find mention in the memoir of Krueger and her husband having to publicly approve or accept the regime, but that does not mean they did not have to; there are many silences in the memoir. If they did show such support it did very little good as they were both sent to labour camps. On the topic of Mennonites who worked for the regime see Colin P. Neufeldt, "Through the Fires of Hell: The Dekulakization and Collectivization of the Soviet Mennonite Community, 1928–1933," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 9–32.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Anne Applebaum, *The Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003): 426-7.
- <sup>6</sup> Epp, *Women Without Men*, 42-3.
- <sup>7</sup> Krueger, *Schicksal*, 40. The translations from the original German are by Mary Hildebrandt.
- <sup>8</sup> Applebaum, *The Gulag*, xvi-xvii.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 573.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.
- <sup>11</sup> Krueger, *Schicksal*, 112.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>19</sup> Epp, *Women Without Men*, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Krueger, *Schicksal*, 188.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.
- <sup>22</sup> Simeon Vilensky, ed., *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), ix.
- <sup>23</sup> Jens Brockmeier, "After the Archive: Remapping Memory," *Culture and Psychology* 16, no. 5 (2010): 11, <http://cap.sagepub.com/content/16/1/5>.
- <sup>24</sup> Vilensky, *Till My Tale is Told*, 336.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Edith Elisabeth Friesen, *Journey Into Freedom: One Family's Real-Life Drama* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2003); Justina D. Neufeld, *A Family Torn Apart* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003); John A. Harder, ed., *From Kleefeld with Love* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003); Janice Dick, *Eye of the Storm* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2003).
- <sup>27</sup> Epp, *Women Without Men*, 14.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>29</sup> Krueger, *Schicksal*, 75.
- <sup>30</sup> Gerhard Hildebrandt's letter is quoted in Krueger, *Schicksal*, 106.
- <sup>31</sup> Brockmeier, "After the Archive."
- <sup>32</sup> Krueger, *Schicksal*, 161.