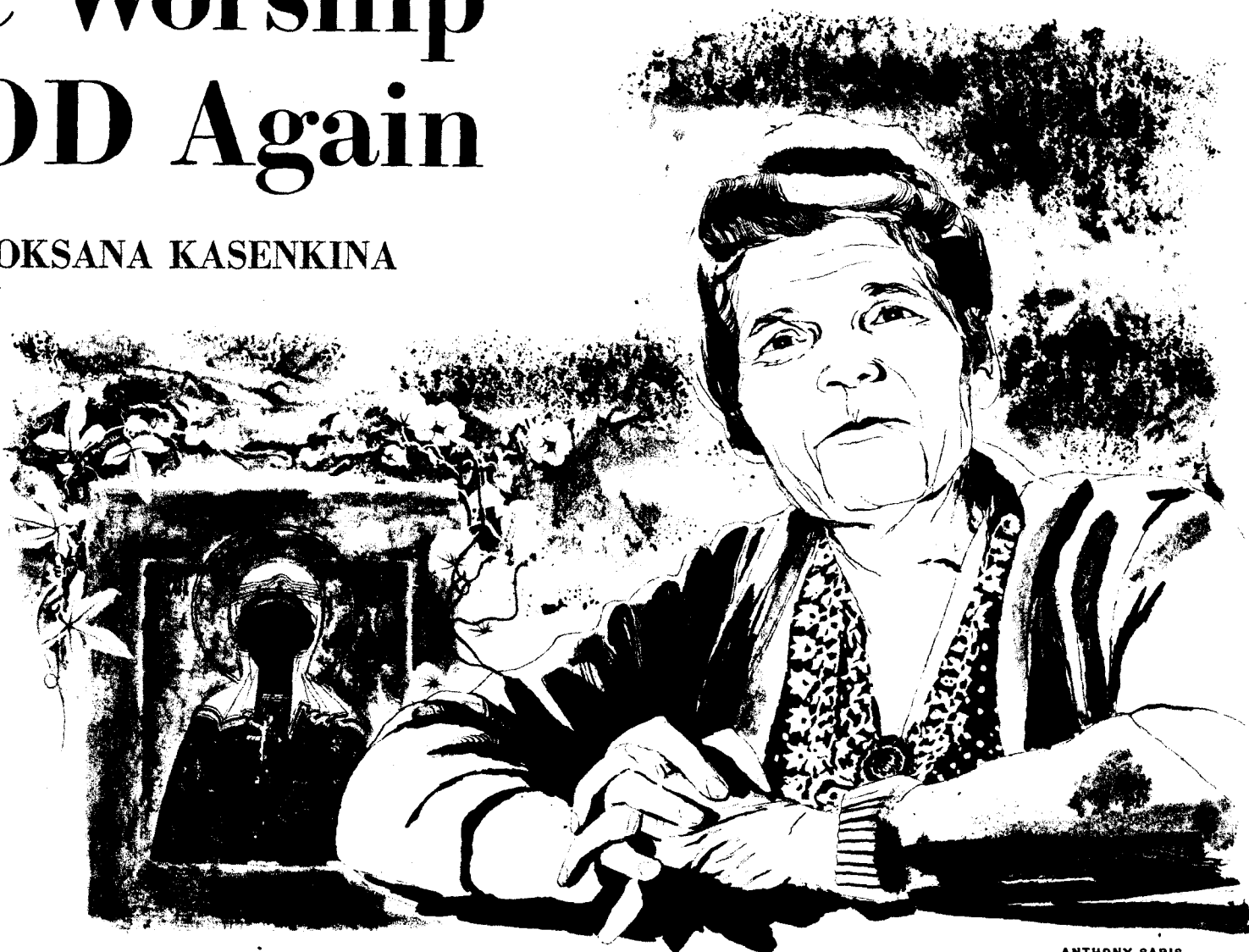


We Worship GOD Again

By OKSANA KASENKINA



ANTHONY SARIS

Slavyansk, Ukraine, 1960

IT WAS the summer of 1948. I was looking out from a third-floor window into the courtyard of the Soviet Consulate in New York. Far below me was a telephone cable. I climbed onto the ledge. Behind me was a life of fear, hunger, cold and brutality. I whispered the prayer my mother had taught me. Then I leaped to freedom.

Millions of women in my homeland would have taken the same opportunity, but they had to wait until Stalin destroyed himself and his whole regime in the war which ended in 1955. I was one of the lucky ones, for I had the chance to escape.

I never intended to return to Russia—at least as long as it remained Stalin's dungeon. But today, with Russia free and unfettered, it is the duty of Russians like myself to aid in its reconstruction. Thus it was that I journeyed here to my father's house three months ago. It was the first time in 15 years I had seen my homeland.

Everybody is hopeful about this New Russia of 1960. It would be wrong, of course, to say that all the women of Russia are happy; they are not. Their menfolk are gone. Indeed, there are few families who have not lost a father, a son, or some other loved one. Yet the freedom which women are enjoying here now, after 38 years of terror under the Reds, is in itself a great compensation.

This may be difficult for the women of the Western World to understand, but it is a fact nevertheless. For example, under Stalin every five families had one MVD (secret police) agent watching them. One's every move was watched. People were afraid to talk to one another. The atmosphere, whether it was in a big city or a small village, was always tense and cautious. Neighbors suspected one another of being informers. For every day somebody would be arrested, to disappear into the unknown.

I remember many of my friends being taken away by the MVD and then being sent to Siberia

for no other reason than they had commented unfavorably on some facet of the regime. Very few of them returned.

Indeed, this terror which gripped the Soviet Union can best be understood if one remembers that one tenth of the entire population of 212,000,000 was sent to labor camps—in the frozen wastes of Siberia or elsewhere. The very existence of these concentration camps—for that is what they were—provided the MVD with the greatest psychological weapon of fear the world has ever known. And the long arm of the MVD reached outside the borders of the Soviet Union, too.

A few months after my escape, I received a letter. Inside the envelope was a single sheet of paper heavily bordered in black. In the center of the page there was one sentence: "Your blood will be exterminated in the Soviet Union." I am still searching for my relatives.

When I returned here, I found my father's comfortable five-room house desolate and deserted. The big terraces surrounding the building were nearly hidden by the wild rose bushes growing untended in profusion everywhere. For a long time I stood looking at the house and the grounds. Memories came flooding back . . . my son, Oleg, born without a doctor or midwife and being christened by a priest who came out of hiding to perform the christening ceremony . . . the government reported Oleg missing in action in World War II . . . my daughter Sylva dying from starvation during the terrible famine of the collectivization years . . . the arrest and disappearance of my beloved husband, Demyan. As I looked at the place, the artesian well in the overgrown garden sprinkled quietly as though shedding tears of sympathy with me for the bitter memories which came back at that moment.

Inside the house I found a cruel reminder of Stalin's police state. After World War II, when I

returned here, I discovered that the Gestapo had used one room for interrogation purposes. I found blood spattered waist-high on the walls. During World War III, this room was used once again as a torture chamber—this time by the MVD. Even today I still wonder how many innocent Russian people passed through the hands of Stalin's gangsters—in this house which once knew such happiness.

One of the first things I did was to take the family icon in its protective mahogany frame and restore it to its former place in that room. Occasionally now, as the sun shines onto the spotlessly white walls, it seems to stop for a moment to pick out the image.

Every home in Russia has its icon today, and there is a great spiritual reawakening throughout the land. Most of these holy paintings were hidden for years, for religion under Stalin was merely a political instrument. But in Russia today, the people are enjoying glorious freedom of religion—as they are enjoying other precious things of the West.

We are rebuilding our town, and the Slavyansk festival has returned. All sorts of goods are on sale; cattle is on exhibition, and there are countless tents and wagons—the whole a great colorful fair with gypsies and everybody wearing their best clothes.

But there is no real happiness here, only a grim gaiety; for the Russian people are still in a state of shock. There is, however, great relief—one can feel it all over Russia—for the people no longer live in terror of anything or anybody. Today the words of Lincoln, "of the people, by the people and for the people," apply to the people of Russia as never before. Under Stalin it was "of the state, by the state, for the state." The "people" did not enter into this warped credo, for there was one great flaw in Stalin's thinking: he did not like the Russian people.

THE END

Women of Russia

By MARGUERITE HIGGINS

Moscow, 1960

WE BUMPED through the crowded, bustling streets of Moscow, past the fine new buildings sprouting everywhere out of the jagged ruins, past the jungle of debris that was once the Kremlin and then the city was behind us. Suddenly Marina Kupryanova's tough peasant fingers gripped my arm. I had found this frail old woman 50 miles from Moscow vainly searching hospitals and registration centers for her youngest and last son. Now I was driving her home.

She motioned to stop the jeep. Turning, she took a long look at the strange sky line that will one day be a new dignified Moscow again, and said: "Moscow was the beginning and the end and now it is the beginning again."

My Russian is still poor and halting. I could just barely understand Marina, but I certainly shared her sense of unreality. I had seen Moscow at the close of the war in 1955 and my last impression had been one of decay and unredeemable chaos. Now it is hard to believe that so much has been accomplished in five short years of peace. Truly it is the beginning again not only for Moscow but for the whole of Russia.

My meeting with Marina Kupryanova was lucky both from a journalistic and a human point of view. She is one of those rare persons who can

answer questions in a colorful and compact manner. Such a gift is a godsend to a journalist like myself who is fighting a daily newspaper deadline, but she has proved to be much more than a speedy source of information. This tough, amazingly resilient old woman is symbolic, to me at least, of the Russian ordeal of the last 43 years.

Marina was born a peasant, saw her husband, a revolutionary, killed by the White armies. She worked in the fields as a laborer, raised a family of five sons, and survived World Wars II and III. Two of her sons died in World War II. Another was killed, along with his wife, by a direct hit on a factory in the Moscow area—in 1953. The black sheep of the family—an MVD (secret police) man—was literally torn to pieces by his own people during the uprising in Moscow a few months before the end of the war. The fifth and youngest son is still missing.

Today, Marina, like millions of other Russian women—young and old—is alone, for this is a nation terribly shorn of men. She lives now with a hundred other refugees in one of the immense rooms of the huge palace which long ago belonged to the Sheremyetev counts in the village of Kuskovo, about six miles from Moscow. Bunks of crude splintery wood are stacked four-high around

the big rectangle; smoke from a dilapidated stove clouds the room; its acrid aroma cannot smother the smell of so many unwashed human beings living in such proximity, but it is home to Marina, for she was born there, the daughter of a coachman, 73 years ago.

After the 1917 Revolution, the Soviets carefully preserved the palace and its priceless contents of tapestries, carpets, chandeliers and *objets d'art*, along with the lakes, parks and magnificent statuary throughout the grounds, to show the Russian people how exorbitantly the nobles of the czarist regime lived. Red placards told how this fantastic private habitat was supported by the labor of 200,000 serfs. And everywhere in Kuskovo, the visitors were greeted during Stalin's regime with the slogan: "It is the Soviets who have saved you from serfdom." Marina has an answer to that in the form of a proverb I have heard many times throughout liberated Russia: "The czars held us with chains of gold; the Soviets with chains of steel."

As we drove on toward the suburb of Kuskovo, Marina's home, my mind went back to those terrible days of 1955 when the city, without leadership of any kind other than mob rule, lay choked with rubble and death, pervaded (Continued on page 80)

Fashion-starved Moscow women jammed huge Dynamo Stadium for their first style show—even though only a handful could see stage clearly

WALTER RICHARDS

