

1 Childhood and Youth

I was born in Chefoo in the Chinese province of Shantung on August 8, 1897 and baptized there in the Anglican church. My father, Nicholas Edwin Poppe (1870-1913), was secretary of the Imperial Russian consulate in Tientsin. He had graduated from the Oriental Department of St. Petersburg University where he had studied the Chinese, Manchu, and Mongolian languages and various other Oriental subjects including East Asian history. He was the son of a tailor, Gottfried Maximilian Poppe, and the latter's wife, Maria née Tromberg, of Estonian extraction. His father, although a simple man, understood the importance of education, and all three of his children graduated from high school and later studied at the university. My father's brother Vasilii graduated from the Law School of St. Petersburg University and later became a lawyer, and his sister Maria graduated from the women's university (Vysshie Zhenskie Kursy) in St. Petersburg—at that time there were no co-educational universities in Russia—and became a teacher.

My mother, Elisabeth (Elizaveta), 1878-1955 (Illus. 1), was the daughter of Ferdinand Karl Joseph Morawitz (1827-1896), a well-known entomologist and vice-president of the Imperial Russian Entomological Society, who also held the degree of medical doctor (Illus. 2). The Morawitz family deserves special attention. My maternal great-grandfather Ferdinand Joseph Kaspar Morawitz (1796-1844) migrated from Altenburg in Saxony to Russia during the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He was

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Illus. 1. Elisabeth Poppe, née Morawitz



Illus. 2. Ferdinand Karl Joseph Morawitz

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a blacksmith by profession and a skillful builder of coaches. As these were practically nonexistent in Russia at that time he managed to accumulate quite a fortune. Of his four sons there were, besides my grandfather Ferdinand, August, who was the curator of the entomological division of the Museum of Zoology of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences; Nicholas, professor of anatomy at Kiev University, and Alexander, who died when he was still a high school student. There was also a daughter, Amalia Maria Josepha, who married a Finlander, Frithiof H. Hultman. Her son was Oskar Fredrik Hultman (1862-1929) (Illus. 5) who became a well-known scholar of the Swedish language and professor at Helsinki University. Thus all immediate descendants of Ferdinand Joseph Kaspar Morawitz were scholars or parents of scholars.

My maternal grandmother, Wilhelmine Emilie Karoline née Boetz (1854-1919), was the daughter of a baker, Wilhelm Boetz (1819-1885), who had married Elisabeth Koenig. The Koenigs were a well-known family in old Russia. Elisabeth's parents were Johann Georg Koenig (1785-1856) (Illus. 3) and Gertrud Elisabeth Koenig, née Weber (Illus. 4) who migrated from Germany to Russia where he became a well-known sugar manufacturer and owned many sugarbeet plantations and factories. His family's fame was further enhanced by his grandson Alexander Koenig (1858-1940) (Illus. 6) who was the son of Leopold, brother of the above-mentioned Elisabeth, my maternal great-grandmother. This Alexander Koenig studied zoology, became a well-known and wealthy scholar who founded the Alexander Koenig Zoological Museum in Bonn, Germany which still exists (Illus. 7).

As grandson of the empire builder "Sugar Koenig" and son of the latter's eldest son and heir to old Koenig's enormous wealth, Alexander was in a position to finance his zoological expeditions to various countries and the construction of the museum, all this entirely with his own money. To explain more clearly the relationship between Alexander and myself, let it be said that he was the nephew of my maternal great-grandmother, or he was the first cousin of my maternal grandmother or cousin once removed of my mother. One of Johann Georg Koenig's sons, Emanuel, became a

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Illus. 3. Johan Georg Koenig



Illus. 4. Gertrud Elisabeth Koenig, née Weber

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Illus. 6. Alexander Koenig



Illus. 5. Oskar Fredrik Hultman

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first-rate painter, and some of his paintings were exhibited in art museums.

There is no doubt that the Koenig family was gifted. My mother, Elisabeth, was a talented woman. She knew many languages and spoke fluently not only Russian, German, French and English, but also Italian and Chinese. Later, when we spent our summers in Finland, she also learned to speak Finnish. She was a good painter, too, probably having inherited the talent from her great-uncle Emanuel, and I remember some of her paintings hanging in our apartment.

I do not remember anything of my early childhood in China. I have only a vague recollection of being in a large room with French windows. Outside the house large trees cast shadows and made the room rather dark. I was sitting on a chair, and somebody was playing with me and patting me. It was my amah's son. My amah's name was Mrs. Wang and I loved her dearly. She was my first language teacher for at that time I spoke only Chinese, even with my mother. As for my pranks I had a bad habit of running off and disappearing which caused no end of worry to my mother, the amah, and servants. Search parties would be organized, and sometimes it took several hours before they would find me at the market or near some temple, conversing with the Chinese and often calling them, to their delight, various names I had picked up from our servants.

In 1900 we were in Tientsin during the Boxer uprising, and my mother and I as well as the dependents of all the other employees of foreign consulates were besieged in the British municipal building called the Gordon Hall (Illus. 8). We were sitting in a basement behind chests and sacks, while the rebels tried to get in, probably with the intent to massacre us. That event left its mark on my young impressionable mind, because throughout my life I have suffered from a recurrent nightmare in which I am sitting in a dark room while somebody dangerous is trying to get in and harm me. Fortunately the joint allied expeditionary force lifted the siege and liberated us. Because of the chaotic conditions prevailing after the Boxer uprising, my father decided in 1901 to send my mother and me to St. Petersburg. We went first to Port Arthur by train where we

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Illus. 7. The Koenig Museum in Bonn



Illus. 8. Gordon Hall in Tientsin

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boarded a coastal steamer bound for Japan. The ship's departure was delayed by a storm, and we had to wait a few days. One day we went to some friends' house where a birthday party for their daughter was to take place. During the celebration, quite unexpectedly, their otherwise very friendly dog became aggressive and bit one of the children. It was evident that the dog was rabid, and I still remember the ensuing pandemonium. The child attacked by the dog went on with us to Japan since that was the nearest country where anti-rabies shots could be had. There the child underwent medical treatment and returned home. After transferring to an ocean-going ship in Nagasaki, I embarked on my first long voyage, traveling through the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean and Black Seas to Odessa. Whereas my mother suffered from seasickness most of the trip, I did not feel any ill effects. On the contrary, as my mother told me some years later, I took advantage of being left alone and amused myself by throwing various objects, such as toothbrushes, combs, and slippers through the porthole into the stormy ocean. The last leg of our journey was by train across Russia north to St. Petersburg.

In St. Petersburg we moved in with my maternal grandmother, Wilhelmine Emilie Karoline Morawitz, who was still living in the house which had belonged to her late husband. He had died in December 1896, less than a year before my birth. The house was located at 33 Voznesenskii (Ascension) Prospekt, near the Ascension Cathedral. I had a hard time adjusting to life in St. Petersburg. I missed my amah, her two sons, and the Chinese in general. St. Petersburg was quite different from Chinese cities, and the climate was atrocious. I spoke only Chinese, now a useless language, even when conversing with my mother, but I soon learned Russian. However, I never felt quite at home in St. Petersburg and, strange as this may sound, I always wanted to leave the city and move to another country. This is probably why later I decided to study Oriental languages and go as a consular employee to China or some other East Asian country. Although I believed for some time that this was my most ardent desire, the real thing which I subconsciously wanted was, as we shall see later, to be a scholar.

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Illus. 9. The Author at the Age of Four.

In 1902, after my mother and I had lived in St. Petersburg for about a year, my father returned from China to spend more than a year with us while assigned to the Foreign Office. I was put in care of a German governess from Latvia named Christine Ozol. She taught me German and soon I became fairly fluent in that language. On August 6, 1903 my sister Elisabeth (Elizaveta Nikolaevna) was born. Almost immediately after her birth my father had to return to China to assume his new post of consul in Tsitsihar in Heilungkiang province. We followed him a short time later. We traveled from St.

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Petersburg to Moscow and there boarded a train of the Trans-Siberian Railroad which had only been opened to traffic a short time before. When we took it, the train went only as far as the western shore of Lake Baikal. Steep mountains, descending straight into the lake, delayed the construction of a rail line around the lake for several years. When the project was eventually completed, it included more than fifty tunnels of various lengths. We stayed for several days in Irkutsk, some forty miles west of Lake Baikal. Irkutsk, the major city in that part of Siberia then as it is now, commanded my youthful attention from the very start. I found it picturesque and rather different from St. Petersburg and Moscow. Most houses were built of wood, the streets were wide, and everywhere one could see spruce trees in the backyards. The hotel where we were staying was rather primitive; I remember that it had neither a toilet nor even an outhouse. When we inquired about a toilet, we were told matter-of-factly that there was none and that guests were to relieve themselves behind a shed in the hotel's backyard. I was glad that my initiation into this aspect of Siberian life did not take place during winter!

From Irkutsk we took a train to Lake Baikal and crossed the lake by steam ferry. The train was put on that ferry without a locomotive and brought to the other shore where another locomotive was waiting. From there we went via Chita and Manchouli to Tsitsihar. My father had prepared everything for our arrival, and the greatest surprise for my mother and me was that he had sent from China for my former amah, Mrs. Wang, to come and be my sister's amah. I could still speak some Chinese, but my vocabulary was, of course, that of a three-year-old child and therefore my conversations with the amah were very limited, and it proved absolutely impossible for me to have a real conversation with her.

Tsitsihar was a typical Chinese city, with narrow, winding streets and many temples.¹ The consulate was located outside the city in the steppe, in a large park of elms and surrounded by a wall made of adobe bricks. We had a detachment of Cossacks for our protection. These were the Ussuri Cossacks, so named after the river that forms part of the eastern frontier of Manchuria. They

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wore dark blue uniforms with yellow stripes on their trousers and matching yellow shoulder boards. They had a large number of handsome but ferocious Siberian dogs which they used as watchdogs because the steppe teemed with bandits, whom the local inhabitants called *hung hutz* (red beards). I remember those Cossacks very well, in particular the two I befriended, named Loginov and Portnyagin. The consulate was very near the Nonni, a very wide and mighty river. The area around the consulate was uninhabited but from time to time one could see Mongol caravans passing by. These caravans made a deep impression on me, and it is possible that my interest in Mongolian languages and folklore is partly due to the childhood sight of those Mongols traveling to and from remote places, leading their heavily laden camels.

There was a shed not far from the consulate grounds in which chicken feathers were stored, probably for export. One day when my mother and I were out for a walk, we passed that shed and saw that some beggars had camped out there. One of them, who was naked except for a mat made of burlap, ran out toward us, kowtowed and begged for money. We were so terrified by his appearance that my mother gave him far more than the usual amount beggars got, and we quickly retreated into our consulate park. The poverty of those wretched human beings was utterly terrifying. I have never seen anything like that again. In all my later travels I never saw beggars stark naked in the winter, in snow, and the temperature far below freezing. I imagine that many of them perished.

Another interesting recollection from those times is of the execution grounds not far from the consulate, where bandits and other criminals were put to death. Of course we did not attend any executions and had no intention of doing so, but from time to time on our walks in the consulate park we came across human bones brought in by dogs. I remember how on one occasion I discovered a skull lying under a bush.

The Cossacks were inveterate hunters and they often brought pheasants, hares and other game for our dinner. This, of course, excited me very much and I wanted to hunt also, so I constructed some snares and carefully placed them all over the consulate park.

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To my great surprise I always found a pheasant or a hare in my snares. What I did not know at the time was that the kindly Cossacks placed the animals in my snares to please me.

The consulate was housed in a large brick building. We had numerous servants who did all the chores around the house. The cook only bought food in the market and prepared our meals. He had two assistants, one to help him with his own tasks and the other to do the dishes. Another servant was in charge of splitting and sawing logs in the backyard, and yet another brought the firewood into the house and heated the stoves. One servant had as his sole duty the dusting and sweeping of the house. A boy served at the table. I don't remember how many servants we had but there were probably about twenty at any given time. We lived in a manner entirely comparable to that of other Europeans in Asia, like the British in India or the French in Indochina.

The city of Tsitsihar was, as I already said, a typical Chinese city. There were no Russians except for the consular employees, the Cossacks, soldiers and occasional travelers passing through. I therefore wonder why a consulate had been established at all; and this question also puzzled my father because he had hardly anything to do in the way of consular business. Months passed by and no Russian showed up to have his passport extended or to get bailed out of trouble with the Chinese authorities.

The soldiers mentioned represented a large Russian military unit, the 128th East Siberian Infantry Regiment, and the officers of that regiment often visited us, sometimes staying for dinner. I still remember a few names. The commander of the regiment was Colonel Andro-Ginglyat, who was of French descent. He was a well-educated man. Like most of the other officers who could not afford being officers in the better regiments of European Russia, and also because of his debts, he had ended up in that East Siberian infantry regiment. In fact, most of the officers had terrible debts which accumulated as a result of gambling losses.

When we arrived in Tsitsihar in 1903, it was autumn, but soon winter was upon us and the daytime temperature, usually close to minus twenty degrees Centigrade, would quite often plunge even

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lower. At Christmas time the officers, some of whom had their families living with them, arranged a children's party at their club complete with a Christmas tree. My only recollection of that memorable event was that I attended it with a splitting headache, one of many such headaches that I would have to endure often during my later life.

Our life in Tsitsihar came to an end sooner than we had expected. In February of the following year the war between Japan and Russia broke out, and the Japanese troops advanced so rapidly through Manchuria that it looked as if they would soon reach Tsitsihar. My father therefore made arrangements to send us back to Russia. Tsitsihar was not exactly on the railroad line but about ten miles from Khurkhira station on the Chinese Eastern Railroad. As it turned out, our return trip to Russia was rather uneventful. When we arrived at Lake Baikal it was frozen solid and the ferry did not operate. Instead, railroad tracks had been laid across the lake directly on the ice. Ties had been put on the ice, covered with snow and sprayed with water to freeze them solidly in place, and then individual railroad cars were pushed across the lake. The remainder of the trip back to St. Petersburg was slow because the Trans-Siberian Railroad was only a single track at that time, and since military trains crammed full of soldiers and supplies had the right-of-way, we had to spend much time waiting at train stations and on sidings.

I never saw my father again after we left Tsitsihar. The Russo-Japanese War, the revolution of 1905 in Russia, and his greatly expanded duties as a consul-general in Mukden and Harbin prevented my father from returning home. He died, or more exactly, he was murdered in 1913. He had always been very careless about his personal security and never locked doors or closed windows. One night in April 1913 while he was in his apartment in the consular building in Harbin, a burglar climbed through a window of his apartment. When my father heard something in the room next to his, he went to investigate and was fatally stabbed. His body was brought to St. Petersburg for burial in the Smolensk cemetery.

The greatest event in my youth came late in 1904 when a teacher began to come to our home several times a week to teach

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me the three R's. Lina Grigor'evna Chebulaeva was a student at the women's university. She was a good teacher and a nice person. At that time we spent our summers in Finland near the railroad station Raivola, about sixty kilometers from St. Petersburg, where we rented a summer cottage. Miss Chebulaeva stayed the entire summer with us and was sometimes visited by one of her male friends who I believe was her fiancé. His name was Aleksandr Fedorovich Shishmarev. He came two or three times that summer of 1904 and then disappeared. He was said to have been arrested by the Tsarist police because of some involvement in anti-government activities. He might have been a member of the Social Democratic or some other party which were all outlawed in Russia. Poor Miss Chebulaeva was very unhappy. Our German governess, Christine Ozol, had left because she married a Latvian officer in the Russian army by the name of Timmermans. Later she had several children and they lived somewhere in Latvia. Timmermans himself died before World War I and I do not recall what happened to his family.

My sister was a weak child who was frequently ill. My mother was unable to nurse her and therefore the physician recommended a wet nurse, Vasilisa Moiseevna Mikhailova, who hailed from the Novgorod region which is not far from St. Petersburg. Vasilisa was a very interesting woman. She knew many fairy tales and all kinds of ancient legends and was very superstitious. She believed in the evil eye and in evil words. She did not allow me, for instance, to pour water out of the window of our summer cottage because, as she put it, "That is a very bad sin because you pour water on your ancestors' heads whose spirits dwell here." She told stories such as one about a lake near her home village in Valdai uezd (county) where a creature lived which was part man and part horse—a kind of centaur. Each time someone was about to die in that village, the creature would come out and announce that person's name. Once Vasilisa's mother passed by the lake when the centaur suddenly emerged and shouted, "Martin, Martin, Martin." Three days later, Martin, the woman's neighbor, died. I regret very much that at that time I knew nothing about collecting folklore and folk beliefs, otherwise I would have

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collected all her tales about supernatural creatures. Vasilisa lived many years with our family and later became our cook.

Vasilisa's family was very poor. One day when my mother entered the kitchen she met Vasilisa's brother who promptly bowed low before her. My mother learned later that the brother came to visit Vasilisa because he was in dire financial straits. He needed ten rubles to pay the annual head tax for himself and his family, altogether five persons. Vasilisa gave her brother the money out of her savings, but had she been unable to do so, his only horse or cow would have probably been sold by the village head to satisfy his tax obligation. Still more revolting was the fact that while this poor peasant was obliged to pay income tax, we as a government official's family paid property taxes but no income tax, and the very rich paid no taxes of any kind. This was one aspect of the "good old days" in pre-revolutionary Russia.

The Russo-Japanese war was a complete disaster for Russia both on land and on the high seas. Much of it was due to almost unimaginable incompetence. As the Japanese armies advanced into Manchuria and the world press announced the names of town after town occupied by the victorious troops, Russian commanders could not even locate these towns on their own staff maps, let alone defeat the enemy. It turned out, as my mother told me later, that before the war Russian army topographers went across Manchuria and would ask the local inhabitants in Russian for the name of their villages and towns. The answer, naturally enough, was quite often "Putung" (I don't understand) which was then formally entered on the Russian staff maps. The result was "Putung I," "Putung II," and so on. The Russian fleet fared no better. It had no wireless and all signals between ships were relayed by flag signals. As the Russian fleet approached the Straits of Tsushima where the Japanese had been waiting, they had no trouble reading the messages and therefore knew every Russian maneuver beforehand. Moreover, the Russians did not yet have smokeless powder so that after the first few salvoes, the Russian naval gunners could no longer see their targets which, of course, were constantly changing their positions.

These failures were symptomatic of rot that had set in all the

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way to the top of the chain of command. For example, it was an open secret that while Russian soldiers were fighting in Manchuria wearing boots with cardboard soles, the ballerina Mathilda Kshesinskaya, the Tsar's mistress, had great influence on the Grand Prince Sergei who was one of the highest military officials. She persuaded him to place a large order for uniforms and footwear with a particular company. After the deal had been completed, the owners of that company presented Kshesinskaya with a very expensive diamond necklace.

The Russo-Japanese war demonstrated that Russia was backward and absolutely incapable of coping with modern problems. It was inevitable that the 1905 revolution broke out. I felt that revolution only indirectly, and I remember only one event of that time. While I was walking with my grandmother down the street, about one hundred yards from us some people suddenly threw a bomb into a coach. They were anarchists holding up an armored truck which was transporting money between two banks. The driver and one of the accompanying soldiers were either killed or badly wounded, and a large group of spectators had gathered around the demolished truck. I remember the police taking two or three men into custody, and these men were probably executed later. One result of the revolution was the establishment of a kind of parliament, called the Duma, which the Tsar granted to the people. The Duma turned out to be quite ineffective, however, because each time an important decision was to be taken, it was dissolved and new elections were held to elect other members who were more docile and agreeable to the Tsar's government. It is a pity that the results of the revolution of 1905 were so meager, otherwise the October revolution would have never occurred.

In 1907 when I was ten years old, I enrolled in a gymnasium, the Latin division of the Ecole des Eglises Réformées de St. Pétersbourg. It belonged to the Swiss, German, and Dutch Presbyterian churches in St. Petersburg. In Russia the Presbyterian church was called "Reformed Church." My school was for boys only. Later, in 1913, a girls' school was attached to it, but the two schools remained separate as there was no coeducational school anywhere in Russia at

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that time. The students were German, Swiss, French, Dutch, and a few English and several Finns as well as many Russians whose parents were anxious to have their sons learn German and French in which all subjects were taught. Only courses in Russian language, literature, and history were taught in Russian.

I suppose entering the gymnasium marked the end of my childhood, although it is impossible to say in what month of a particular year one ceases to be a child and becomes a youth. I am speaking here about the mental development of young human beings. I do not believe I am mistaken when I say that I was no longer a child at the age of twelve, for by that time I was no longer interested in toys such as tin soldiers, houses, trains, and boats. Instead, I began to prefer books. I was interested in other countries, other peoples, their histories and even their languages. I began to note the differences in speech of Finns and Russians living in different areas. I was only fourteen when I already knew that in Parikkala a special Finnish dialect was spoken, actually one of the subdialects on the border of the Savo and Karelian dialects. I knew that the words *mehtä* "forest," *tehas* "factory," *tahon* "I want," *kaho* "look," *moahaa* "into the earth," and others were regular correspondences of Literary Finnish *metsä*, *tehdas*, *tahdon*, *katso*, and *maahaan*, respectively. I, therefore, could easily transform dialectal forms into literary forms. Likewise, I noticed that our Russian servants from the villages of Novgorod province would say *kupivši* "bought" instead of Literary Russian *kuplen* or *ne xvataj rukam* "do not touch with your hands" instead of *rukami*.

I was also very fond of movie projectors and films, and the dream of my life was to have an outboard motor, an object that had just come on the market. In summer I was mostly busy with water sports. Finland has many lakes and rivers and also a long coastline stretching from the border of Sweden to the Russian frontier. I had, however, to wait several years before I could afford an outboard motor.

In 1911 I bought a movie projector with money I had saved. I also bought used films which had been discarded by movie theaters. Many of them were cultural films, featuring trips around the world.

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I remember one film was about Niagara Falls and Quebec City. Another showed the fountains of Versailles Park. At that time I had no idea that I would ever even be near those places later in my life. I also had films of comedies and even short dramas. One of them took place during the French revolution and was about a young revolutionary officer who freed an aristocrat whose daughter he loved. The officer was sent to the guillotine for disobeying orders. Another drama was a color film which certainly must have been hand-colored as color photography did not exist at the time. The film was called "The Love of a Slave Girl." It was a story about a young man in ancient Rome, son of rich parents, and his love for a slave girl. Unable to marry, the lovers, like Romeo and Juliet, took their own lives.

At that time I also liked animals and, in fact, I am still fond of them. I had rabbits and guinea pigs and green lizards, a turtle, a dog, a cat, a lamb, squirrels, and a hedgehog. I actually owned a small private zoo.

When I turned fourteen in 1911, I entered fifth grade in our school, the École des Églises Réformées. We had much Latin, six hours a week, and we had a full day of classes on Saturdays. As a result, in fifth grade I already knew that French *homme* had developed from Latin *hominem*, and French *cheval* was the same as Latin *caballus*. We had Greek seven hours a week, with two hours on Saturdays, as well as German, Russian, French, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, history, geography, art history, singing, and sports. School days lasted six hours, from nine to three, and discipline was severe.

We had a deep respect for our director, Arthur Brock, Master of Arts and former professor at the prestigious Nezhin Lyceum, who was our Latin teacher in the senior grades. We read Horace and Cicero with him and had to learn many passages by heart. I still remember Cicero's Phillippics against Catilina ("Quousque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?") and Horace's contempt for the ignorant crowd ("Odi vulgus profanum ethorreo!"), both of which are probably now banned from the high school curricula in the "people's democracies." Among our other teachers, a particularly good one

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was Erich von Voss who taught German and Greek in different grades. Our class had only Greek with him, reading the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and Plato. Voss was a philologist with a Ph.D. from Leipzig University. His doctoral dissertation had been on a Sanskrit subject. He was an excellent philologist and taught us philological methods. For example, we learned the art of precise translation with thorough analysis of each grammatical form occurring in the original text.

Another interesting teacher and an excellent scholar was Oskar Waldhauer, a specialist in ancient art. He was one of the part-time teachers at our school, his main occupation being the custodianship at the Hermitage Museum. He had a vast knowledge of Greek and Roman art and had assembled a huge card file on art objects preserved in various museums around the world and another file of those objects still in Greece, Rome and those countries which had been under Roman domination. After the revolution the Soviet secret police conducted a search of his house and discovered his card files. They took the cards with them and never returned them to him so he felt his life work was wasted. He became so frustrated that he started to drink and died of alcoholism. After the revolution, Director Brock, mentioned earlier, became professor of German literature at the Gertsen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. At the time of the Great Purge in 1937 he was arrested and exiled to Kazakhstan where he died very soon thereafter. It is one of fate's ironies that in 1927 he and his wife had received exit visas and had visited their son in Latvia. Instead of remaining there, they returned to Leningrad, not knowing what awaited them in Russia ten years later.

Whereas Brock, von Voss and Waldhauer were excellent teachers, some other members of our faculty were not. The mathematicians, for example, never explained anything. They simply called the best student to the blackboard and had him solve a theorem while the rest of us watched, not understanding how the boy solved the problem. As a result, many of us were rather poor at mathematics. As I was one of them, my mother hired a tutor, Andrei Ivanovich Gershun, who had graduated from our school and was now a student at the Institut Putei Soobshcheniya (Institute of

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Communications Engineering) in St. Petersburg. He was a nice man and excellent mathematician who explained everything to me that our teacher should have taught us to begin with.

The winter of 1911-1912 was very difficult for me. I was sick most of the time. First I caught the German measles. After that I had several bouts with the flu and missed so many classes that I could not catch up and had to remain in the same grade for the second year. I spent part of the next winter in a small Finnish town on the Vuoksi River called Antrea, about one hour by train from Viipuri (Viborg in Swedish). Antrea is now part of the Soviet Union, having been conquered during World War II. I recovered there very well and the following year I repeated fifth grade. My tutor continued to coach me in mathematics as well as in Greek and Latin. Going through fifth grade the second time around had its unexpected rewards, for I found my new classmates much more likable than those in my former class. I made many new friends and graduated with them in 1916. I will mention here only a few of them who were particularly close to me. One was Victor von Striedter, the son of the leader of the nobility in the Novgorod area. Victor's father was a high official in the office which managed the imperial court's affairs, something akin to an Imperial Household Agency. Another student was a certain Sergei Lipskii, a Russian and a very pleasant boy, who also was the best student in our class. A third friend was Georgii Prokofiev, the son of a famous painter, who later became a well-known scholar in the field of Samoyed linguistics and ethnography. Another good friend of mine was Dmitrii Wentzel who later became professor of mathematics at the Artillery Academy. I visited all of these friends often and they came to see me. Later we founded a kind of club where we discussed various historical, philosophical, and religious subjects. Occasionally we also invited our favorite teachers to participate in our discussions and afterwards we had parties with cookies, cakes, and snacks.

During summer vacations, which lasted from June 1 to September 1, my family at first went to Antrea, and after 1911 to Parikkala, a beautiful town on Lake Simpele in the eastern part of the country (Illus. 10). Its railroad station is now on the line

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between Lappeenranta and Savonlinna. We stayed in a fine villa which my mother first rented and later bought (Illus. 11). On my trip to Finland in 1976, I visited that area again and saw our former villa which we had sold after the revolution, through the Finnish consulate, to a friend of ours who lived in Finland. My summer vacations in Finland greatly influenced me because to a certain degree they formed my view and understanding of the surrounding world. I spoke Finnish so fluently that many people thought that I was Finnish and even related to my many Finnish friends. They could not distinguish the difference between their and my pronunciation. There in Parikkala I began my love affair with Finland and the Finns, and I still have a very high regard for the people and their beautiful land.

The part of Finland where Parikkala is located is called Southern Karelia and has been inhabited since ancient times. Before 1813 Parikkala was called Koitsanlahti and before that, Joukio. Joukio appears in old Russian documents of the Novgorodian period, to be exact, in the fourteenth century, where it is written "Evgija" which stands for Yowgia. The village of Joukio still exists near the present border between Finland and the Soviet Union.

Rural Finland was rather conservative in the years before World War I, and in Parikkala many old customs and superstitions were still alive. Thus when the old church was destroyed by fire, it was believed that the disaster had been foretold by the woodpeckers which always pecked at the outer walls of the church. A more likely explanation is that the wooden structure had been infested by dry rot and so its timbers housed insects which attracted the woodpeckers in the first place. People of both sexes still used the same sauna together, and one frequently saw both men and women run stark naked from the sauna to their houses or to the lake where they would plunge into the ice-cold waters.

Folksingers often came from other parts of Karelia. Once two men came to our house. They used an eastern Karelian dialect spoken in Russia, and one of them had a *kantele*, a stringed folk instrument. They straddled a bench, facing each other, and started to sing. Their song was from *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, and told how the epic's main character, Väinämöinen, built a boat.

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Illus. 10. Lake Simpele



Illus. 11. The Villa in Parikkala

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Their performance made a deep impression on me. After they had left, I asked my mother to get me a copy of the *Kalevala*. She presented me with one, and I read it with great fascination. No detective story or Wild West adventure yarn could have intrigued me as much. The visit of these two Karelian folksingers may have been a decisive factor in my life, because after that my interests turned to the history of the Finns and other Finno-Ugric peoples. I read Yrjö-Koskinen's *History of Finland*,² and later Castrén's description of his travels in Siberia and his ethnological lectures on the Altaic peoples.³ I decided to study the languages and folklore of the Finns and other peoples including the Mongols and Turks who Castrén regarded as being linguistically related.

Finland was a very clean country, whereas Russia was filthy and its villages were very unkempt. Finnish roads were excellent; in Russia they were hardly more than mud paths, impassable in spring and fall. In Finland there were telephones and telegraphs everywhere, and well-stocked stores, physicians and pharmacies were found in every *pitäjä*, i.e. township. For the Russians all this was absolutely unknown, and it was common to travel from a village to the nearest town, sometimes seventy or eighty kilometers away, on absolutely wretched roads in order to find a physician. The Finns were very industrious and honest, but Russians generally were not. In Russia when people started to work they often just leaned on their shovels, debating just how a particular job should be done. Besides, there was much theft in Russia. It was impossible to leave anything unguarded for even a moment. If, for instance, after entering a store one put his briefcase down, one could find it gone when ready to leave. In Finland I had a bicycle and I often rode it to the edge of the forest, parked it against a tree, entered the forest to pick mushrooms or berries, and came back after a few hours to find the bicycle still standing under the same tree. This would have been absolutely impossible in Russia. In Finland when we left our villa to take a walk in the fields or forest, we never locked our doors. The windows and doors were always open. Silverware, including real silver spoons and other valuables were left lying on our dining room table, and no one ever entered the house and stole anything.

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However, not all was well in Finland. In spite of an excellent climate and general cleanliness, tuberculosis was rampant. One cause was unpasteurized milk from tubercular cows. Another cause was unsanitary conditions in village homes. Their sealed double-paned windows could never be opened, causing the air inside to be heavily polluted with tobacco smoke and various household odors. I remember several young people who died of tuberculosis. Yrjö Loikkanen lost both his brother, Emil, and his younger sister, Helmi, to tuberculosis. Another victim was a certain Pekka Kanahentä, a strong and healthy boy, who caught tuberculosis and died in less than a year.

In Parikkala I made the acquaintance not only of youngsters my own age but also of some adults. I remember a certain man whose last name was Möltsi, who was an engineer at a sawmill which belonged to a Mr. Helenius. Möltsi was a Social Democrat and due to his influence I began to realize that some social democratic ideas were good and that they should be put into effect. This Möltsi may later have participated on the Red side during the civil war in Finland, and it is possible that he perished in it. Among my numerous young Finnish friends, my best friend was Yrjö (George in English) Loikkanen, whom I just mentioned. He was the son of a bricklayer and an intelligent and very nice boy who was slightly younger than I. Very often we went by motorboat—I already had an outboard motor—from island to island in Lake Simpele, and he taught me a great deal about Finnish living conditions. I knew many farmers and I often went to their homes so I knew them personally and became familiar with their way of life.

From my Finnish friends I learned about a resistance movement against Russian domination. Even as early as 1909-1910, when we were still vacationing in Antrea, there was an incident I remember very clearly. One day, while walking with my mother in a forest, I was walking ahead when at a distance I saw a group of men sitting and talking seriously to each other. As soon as one of them saw me approach, they all jumped up and disappeared in the underbrush. They were too well dressed to be vagabonds, so I surmised that they were workers or intellectuals engaged in some

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revolutionary activity. I also learned that in a particular place not far from Parikkala, the Finns had stashed away arms for use in a possible uprising against the Russians. This cache was hidden in a forest near Ojajärvi, a railroad station between Viipuri and Elisenvaara, which is now part of the territory annexed by the Soviet Union after the war against Finland in 1939-40. It is interesting to note that the Russian authorities never discovered the arms cache, and it is likely that these weapons were used later, in 1917-18, when the Finns were fighting their war of liberation against the Reds. Some of the inhabitants of Parikkala became later prominent freedom fighters against Russia. One of them was Yrjö Fagerlund, who was an excellent hunter and marksman and owned a big farm not far from our villa. Years later I read an article about him in the Finnish encyclopedia and instantly recognized his photograph.

Parikkala was not only a place greatly endowed with natural beauty, it was also an important cultural center. There was a co-educational high school, something that did not exist in any part of Russia, and important musicians and artists very often came to Parikkala. The musicians included the famous composers Oskar Merikanto (1868-1925) and Toivo Timoteus Kuula (1883-1918), and the latter's wife, the singer Alma Silventoinen (1884-1944). My mother knew many of these people and we often visited each other. The well-known Finnish philologist Onni Hannikainen, director of the Lycée in Kuopio, spent his summers at a place not far from our village. The son of the well-known writer Minna Canth lived in a beautiful house in Parikkala and also had a farm about three kilometers from our place. Thus I had the opportunity not only to relax in summer but also to get a very good knowledge of the Finnish country, people, and culture. By the time I was a teenager I already had a very good knowledge of Finnish literature, having read Juhani Aho, Alexis Kivi, Frans Eemil Sillanpää, Minna Canth and the works of other writers.⁴

Soon after the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajewo in June 1914, all the St. Petersburg newspapers started to carry frightening news of an imminent war, but in the weeks immediately before the outbreak of World War I, my

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family was not affected at all. I finished my school year and we went to Parikkala and a seemingly normal summer began for me. But soon it turned out to be neither a normal nor happy summer at all. In fact, it marked the end of the only period in my life when I was happy.

When the war began on August 1, the Finns were enthusiastic. The Finnish policeman at the railroad station Elisenvaara expressed the general feeling among the Finns by openly boasting to all passengers that now Russia would at last be thoroughly defeated. All Finns believed this, and the thought made them happy. The same sentiments were later expressed by Yrjö Fagerlund, the intelligent and educated rich landowner I mentioned above, so this sentiment must also have been common among Finnish intellectuals.

From its very beginning the war was disastrous for Russia, and this was a direct result of Russia's backwardness and unpreparedness. Both the military leadership and the general public were convinced that a world war could not last for more than three or four months. This opinion, however, was not shared by my paternal uncle Vasilii, the lawyer. He was convinced that the war would last seven years. His prophecy turned out to be correct; the world war and the subsequent civil war lasted exactly seven years. Unfortunately, Russia had weapons and ammunition for only a few months. It soon became clear that the war would not be over that quickly and without Allied help Russia would be unable to continue fighting Germany and the other Central Powers. American and British war supplies could not reach Russia because the Baltic Sea was controlled by German warships. The Black Sea was unusable because Turkey, one of the Central Powers, had closed the Dardanelles. The only access available to the West was from the White Sea and the Arctic Ocean in the north. Unfortunately, there was no railroad linking the only ice-free port, Murmansk, to the interior. The Russians, therefore, started to build the Murmansk Railroad which branched off from the trunk line between Petrograd, as St. Petersburg had been renamed, and Vologda.

The Finns were not drafted into the armed forces. Formerly, they had their own army but the Russians disbanded it in 1900,

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imposing a special tax on the Finns in lieu of conscription. In addition to this, the Finns, like many minority peoples in Russia, especially the Kirghiz, Kazakhs and Uzbeks, had to perform *corvée* in wartime. They pushed construction projects, such as the Murmansk Railroad, through swamps, lakes, and across rivers. Many workers perished from standing all day long in cold water which was always up to their knees and sometimes up to their chests. Many Finns who had returned from construction jobs told me that the mortality rate was particularly high among the Uzbeks, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Buryats and other people of Siberia and that at least 100,000 of them met their death in the subarctic swamps. This was the main cause of the general uprising in Russian Central Asia and Kazakhstan in 1916, an uprising never mentioned in the Russian press at that time and cruelly suppressed by the Tsarist government. In addition to the 100,000 deaths in the swamps in Northern Russia, at least 250,000 Turks were killed in Turkestan by punitive units of the Tsarist army. The 1,500 kilometer-long railroad had been built so quickly that by late 1915 or early 1916 it started operating and began to carry the much needed war supplies shipped from Great Britain.

The opposition to the Russians was very strong in Finland. Workers, farmers, intellectuals, and businessmen were united in their desire to see their country freed from Russian domination. No sooner did the war begin than young men in Finland started to "disappear." First, one of the neighbors' sons stopped showing up at our house, then another young man disappeared from our village, and eventually we learned that they had gone across the border to Sweden, Denmark and finally to Germany, where they joined the German army in order to fight against the Russians. Very soon a Finnish division was formed. At the same time Pilsudsky, the future leader of independent Poland, was organizing Polish regiments to fight under the German army against Russia.

As for the events at the front, it should be said that by the summer of 1916 the German army occupied all of Russian Poland and a large portion of the Baltic area, including the city of Riga. In light of these stunning German victories, the Tsar's granting of

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independence to Poland was truly ridiculous. I still remember the speech made in the Duma by Chkheidze, a Social Democrat, who called the Tsar's generosity "mustard after dinner." It was clear that Russia was losing the war. Although the Allies were sending weapons and other supplies to Murmansk, everything was in short supply and by the middle of 1916 bread lines had even formed in larger cities. Actually, there was enough food in Russia, especially in the Volga, Kuban, and Western Siberian regions, but the railroads were disorganized and soon a shortage of railroad cars became noticeable as well. This shortage was caused by the fact that the railroads leading into Rumania were single-tracked so that as soon as a supply train arrived at the Rumanian front, it was unloaded and pushed off the track to make room for the next train. Before long enormous car cemeteries cropped up in different parts of Rumania.

We all knew that everything was in short supply at the front and that only every other soldier was armed with a rifle. When the soldiers were ordered to attack, half of the unit would stay behind to wait until some of their comrades would fall, leaving their rifles lying on the ground. The other half of the unit would then jump up, run out to collect those rifles and join the remaining troops at the command, "Forward, collect rifles, proceed!" The widespread shortages caused an immense number of casualties and, of course, many defeats. Another cause of defeat was the incompetence of the commanding generals. At the very beginning of the war, as the German army approached Paris, the Russians sent a large army under the command of General Samsonov and another under the command of General von Rennenkampf into East Prussia. Both armies perished there in the battle of Tannenberg, and an additional blow was that the Rennenkampf army had included the best Guards regiments. In spite of terrible losses, in 1916 the government continued to disseminate news that the situation was good. In that year's summer, one of the Petrograd newspapers carried the headline: "Great is the God of Russia," followed by a long article about the complete annihilation of the German fleet in Riga Bay. Many years later when I visited in Germany in 1973 my friend Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, the author of the well-known book *Against*

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Hitler and Stalin,⁵ showed me a copy of that newspaper which he had saved. He had lived near Riga at that time, and he assured me that no such battle ever took place—in fact, that no German fleet had ever entered Riga Bay. All that had actually happened was that a German minesweeper appeared at some distance in the bay, the shore batteries opened fire, and the minesweeper steamed away. Strik-Strikfeldt added that he felt very sad telling me the true story, because everything that happened later was partly the result of the incompetence and backwardness of the Russian system.

This kind of war propaganda was actually criminal because young men were enthusiastic from the very beginning of the war anyway, and many of them volunteered for military service. I remember a certain boy in our class named Nikolai Shmidt. Despite his German name, he was Russian, and in fact hated the Germans. He was one of those many young men who, duped by the government's criminal propaganda, believed in a quick and decisive victory over Germany. He left school to join the army because he was afraid that the war would be over before he could be graduated. As it turned out, he fought for several years in the war against Germany but was later killed during the civil war. Another example was the son of our director Brock. He volunteered and after a mere three months' training at an officer's school, he was sent to the front. Just as he disembarked from the troop train, a stray bullet struck him in the head and he was killed instantly. His life was wasted through the incompetence of the Russian military commanders who should never have allowed the train to come so close to the German lines.

It was not only young army volunteers who suffered, but many segments of the civilian population also were burdened. There were many people of German descent in Russia. Some of them were still German citizens, but many others were Russian subjects, and even their parents and grandparents had been Russian subjects. In Parikkala there was a baker of German descent. He and his wife had been born and raised in Finland and could not even speak German. However, they did not have any papers proving their Finnish citizenship. Therefore, the Russian authorities evicted them and

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exiled them to Siberia. Alexandra Boetz, my uncle's widow, and her daughters Alexandra and Lydia were banished to the Volga area. During this exile my aunt got breast cancer and died in a village where there was no doctor nor a hospital. Lydia, too, died in exile, very soon after her mother. After the revolution Alexandra returned to Leningrad where she studied and became a teacher. She died of tuberculosis in 1933.

All of the above-named were Russian subjects, and it is incomprehensible that they had been exiled simply because they had German names. One of my aunts, Maud Boetz, had a brother who owned a saddle factory in Moscow. When the war began, his factory and office were demolished during an anti-German pogrom, even though he himself was not German. After this he could no longer manufacture saddles, which was ironic because he had manufactured most of the saddles used by the Russian cavalry.

The war also heightened the government's natural suspiciousness, and this resulted in the rapid growth of the secret police. Alexander Boetz, another cousin, was in Arkhangelsk during the war. One day he and a friend were walking in the street. They were conversing animatedly and even laughed a few times, when suddenly they were arrested by the police who claimed they were laughing because the Germans had just won a battle! Both of them were exiled to Siberia, and they did not return until after the war was over. I met Alexander's daughter again in Stuttgart in the 1970s, and she told me many details of the hardships her parents suffered. My paternal uncle, Vasili, was a lawyer with the *Crédit Lyonnais* Bank as well as some other firms. During the war one of these companies ordered a huge dredge from Sweden, and the Swedish firm delayed its delivery. The dredge was urgently needed for the construction of the Murmansk Railroad, as no dredges were made in Russia and were very scarce. My uncle sent a telegram to Sweden with the anxious question: "When will dredge arrive?" He was promptly arrested, only to spend months in jail waiting for a trial which was never held. An investigation revealed that the secret police had suspected "dredge" was the name of a German agent whom my uncle was expecting. My uncle was eventually released from jail, but he quit

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working for the company and vowed never again to have anything to do with firms that ordered machinery from other countries. All these cases are from my personal environment and my immediate family. It is, of course, shameful that the Russian government should have committed such blunders, which damaged their own war efforts, and even crimes against humanity.

In this connection I should mention that many Russian citizens of German descent were loyal subjects of the Tsar who fought at the front like everyone else. Moreover, during the entire war not a single case of treason among Russian citizens of German origin was known, whereas the most sensational case of German espionage involved an ethnic Russian on the Russian General Staff, Colonel Myasoedov. This Myasoedov frequently visited the defense minister's wife, Mrs. Sukhomlinova, and stole papers lying on her husband's desk to be photographed and sent to the Germans.

It is unfortunate but true, as I was to learn later in life, that even countries I admired for their democratic institutions could commit crimes against their own citizens that were no different from the crimes of the Tsarist government. For instance, during the second world war the United States forced many of its citizens of Japanese descent into detention camps. These Americans were deprived of their farms and other worldly goods, and most never got their farms back again. It did not matter at all that these hapless victims had, of course, nothing to do with Pearl Harbor or any other action of the militaristic clique of Japan. I have come to the sad conclusion that under certain circumstances it matters little whether a country calls itself a democracy, like the United States, or an absolute monarchy, like Tsarist Russia. Any country has the potential to become oppressive under similar circumstances; certainly in this case the United States and Tsarist Russia behaved exactly alike.

In the spring of 1916 I graduated from high school and received my diploma with a silver medal. This award was only on paper, and the medal was never handed out. At that time I was interested in linguistics and folklore, especially that of the Finno-Ugric peoples, such as the Finns, Estonians, and Mordvinians.

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However, since my early childhood I had also been reading books on the Altaic peoples of Siberia and I now wanted to study subjects dealing with them. Of course, we were uncertain as to what kind of job might be obtained after studying such subjects, because in Russia well-paid academic positions were difficult to come by. This was one reason why I was persuaded by my mother and aunt to study natural sciences and medicine and follow the path of my maternal grandfather and my granduncle, Alexander Koenig. In any event, my relatives were dead set against Oriental languages or anything connected with East Asia after my father had been murdered in Harbin. The Boxer Revolt and the unhappy war with Japan had reinforced their antipathy to East Asia. And so I enrolled at the medical school of Petrograd University which had only been opened at the beginning of the war. Together with my friend Victor von Striedter, who was later to become a medical research scholar, I set out to become a doctor of medicine.