

LEARNING TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES:

MISCOMMUNICATION AND COMPETING NOTIONS OF VICTIMHOOD IN PRIVATE GULAG CORRESPONDENCE

An NCEEER Working Paper by

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Executive Summary

Anyone who has read classic eyewitness accounts of life in Stalin's gulag by authors such as Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and Ginzburg, will find the letters that inmates sent home to family members quite revealing. From an inmate's desperate request for a package of homemade dried rusks, references to swollen legs and bleeding gums, despair at a possible transfer to a new camp outpost, and half-hearted reassurances that assignment to a general labor detail really isn't so bad, we can quickly piece together a familiar landscape of horror and hopelessness: the information inmates manage to provide confirms what we already know; we understand them as inhabitants of a special kind of hell that exists entirely separately from ordinary Soviet experience.

It seems worth asking, however, how the original recipients of these letters understood them. Did ordinary Soviet citizens with little prior knowledge of the Stalinist penal system manage to piece together a reasonably accurate picture of conditions in the camps from the elliptical and often contradictory communications that they received from imprisoned relatives? How did they imagine that their own often dire material and personal circumstances, shaped by collectivization, forced industrialization, and war, compared to the experience of labor camp and prison inmates? Did they believe the imprisoned always faced more hardships and sufferings than other family members?

Because the surprisingly large corpus of Stalin-era gulag correspondence that has survived to the present day includes, in addition to letters prisoners mailed out of the camps, communications sent in to inmates by relatives and, in some cases, entire two-sided exchanges, we can arrive at least a partial answer to these questions. We can track not only what prisoners said but also how their relatives replied, and these responses provide important clues to how the labor camp system was regarded from the outside.

Learning to Read between the Lines: Miscommunication and Competing Notions of Victimhood in Private Gulag Correspondence

“Nina had been amazed that while in camp I would ask her to send lipstick, as much as she could, of any color. One time she had answered my requests with a mean letter about how at my age and in my circumstances it was time I stopped worrying about lipstick. She now clutched her head as I told her how I had been so vitamin deficient at age forty they were already calling me granny. For a single lipstick women criminal offenders would trade a large piece of black bread. Obviously at the time I couldn’t have written that in letters screened by camp censors.”¹

Ada Federolf, *Alongside Alya*

“It was probably 1948 or 1949.... I got a package, and in it there were sunflower seeds and this kind of mass they had made out of sunflower seeds. They wrote: “We’re sorry. We don’t have anything ourselves. We’ve sent what we could.”

The camp survivor Lidia Ivanovna Erastova, 2006 interview²

Although many of the best known accounts of life in Stalin-era labor camps and prisons depict Soviet penal institutions as almost entirely cut off from the world outside, in fact most prisoners theoretically enjoyed the right to correspond with close family members at least occasionally. As a rule, prisoners could neither send nor receive written communications while their cases were “under investigation,” but once they had received their sentences, they could begin corresponding with their loved ones.³

In practice, this meant that prisoners generally mailed their first letters home either from a transit prison or upon arrival at a permanent place of confinement rather than from the investigative prisons in which they were initially held. Rules regarding how often inmates could send and receive letters varied over time and from place to place. Often prisoners could receive an unlimited number of letters, telegrams and packages but theoretically faced restrictions on how frequently they could reply based on their sentences. A “provisional” instruction on daily operations in labor camps issued by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs in 1939 and

in force until 1947, for instance, divided prisoners into three categories based on the severity of their offences: those convicted of the most serious counter-revolutionary offenses (Trotskyism, treason...) could only send letters once every three months; those sentenced for less grave political offenses could mail letters home monthly; non-political offenders enjoyed unlimited correspondence privileges.⁴

In camps with a mixed inmate population, however, administrators struggled to maintain such differentiations: high turn-over among the population of inmates, overcrowding, and poor staffing in the camps made it difficult to keep prisoners and their documents together or to segregate the incarcerated according to their sentences as centrally issued instructions demanded.⁵ In many places, prisoners in restricted categories managed to send mail out through the official mail system far more frequently than rules allowed; inmates also often found opportunities to dispatch additional correspondence covertly through free laborers or through prisoners trusted to move around outside the camp without an armed guard. Some political offenders managed to send out hundreds of letters a year through a combination of legal and illegal channels.⁶

In the letters that they sent home even through legal channels, inmates often managed to convey a surprising amount of information. Censorship rules in place in labor camps theoretically barred prisoners from divulging any information about what had transpired during their initial interrogation, the location of the camp in which they were held, the work they were performing, camp regulations and procedures, unsatisfactory living conditions, epidemics, production accidents, punishments dispensed for disciplinary infractions, and also the names of both fellow prisoners and camp employees.⁷ As a result of the indifference, overwork, and poor qualifications of censors, however, these rules were rarely systematically enforced.

Although inmates were generally too afraid of again incurring the wrath of the authorities to describe the beatings they had suffered during interrogations or time spent in punishment cells even in illegal communications, they often, in both illicit correspondence and letters stamped by the official camp censorship office, provide fairly graphic testimony on other aspects of their daily lives. They describe the symptoms of nutritional deprivation, note that they think constantly of food, and beg desperately for their relatives to send basic groceries, warm clothing, and other supplies, including high-value goods such as tobacco and lip stick for use as “gifts” or for trade. They talk about the injuries that they have suffered at work, substandard medical care, the horrors of transport, the theft of their possessions, and their grueling schedules. They also note the geographic location of the camps in which they are held in fairly exact terms and provide the names of other prisoners. In some cases, they even try to set up meetings between their relatives and the families of other inmates held in the same camp.

Anyone who has read classic eyewitness accounts of life in Stalin’s gulag by authors such as Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and Ginzburg, will find the letters that inmates sent home to family members quite revealing. From an inmate’s desperate request for a package of homemade dried rusks, references to swollen legs and bleeding gums, despair at a possible transfer to a new camp outpost, and half-hearted reassurances that assignment to a general labor detail really isn’t so bad, we can quickly piece together a familiar landscape of horror and hopelessness: the information inmates manage to provide confirms what we already know; we understand them as inhabitants of a special kind of hell that exists entirely separately from ordinary Soviet experience.

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manage to piece together a reasonably accurate picture of conditions in the camps from the elliptical and often contradictory communications that they received from imprisoned relatives? How did they imagine that their own often dire material and personal circumstances, shaped by collectivization, forced industrialization, and war, compared to the experience of labor camp and prison inmates? Did they believe the imprisoned always faced more hardships and sufferings than other family members?

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This report analyzes three examples of inmate correspondence from the archive of the Moscow human rights society Memorial with an eye to understanding how both goods and information flowed between the scattered outposts of Stalin's vast gulag archipelago and the rest of Soviet territory. It also considers the role both official censorship and self-censorship may have played in helping to create and reinforce competing notions of victimhood, misconceptions, and feelings of alienation within the immediate families of gulag prisoners.

Because inmates and their relatives could not communicate frankly about their respective living conditions, they could not easily compare their circumstances. A desperate desire to continue to play familiar familial and gender roles, anxiety, and, in some cases, outright blindness guided their interactions with each other at least as often as reason and reliable information. Behaviors that, in hindsight, may seem perverse flourished: throughout the Stalin

period large quantities of letters arrived at gulag outposts addressed to inmates sent C.O.D. (*doplatnye pis'ma*); inmates wired small amounts money out to struggling relatives with surprising frequency and sometimes even tried to send their families care packages of food and clothing.⁸

The communicative exchanges chosen for analysis here all date in whole or part to the years of the Soviet Union's involvement in World War II and the famine-plagued post-war reconstruction era. Letters from these periods provide particularly interesting examples of the way in which both information and goods circulated between inmates in the camps and their relations on the outside because conditions were so extreme.

The rapid German advance in 1941 left vast swathes of Soviet territory under enemy control. Mass military and civilian casualties, dislocation and destruction, desperate shortages of basic necessities, draconian work rules and rationing left many "free" Soviet citizens in horrifying circumstances. At the same time, conditions in Soviet labor camps deteriorated: the war exacerbated pre-existing supply problems, further reducing the access of prisoners to food, clothing, and other necessities.⁹ Mortality rates in the camps soared to such highs that even the central authorities recognized the situation as a problem: in early spring 1942 the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs ordered camp and prison commandants to encourage prisoners to write home and ask for care packages to supplement dwindling allocations.¹⁰ Throughout the rest of the war and the post-war reconstruction period, the packages that individual prisoners received from their relations represented an important, officially acknowledged secondary line of supply for places of confinement: the NKVD required prisons and camps to track the number of private packages that arrived and also the amount of food and clothing that entered the penal system through this mechanism.¹¹

New barriers to communication also affected the flow of prisoner mail during the war period. On June 22, 1941, one day after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, a joint directive issued by the NKVD and the Soviet Procuracy detailing wartime security measures banned all categories of prisoners from corresponding with their relations.¹² Relatively quickly, however, the central authorities began to relax this regulation, in part, probably, because it impeded the drive to draw more packages into the gulag, but also, perhaps, in response to issues of morale both inside and outside the camps. By early 1942, many categories of prisoners could theoretically send mail almost as frequently as they had in the pre-War era.¹³

Even when correspondence resumed, however, the mail moved slowly: the war disrupted transportation and communication lines; with so many citizens dislocated or in occupied territory, many inmates lost track of their relatives. Moreover, in this period letters mailed to and from the camps passed through a new form of inspection: in addition to being reviewed by the camp censorship department and, potentially, by the secret censorship departments maintained by the NKVD in ordinary Soviet post offices, they now, like all other mail sent in the Soviet Union, passed through military censorship offices.¹⁴

These military censorship units systematically worked to block communications deemed defeatist or demoralizing and often blacked out frank descriptions of wartime conditions. In addition, as in all periods, prisoners and their relatives engaged in self-censorship both out of fear and because they did not want to cause each other pointless worry and distress: why reveal the full horror of a situation if nothing can be done to address it? In other words, even if they received communications from each other regularly, prisoners and their families did not necessarily have a full sense of their respective experiences in this period. They made choices with partial information, drawn from rumor and hearsay and by reading between the lines.

The Correspondence of the Shtern Family

Evgenia Vladimirovna Shtern was nine when first her father and then her mother were arrested on political charges in 1937.¹⁵ She never heard from her father again: he was shot in 1939. Her mother, Evgenia Aleksandrovna Shtern, received a five-year sentence, which she spent first in the Iaroslavl prison and then later in Kolyma. Held over in camp long past the end of her term due to the war, she was not released until 1944 and even then was not allowed to leave Magadan. In 1950, she was rearrested and sentenced to perpetual exile. She did not return to Moscow until 1955.

Following her parents' arrest, Evgenia Vladimirovna remained in Moscow in the care of her paternal relatives. Under the strict rules in force in political isolation units such as Iaroslavl prison in the late 1930s, prisoners could only correspond with an immediate blood relation, so, from the first, Evgenia Vladimirovna took on the role of her mother's designated correspondent.¹⁶

Although internal evidence within the correspondence shows that her paternal relations helped her to assemble and mail packages and sent wire transfers to Evgenia Aleksandrovna, with the exception of a single note dating to the period in which Evgenia Aleksandrovna was in exile, only Evgenia Vladimirovna herself seems to have written to her mother.¹⁷ They corresponded reasonably regularly throughout the years that Evgenia Aleksandrovna spent in prisons, labor camps, and exile: in Kolyma, the mail stopped each winter for a period of months when the navigation season ended. Otherwise, the only substantial interruption in the exchange occurred in the aftermath of the war: for several years, Evgenia Vladimirovna stopped writing, perhaps as a result of her own exhaustion and stress.¹⁸ Although very few of the letters that the Shterns exchanged during the two years Evgenia Aleksandrovna spent in the Iaroslavl prison

have survived, a great deal of correspondence mailed to and from Kolyma remains extant.¹⁹ These authentic artifacts of Stalin-era culture are, in respect to their content, quite typical for camp exchanges dating to the late 1930s and the early 1940s.

Like most gulag inmates who managed to sustain regular correspondence with loved ones, Evgenia Aleksandrovna Shtern included in the letters that she wrote home a fairly significant amount of factual information about the circumstances of her confinement. She notes her work assignments (hay making, logging, greenhouse labor, jobs in sewing factories, and clearing snow in winter) and also describes her daily schedule and her physical ailments. For instance, in a letter describing a haymaking assignment dated August 10, 1941, she writes: “At first I did not cut the hay but only raked it as part of another work team because I had so many boils, and Lena (Lena is our team leader) took pity on me. Now they aren’t bothering me as much, that is, I have gotten better, and I have asked Lena to let me cut the hay.”²⁰

Other symptoms of both poor nutrition and exhaustion also figure prominently in Evgenia Aleksandrovna’s letters. In a letter tentatively dated 1943, she writes:

I was sick or, more accurately, it wasn’t that I was ill—I just needed to build myself up. They put me in the hospital so that I could rest up and Lialia was so touchingly attentive to me all the time that I will never forget it. My darling, just don’t start worrying and think that something happened to me and I was really sick. Honestly, that isn’t so. I was just tired, and my heart was not in such good shape. Nor were my lungs. Since I work hard all the time, they decided to get my health in order and give me the chance to rest.²¹

Evgenia Aleksandrovna asks, sometimes in a tone that borders on desperation, for food parcels, warm clothing, and occasionally money.²² For instance, in an undated letter, she writes: “Baby, all the same, you really need to send me small packages more frequently. Sugar, butter, and other really nutrient-rich things.”²³ In a letter dated September 27, 1939, she notes that she is stronger, has put on weight, and “does not have scurvy, which is really nice.”²⁴ She

repeatedly references her struggles to fulfill norms and master new work assignments.²⁵

In response to Evgenia Aleksandrovna's letters, Evgenia Vladimirovna consistently expressed her love, support, and concern, and, with the help of other relatives, sent food parcels, clothing, and funds.²⁶ Did Evgenia Vladimirovna, however, really understand the severity of the conditions in which Evgenia Aleksandrovna lived? The answer to this question seems to have been no. In recent interviews, Evgenia Vladimirovna has noted that she had little real understanding of her mother's situation throughout their correspondence: initially she did not even understand that she was incarcerated.²⁷ The content of the letters that Evgenia Vladimirovna sent to her mother by and large accords with this memory.

For instance, in a letter written in 1939 written just after Evgenia Aleksandrovna's transfer from Iaroslavl prison to Vladivostok had caused an interruption in the family's correspondence, Evgenia Vladimirovna writes: "Mommy, you ask if I was very worried when I stopped receiving letters from you and whether or not this spoiled my vacation. While I was in Leningrad, I did worry, but, while here, I firmly knew that the fact that I wasn't getting letters from you was just temporary. I had a great break, spent a great deal of time outside, went swimming, and played to my heart's content."²⁸ In a 1940 letter, written right after her mother has been transferred to a new camp she sagely advises: "Mommy, I ask you earnestly to do your work calmly. Do not worry about anything. I also ask you, if you move again, to notify the post office. If you had gotten all the letters I sent, including those mailed to Vladivostok, you would have a fair number."²⁹ Nowhere in these letters or, for that matter, in the correspondence as a whole, do we sense that Evgenia Vladimirovna really understood the restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, dangers, and degree of deprivation that her mother was experiencing.

Although Evgenia Vladimirovna's age during the correspondence and relative naïveté doubtless limited her ability to read between the lines of her mother's letters and understand her real situation, the content of the letters that Evgenia Aleksandrovna sent probably also contributed to this lack of understanding. Like most gulag inmates who corresponded at all regularly, Evgenia Aleksandrovna alternates in her letters between detailing her needs and offering reassurance about her well-being. In one 1940 postcard written following her transfer to a camp station further from Magadan, for instance, she notes:

It is beautiful here. I live in the forest; there are mountains all around. There is a great deal of snow and sunshine. The air is very good: very healthful though the frosts here are serious. There is no wind and the sunshine really warms things. I have gotten very tan just in these three days, I am working outdoors, logging, that is, I cut down and saw up trees. In the sewing factory, I spent half a year learning how to sew on a sewing machine. Now I am learning a new job, but, when we see each other, I will probably be robust and tempered by this work.³⁰

Nowhere in the correspondence from this period do we sense the despair that, according to some memoirs, drove Evgenia Aleksandrovna to attempt suicide in the face of pressure from common criminals and the impossibility of meeting the high norms set for those assigned to logging details.³¹ In fact, Evgenia Aleksandrovna repeatedly suggests in her letters, including specifically in correspondence sent during World War II, that she thinks she is living and probably even eating better than family members outside the camps.³²

Multiple factors encouraged inmates to issue such assurances. First, as noted earlier, the censorship regulations that governed the camp mail system specifically barred inmates from complaining to their relations about conditions. By including positive assessments of their situation in letters, inmates improved the odds that these communications would reach their intended recipients. Inmates also often wanted to spare their loved ones grief and worry, particularly if they sensed that their family members were unlikely to be able to offer much aid.

Moreover, during World War II and years of widespread famine such as the immediate post-war period, such reassurances often hint at an uncomfortable truth: in many areas of the Soviet Union, living conditions were so poor that, by certain measures, the lives of citizens without any special connections or privileges might indeed differ little from those of gulag inmates. Outside the camps as well as in them, Soviet citizens showed symptoms of nutritional diseases such as scurvy and pellagra and died of both hunger and exposure.

The relatives of those convicted on political charges, moreover, as camp inmates knew, faced barriers to employment and legal sanctions that made them disproportionately vulnerable in periods of crisis. In the context of the time, in other words, the references to shortages and requests for food and clothing parcels that inmates did succeed in conveying in the letters they sent home would have read very differently than they do now: to many recipients, they doubtless seemed depressingly familiar, consonant with ordinary experience during hard times and in poorly supplied areas as opposed to truly exceptional.

Like many inmates who managed to correspond during the war, Evgenia Aleksandrovna writes fairly openly about her concern for the material well-being of her loved ones outside the camps. After describing going berry-collecting, in one war-time letter she notes: “In general, I think, we eat better here than you do there. Sometimes I am ashamed because of that, but sometimes I justify us by the fact that it is the north and we are here for years.”³³ In another place she asks: “Why haven’t you sent me a photo? Is it that you can’t find an opportunity to get your picture taken or, more likely, is it that you are so thin that you are worried that you will upset me?”³⁴ In connection with a request for a clothing parcel, she writes: “Lialia’s mother used to send things and we would share them, but now she is in great need herself.”³⁵ This issue, the problem of the poor living conditions that prevailed outside the camps, emerges as the

dominant theme in the next example of inmate correspondence that will be discussed in this report.

The Correspondence of Petr Lazutin and Raisa Beskodarnaia

The letters that Petr Lazutin exchanged with his fiancée Raisa Beskodarnaia between February 1945 and May 1946 represent a remarkable, extended example of correspondence between a prisoner and a former detainee. Although inmates released from the camps in the Stalin period did sometimes send back individual letters to friends in the places of confinement in which they had been held, both correspondence rules and fear tended to limit the duration of such exchanges. Although rules were not always enforced, theoretically prisoners could only correspond with immediate family members; releasees, moreover, knew that efforts to sustain contact with other convicted criminals could only increase their chances of re-arrest.

In the context of this paper, the Lazutin-Beskodarnaia exchange also merits attention for another reason: it shows that even in instances when a prisoner's loved ones had personal knowledge of the camp system and fully understood the conditions inmates faced, they might not necessarily have perceived their own situation as superior to the inmate's. Material resources and sympathy could still flow from the camps to the outside world in a way that sometimes defies our expectations.

Petr Lazutin and Larisa Beskodarnaia met when both were serving terms in the Intinskii coal-mining camp in the Komi autonomous republic.³⁶ Lazutin, an electrical engineer by training and a Party member since 1930, had once enjoyed a successful career in government service. At the time of his arrest in Moscow in December 1940, he had occupied the post of assistant head of the international section of the Ministry of Communications. Convicted under article 58, section 1a of the criminal code (treason) and given a five-year sentence, he performed

hard labor in the mines when he first arrived in Inta. After being injured in an accident, however, he was transferred to a workshop above ground and allowed to perform work more suited to his specialization: he repaired electrical equipment needed for mining operations. This relatively light work assignment doubtless saved his life: he remained indoors much of the day and had better access to resources.

Beskodarnaia arrived in Inta in March 1943 as part of a party of young women, all of whom had received five-year sentences for skipping or arriving late at work under a June 26, 1940 decree designed to tighten labor discipline.³⁷ A native of Perm (renamed Molotov from 1940 to 1947), she was only eighteen when she arrived in camp, a full twenty years younger than Lazutin. She had completed just seven grades in school and had relatively little cultural sophistication, but, despite the obvious differences in their backgrounds, Lazutin and Beskodarnaia quickly grew close. By the end of 1944, they were engaged.³⁸

In summer 1945 a general amnesty for inmates convicted under the decree of June 26, 1940 was announced, and Beskoradarnia was released.³⁹ As soon as she could, she left to rejoin her siblings and mother in Molotov, with the intention of reuniting with Lazutin when his sentence ended. For the next year, Lazutin and Beskodarnaia corresponded regularly: over fifty letters that the pair exchanged between August 1945 and June 1946 survive in the archive of the Moscow branch of Memorial.

Moreover, internal evidence within the correspondence indicates that this collection is by no means complete: in letters, Lazutin and Beskodarnia often note the receipt of communications that do not constitute part of Memorial's collection. The total number of letters that the pair exchanged seems likely to have been considerably higher. Some of the letters sent by Lazutin and Beskodarnaia clearly by-passed the official camp postal system, presumably with the help of

free-laborers in the Inta camp.⁴⁰ Other letters, however, obviously passed officially: they bear the distinctive stamps of the camp's censors and/or are addressed to the post-office box used for officially regulated prisoner correspondence.

Even the first letters that Beskodarnaia sent back to Lazutin from Molotov express considerable disappointment in her situation. The supply situation in the city was poor, and her family was destitute. Her mother had no job. Her brother earned a pittance working at a local factory. They had already sold essentially all the family's spare possessions to buy food for themselves and also so that they could send Beskodarnaia packages while she was in the camps. They did not have access to the specialized stores that sold essential food stuffs at regulated prices and had to purchase everything they needed at the bazaar.⁴¹

Although Beskodarnaia managed quickly to find work as a typist in a textile factory, she noted to Lazutin that her salary of 250 rubles a month did not even allow her to purchase bread: she subsisted on the dinner she got with her ration coupons. In a letter dated September 13, 1945, she writes:

You need to understand what our material circumstances are like now. You can't imagine how it is. I never experienced anything like this before—at least not before the camps. But this is home! After everything I had been through, could I have possibly thought that it would be like this? Not realizing how things were, I wanted something different. I dreamed, I imagined freedom entirely differently. I did not expect to find things this way.⁴²

Clothing represented a particularly pressing concern from Beskodarnaia. Nothing remained from her pre-arrest wardrobe; she had left camp with little and had no winter coat and no real shoes. With no clear way to improve her circumstances in Molotov, she quickly began to regret her decision to leave Inta. As a free laborer in the camp, she noted in a letter dated September 27, 1945, she would have lived better and might have even been able to help her family financially.⁴³

Lazutin responded to Beskodarnaia's unhappy description of life in Molotov with lengthy, sympathetic letters. He agreed that Beskodarnaia's decision to leave Inta had been a terrible mistake and noted specifically the role that family correspondence had played in nudging her towards this short-sighted decision:

I am so sorry that you left. After all, you probably won't succeed in continuing your education right now anyway, and, in terms of work, it would be much better here. Here you could easily earn 700-800 rubles [a month]. Moreover, the supply situation is good here, and you could help your mother. Your mother really let us down: she didn't write about anything, and you thought everything there was just fine.⁴⁴

Lazutin promised that if Beskodarnaia managed to get permission to return to Inta, he would do everything he could to assist her in getting reestablished. Beskodarnaia, however, demurred that she could not go back without serviceable winter clothing.⁴⁵ Moreover, she felt "uncomfortable going to join a person who was still not free and who himself needed support and assistance."⁴⁶

Interestingly enough, for all Lazutin may have regretted the fact that Beskodarnaia's mother had not spoken frankly about conditions in Molotov in the letters she mailed into the camps, he himself urged his fiancée to censor herself when writing back to the friends she had made in Inta:

Today I read the letter that you sent the girls. I liked the letter a lot. I had thought that you would describe your life in detail for them, but you were very smart. It's better that they not know about all your hardships. You should share everything with me alone. There is no need to tell all this to outsiders. I don't know when they will answer you, but everyone wants to correspond with you. If you can find common ground, then write, but be careful what you say. You are awfully frank when you write, even when you shouldn't be. I advise you not to tell them about the prices at the farmer's markets and your hardships, etc. Don't forget that this is a camp, and you shouldn't include all sorts of foolishness when you write here because that sort of thing will only lead to trouble, first of all, for you. I hope you understand what I mean.⁴⁷

In December 1945, at least in part as a result of her difficult financial circumstances, Beskodarnaia left Molotov at her mother's urging and went to visit relatives in the Ukraine. She

got stuck in Moscow on the way and, finding herself short on both food and money, began to mail letters to Lazutin C.O.D.⁴⁸ Although, when she reached the home of her aunt and uncle in Kunashovka, Ukraine, she found material conditions there, on balance, better than they had been in Molotov, she continued regularly sending Lazutin un-stamped mail: initially she delayed looking for work because she thought it might be difficult for her to get permission to quit if she later wanted to leave and return to Lazutin in Inta. When she did finally get a job, she found herself earning so little that she again could hardly cover her basic expenses.⁴⁹

On March 1946 Lazutin responded to Beskodarnaia's continued accounts of her straightened circumstances by sending her 500 rubles, approximately a month's pay in the period for an average Soviet employee.⁵⁰ In the thank-you letter Beskodarnaia sent Lazutin in response, she herself called attention to the incongruity of the situation:

I know how "modest" this sum is for someone in your position, believe me, and am ashamed to be accepting it from you. Don't be angry with me: it is the truth. Where could you have gotten more? I understand and know that you are not able to render me real aid, particularly materially, and so this assistance brought tears to my eyes. Where did you manage to get all this money? Sweetheart, my darling, my dearest, how I would like to bring you some joy somehow, at least by sending you some good news or a little package, but you understand my situation. My material circumstances are no better than yours and morally things are no easier for me. After all, your torment is my torment; your grief is my grief. The fact that I am free is the only thing, but you know what kind of freedom this is.⁵¹

In fact, this was not the first time Lazutin had tried to send his fiancée funds. He notes in letters that he first tried to send a wire transfer of 450 rubles to her when she was in Molotov, but she had left by the time the money arrived, and the funds returned to him. He then tried to wire the cash on to her in Moscow, but again just missed her.⁵² He also made steps to resolve her clothing situation. He writes in one letter: "I have a coat for you. You'll just need to get it re-sewn into a women's style."⁵³

Lazutin's letters to Beskodarnaia make it clear that all this assistance involved considerable sacrifice on his part. Regarding the 500 ruble transfer, he notes specifically: "These are all the saving that I had."⁵⁴ In another letter, he writes: "I am alive and healthy but have lost a noticeable amount of weight lately. How could it be otherwise? I worry so much about you."⁵⁵ Nor was Beskodarnaia herself complacent about Lazutin's health and situation. In one letter, she writes: "I think about you often, far too often. You never leave my mind. Recently I had a dream about you in which you were so sick. You looked awful. I woke up in the middle of the night feeling wretched. I was terrified that something might have happened to you. Are you well?"⁵⁶

What should we make of this improbable exchange? Why would a gulag inmate send such a substantial sum to a loved one and why, moreover, would living conditions outside the camps emerge as the chief point of concern in the correspondence? To some extent, doubtless, gender roles represent a factor. Throughout the exchange, Lazutin expresses anxiety about Beskodarnaia's loyalty and commitment to the relationship. Any interruption in the correspondence tended to exacerbate these fears. For instance, in one letter, he writes:

I think I am beginning to understand you. You have been released, and there are so many people and friends, both male and female, there. There are so many forms of entertainment. So little room remains in your heart for me. I, after all, am all alone and in such a place, such surroundings. You can forget me. Just forget me immediately: just don't torment me. Write openly that that is how things should be, that we are not heroes out of books. We are living people and are governed by feelings. Although, speaking frankly and in all fairness, I never look at things that way and would never act like that in any situation or circumstances.⁵⁷

These fears, moreover, seem justified. Surviving letters suggest that Beskodarnaia wrote to Lazutin and told him that her relatives had questioned the wisdom of their relationship.⁵⁸ Given this challenge to the relationship, it makes sense that Lazutin would want to prove himself

as a provider, to show that even in the most difficult circumstances, he could extend himself and make sacrifices on her behalf. His relatively privileged work assignment in the camps and contacts with free laborers, the fact that he maintained some ties with his family and probably received wire transfers from home as well as the small monetary payments that convicts collected for their labor, all helped make it possible for him to play this role.⁵⁹

One might also, perhaps, reasonably note that tolerance for deprivation varies and suggest that Beskodarnaia's willingness to accept assistance from Lazutin reveals a certain callousness. It seems worth noting, however, that their relationship survived the challenges they faced and by most measures must count as tremendously successful. After Lazutin's term ended in 1946, Beskodarnaia returned, as promised, to Inta to rejoin him. They married and went on to have two daughters. When Lazutin donated the couple's correspondence to the archive of the Moscow branch of Memorial, he submitted with it a loving two-page explanatory note that charted the course of their relationship. Pressed flowers are interspersed among the letters.

Overall, the Lazutin-Beskodarnaia correspondence reads as a telling comment on the realities that defined Soviet life during the Stalin period: food and clothing were in such short supply that, in respect, at least, to access to these goods, the lives of many "free" Soviet citizens differed little from those of gulag inmates, particularly in certain periods and places. Individuals whose loyalty to the system seemed suspect, including both relations of those sentenced for counter-revolutionary activity and those who had themselves spent time in exile or the camps faced barriers to employment that made surviving periods of particularly acute shortage, such as the famine years that followed World War II, doubly difficult.

Moreover, living conditions within the camp system also varied. An inmate who, like Lazutin, was relatively fortunate in his work assignment and in the camp in which he was held

might indeed find himself at least temporarily better off than his loved ones. Although the size of the transfer that Lazutin sent Beskodarnaia is striking, the fact that he sent money hardly counts as exceptional. Surviving examples of gulag correspondence often mention small transfers of funds or packages sent home from the camps.

Inmates wanted desperately to remain connected and to continue to play an active role in the lives of family members, and so, even in the face of tremendous obstacles and hardships, they sent small gifts and contributions when they could. Spurred by an account of extreme need at home, they could sometimes make remarkable gestures of self-sacrifice. Moreover, the camp system itself at times acknowledged the legitimacy of this trend and specifically allowed such transfers, particularly in periods of acute shortage and mass dislocation. For instance, an NKVD circular issued in January 1944 authorized inmates to send as much of half of the funds they had in their camp accounts home to their relations.⁶⁰

The B. S. Berkovskaia/ M. F. Kuzina Correspondence

The B. S. Berkovskaia/ M. F. Kuzina fund contains dozens of letters that Broneslava Solomonovna Berkovskaia received while in camps and exile from 1938 until the 1950s.⁶¹ Born in 1899 to working-class Jewish parents in Odessa, Broneslava Berkovskaia was active in the city's Revolutionary underground in the Civil War years and joined the Party in 1919. By the 1930s, she had completed a higher educational degree and was teaching in a post-secondary institution. Her husband, Fyodor Kuzin, a former factory worker of Russian nationality, had risen through the ranks to serve as Director of a leather manufacturing concern and, by 1935, was first secretary of a regional Party committee. Six months after his arrest in Kharkov in September 1937, Broneslava was herself arrested and sent to ALZHIR—the notorious camp for wives of traitors to the motherland in Kazakhstan.

Berkovskaia's two daughters, Marina (called Rena), age 6, and Elena (called Lina), age 11, were sent, following their mother's arrest, first to an emergency reception center and then to separate state-run orphanages. By 1940, an aunt, who worked in the child welfare system herself and had connections, had managed to secure custody of the youngest child, whose health had deteriorated precipitously due to malnutrition.

As a single parent with three girls of her own, she did not feel that she could take in the older child, but she arranged to have her transferred to a state home for gifted children in Odessa, the city where she lived. A year later, however, when the Germans invaded, the family was again split apart. The youngest daughter was evacuated to Novosibirsk. The oldest ended up in the Krasnodar' region and, for a period of some months, under German occupation. Despite her Jewish heritage, she managed somehow to survive and, when Soviet troops retook the area in 1943, returned to the children's home system.

The letters that the girls sent to their mother during the years she spent in the camps provide only a fragmentary account of their peregrinations through the Soviet child welfare system and German occupied territory. Much of the time, the girls, in an obvious role reversal, tried to reassure their mother by minimizing the difficulties they themselves faced. For instance, in one of the earliest letters she sent her mother, Rena Berkovskaia writes: "Don't worry about me, mama. Things aren't bad for me in the orphanage. There are a lot of children, and it's fun. I have already grown some."⁶² At the time, family memoirs suggest, her health had deteriorated and she was showing signs of dystrophy.⁶³

In a letter she sent her mother from the Krasnodar region in December 1941 following her dramatic, last-minute evacuation from Odessa, Lina Berkovskaia also described her situation in the brightest possible terms:

Living conditions are good for me here, but the weather is not particularly nice. My health is also good. There are a lot of people I know here who also came from Odessa.... We aren't studying in school yet; it [the building] is occupied. Mother, I can't sleep at night, because I am thinking of you. We're pretty crowded here, but the more the merrier. Once we smash Hitler, we'll live well. Hitler will meet his end soon. We, living here, send curses down on his head every minute. Soldiers come to visit us and tell us about battles. They take great care of us; they come to visit us every day.⁶⁴

Between the lines, one glimpses the reality: cramped conditions, no access to school, and the front moving ever closer. At times, surviving letters suggest, Berkovskaia pressed her daughters for more frank accounts of their circumstances. In one of the letters she sent her mother in 1945, Lina, after noting that she is in good health, adds with seeming annoyance: "I have one request. Don't read between the lines of my letters, because in this instance I am writing you the truth."⁶⁵

Although, sometimes Berkovskaia's girls doubtless censored themselves with the aim of sparing their mother pointless anxiety, in other cases, they would have had little opportunity to convey harsh realities even if they had wanted to do so. Rena dictated the first letters that she sent her mother to one of the teachers at the orphanage: barely school age, she struggled to print her own name.⁶⁶

Predictably, these communications in places sound more like the compositions of an adult than the work of a child and contain only praise for life in the orphanage.⁶⁷ The rare letters in which Lina tried to describe the horrors she had seen in occupied territory reached her mother with extensive censorship markings: either the military censors who inspected the mail before it reached Akmolinsk or the camp censorship office had stricken out whole sections of the text, presumably because they offered too frank of a glimpse of conditions.⁶⁸

Broneslava Berkovskaia's daughters in turn seem to have had little sense of their mother's situation. The questions their letters contain are often revealing in their naïveté: "Mama, write

and tell me where Daddy is. I don't know.”⁶⁹ “Is there a Fedosii Akushev where you are? There is a girl here and they took her daddy and there still hasn't been any word.”⁷⁰ Material aid and gifts, in this correspondence, flows in both directions. Broneslava Berkovskaia at times managed to forward money and occasionally small packages to her children.⁷¹ The girls sent their mother pens and paper as enclosures in some letters and also, on at least one occasion, a sweater.⁷² The girls frequently wrote to their mother C.O.D.

Berkovskaia's girls began to communicate more frankly about their experiences since 1938 only as Bronselava's term in the camps was ending. In 1946, Lina mailed to her mother a four-page long communication in which she notes: “I have decided that it would be better for you to hear the ‘bitter truth’ instead of ‘sweet lies’ about my life.” She then retraces events from the moment of her mother's arrest: two months with her sister in a reception center in Kharkov that she likens to a “trash pit”; the orphanage that kept its charges busy performing field work most of the time; how, in children's home in Krasnodar', she escaped detection during a German selection in which the children were examined like cattle and twelve Jewish children were separated out for extermination; how she was then thrown out by the director, fled to a kolkhoz nearby, and escaped deportation in a work brigade to Germany. She, in this letter at least, spares her mother the story of how she hid for months in a shed and then, weakened by malnutrition, had to be carried to the hospital by the Red Army soldier who found her.

With its pitiless descriptions of the conditions and terrors she faced, Lina's letter reads as an effort to establish control over the family's narrative of survival. She wrote, doubtless, not with any intention of minimizing her mother's struggles but rather to clarify her own: she too had overcome horrible obstacles and dangers during the years they were separated and now, a survivor, like her mother, could sagely close by noting: “Mother, sweetheart, this is the whole

story of my life. Don't be downhearted. It is not for nothing that the Russian proverb says: all's well that end's well."⁷³

Conclusion

The examples of gulag correspondence discussed above are interesting in part because they force us to perceive the horrors of Stalin's labor camp and prison system within the larger context of Soviet history. In these documents, the Gulag seems not a distant, hellish underworld cut off entirely from the rest of Soviet experience, a "world apart" to use the words of Gustav Herling, but rather very much a part of ordinary life. Its inhabitants can be reached, at least sometimes, by regular government mail; they try, despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, to continue to fill familiar familial roles.

Moreover, from the vantage point provided by these documents, the horrors of the camps seem less exceptional and more consonant with the rest of Soviet reality. In part, this is an illusion occasioned by fear and censorship regulations. Inmates could not write home about the most distinctive aspects of their daily lives: the kinds of spectacular physical abuse and violence described by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, and other gulag chroniclers. The hardships that they could, at least in some small measure, describe— hunger, the lack of clothing and housing, exposure to the elements, poor medical care, exhaustion, and impossible norms—would have seemed all too familiar to many Soviet citizens outside the camps.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the impression of consonance between the camp world and the rest of Soviet society that emerges from gulag correspondence as entirely illusory. Particularly in times of great crisis and acute hardship, those outside the gulag's borders did sometimes face circumstances that rivaled those common in the camps in their desperation and horror. For very good reasons, material aid, worry, and sympathy flowed from

the gulag as well as toward it.

After Stalin's death, when inmates released from labor camps and prisons began to return to major Soviet cities, the poet Anna Akhmatova famously remarked "Two Russias are eyeball to eyeball: those who were imprisoned and those who put them there."⁷⁴ Certainly Stalin's purges and the labor camp experience created lasting divisions within Soviet society, but it is possible to understand the split not just as between victims and perpetrators but also as between competing categories of sufferers, each of which naturally tended to view the trauma it had most closely experienced as the defining moment in Soviet history.

The famines that gripped Ukraine as a result of collectivization, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the siege of Leningrad, the destruction of the culture of minority nations within the Soviet Union all, like the labor camp system itself, represent not just a source of suffering and trauma, but also a potential foundation for new forms of both personal and collective identity. If real discussion about the Stalinist past remains difficult today in Russia, it is perhaps in part because the great traumas of the period so often continue to be treated separately, almost as though they occurred in entirely different worlds.

Endnotes

¹ *Unforced Labors: The Memoirs of Ada Federolf and Selected Prose of Ariadna Efron*, compiled, edited, and translated with commentary and introduction by Diane Nemeč Ignashev (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2006), 189.

² Interview conducted by Emily D. Johnson in the offices of NIT's Memorial, St. Petersburg.

³ Stalin-era Soviet penal codes indicate that control over correspondence for prisoners held under investigation rested with the investigative organ conducting the case. The prisoner's investigator could allow correspondence, if he felt it was in the interest of the investigation, or block it. He also could personally act as the prisoner's censor. Many classified regulations governing the operations of Soviet prisons in the Stalin period, however, contain blanket statements barring prisoners from corresponding prior to sentencing; requests by individual prisoners to ease this prohibition were generally summarily denied. See, for instance: *Ispravitel'no-trudovoi kodeks RSFSR s izmeneniami na 1 oktiabru 1934 goda* (Moscow: Gosizdat sovetskogo zakonodatel'stvo, 1934), p. 16; "Polozhenie o tiur'makh GUGB NKVD SSSR dlia sodержaniia podsledstvennykh. Prilozhenie k prikazu NKVD SSSR No. 00112 ot 15 marta 1937," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 14, l. 42 ob.

⁴ "Vremennaia instruktsiia o rezhime sodержaniia zakliuchennykh v ITL NKVD SSSR. Prilozhenie k prikazu NKVD 00889 ot 2 avgusta 1939," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 35, ll. 21- 23.

⁵ See, for instance: "Prikaz NKVD 021 ot 15 ianvaria 1940," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 61, l. 25; "Prikaz NKVD 001408 ot 6 noiabria 1940," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 564, l. 7; "Prikaz 0290 ot 24 iuliia 1942," GARF 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 118, l. 102.

⁶ See, for instance, the following large examples of camp correspondence: Vasilii Evgen'evich Solomin Fund, NIT's Memorial, St. Petersburg; Nikolai Pavlovich Antsiferov fund, OR RNB, f. 27, ed. khr. 139-143, 154, 232.

⁷ The chief instructions on the operations of the camp mail and censorship system in the Stalin period appeared as attachments to the following NKVD orders: "Prikaz 001418 ot 21 noiabria 1939," GARF 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 37, ll. 92- 101; "Prikaz 00634 ot 16 iunია 1947," GARF 9401, op. 1a, d. 225, ll. 111-124.

⁸ Gulag officials struggled to process mail that arrived C.O.D., collect the postage due, and return these funds to local postal branches as required by regulations: in many cases addressees had died or been transferred to a new labor site before a letter could be delivered or did not have any money in their camp accounts. Although, in response to these difficulties, individual camp bosses sometimes tried to prohibit inmates from receiving correspondence sent C.O. D., they seem to have had trouble enforcing such a categorical policy. In the 1940s, the Ministry of Communication tried to regulate this situation with an eye to stemming its own losses. For an example of an unsuccessful attempt to ban letters mailed into the camps C.O.D., see: GARF f. 9489, op. 2, d. 5. l. 399; f. 9489, op. 2, d. 19, l. 94. On the efforts of the Ministry of Communications to resolve the issue, see: GARF f. 9414 op. 1, d. 327, ll. 41-46. For an instance in which inmates were caught mailing camp-issued supplies home, see: GARF f-9489, op. 2, d. 46, l. 142.

⁹ G. I. Ivanova, *Istoriia Gulaga. 1918-1958* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), 255-57.

¹⁰ "Tsikuliar No. 52 ot 13 fevralia 1942," and "Tsirkuliar No. 99 ot 9 marta 1942," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 127, l. 25 and 69 respectively.

¹¹ See, for instance: “Tsirkuliar No. 366 ot 1 sentiabria 1942,” GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 118, l. 174.

¹² For more on this document, “Direktiva No. 221 NKVD i prokurora SSSR or 22 iunia 1941,” see: GARF f. 9413, op. 1, d. 37.

¹³ See, for instance: “Direktiva NKVD No. 031/9839512 ot 28 avgusta 1941,” GARF f-9414, op 1, d. 2507, l. 60; “Tsirkuliar No. 52 ot 13 fevralia 1942,” GARF 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 127, l. 25.

¹⁴ For information on the secret postal censorship offices, see: Vladlen Semenovich Izmozik, *Glaza i usbi rezhima: Gosudarstvennyi politicheskii kontrol' za naseleniem Sovetskoi Rossii v 1918-1928 godakh* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1995).

¹⁵ Biographical information is drawn from the background information included in the Shtern family file, the pages of which are unnumbered: Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Additional information on the Shtern/Smirnova family can be found online as part of Orlando Figes' oral history website: <http://www.orlandofiges.com/families/Smirnova.php> [accessed December 28 2010].

¹⁶ See the October 2004 interview conducted by Alena Kozlova with Elena Vladimirovna Smirnova (née Shtern): <http://www.orlandofiges.com/interviews/Smirnova.php> [accessed December 28, 2010], p. 23.

¹⁷ A letter dated May 3, 1945 contains a note added by one of Evgenia Vladimirovna's paternal aunts. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], documents 007-3 -007-4.

¹⁸ In the October 2004 interview cited above, Elena Vladimirovna describes the interruption in the correspondence as entirely her own fault: <http://www.orlandofiges.com/interviews/Smirnova.php> [accessed December 28, 2010], p. 29.

¹⁹ The letters Evgenia Vladimirovna mailed to her mother in the Iaroslavl prison do not survive because of the specific rules of correspondence in place in political isolation units of this kind during the late 1930s: after prisoners had read the letters they received from home, they had to return them to their jailors. What happened to the letters Evgenia Aleksandrovna mailed to her daughter from Iaroslavl is less clear. For some reason they were not preserved by the family. Olga Adamova Sliozberg, “My Journey” in *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*, Simeon Vilensky, ed., Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies, Trans. John Crowfoot, et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 37-39; “Polozheniia o tiur'makh GUGB NKVD SSSR dlia sodержaniia osuzhdennykh,” GARF 9401s, op. 1a, ed. khr. 529, l. 93.

²⁰ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], documents 025-3 and 025-3ob.

²¹ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Not available online.

²² See, for instance, the letter dated August 25, 1939: Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 024.

²³ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 019-1.

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- ²⁴ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Not available online.
- ²⁵ See, for instance, the letter dated August 25, 1939, Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 023-1.
- ²⁶ See, for instance the letters dated March 24, 1941 and October 12, 1939. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], documents 003-2ob and 001-2ob.
- ²⁷ See the transcript of the March 2005 interview with Elena Vladimirovna conducted by Alena Kozlova, which is available online: <http://www.orlandofiges.com/interviews/Smirnova.php> [accessed December 28, 2010], pp. 7-10.
- ²⁸ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 027-2.
- ²⁹ Dated spring 1940. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 036-2ob.
- ³⁰ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401.. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 019-1.
- ³¹ Ekaterina Olitskaia, “Na Kolyme,” in *Dodnes’ tiagoteet*, 2 volumes, Semen Vilenskii, ed. (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2004), 2: 60.
- ³² See, for instance, the letter dated January 24, 1945. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Not available online.
- ³³ Letter dated August 7, 1944. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401.. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 007-1ob.
- ³⁴ Letter dated July 6, 1944. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 021-1.
- ³⁵ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1., op. 1, d. 5401. Posted online at <http://www.orlandofiges.com/archives/Smirnova.php>, [accessed December 28, 2010], document 021-1ob.
- ³⁶ Biographical information included here is drawn from a standard questionnaire that the Moscow branch of Memorial distributes to survivors and also from a free-form explanatory note provided by Lazutin. Both these documents precede the Lazutin-Beskodarnaia correspondence in Memorial’s files. Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2614, ll. 1-4.
- ³⁷ On the enforcement of this decree, see: *Istoriia stalinskogo gulaga*, 7 volumes (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), 1: 411-14, 416-23, 430-33, 446-48.
- ³⁸ Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2614, l. 60.
- ³⁹ On the post-war amnesty, see: *Istoriia stalinskogo gulaga* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), 4: 103-105.
- ⁴⁰ In a letter dated April 26, 1946, Beskodarnaia notes receiving a letter sent “with someone” (*s okaziei*): Arkhiv obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2614, l. 41,

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- 41 See her letters dated September 13, 1945 and September 24th, 1945: Ibid., 5; 7.
- 42 Ibid., 5.
- 43 Ibid., l. 9 ob.
- 44 Letter dated August 30, 1945: Ibid., l. 62.
- 45 See her letters dated September 24, 1945 and November 11, 1945: Ibid., l. 7 ob; l. 26.
- 46 Letter dated November 1, 1945: Ibid, l. 21 ob.
- 47 Letter dated August 30, 1945: Ibid, l. 62.
- 48 Letter dated December 21, 1945: Ibid., l. 31.
- 49 Letters dated January 5, 1946 and March 24, 1946: Ibid., l 33; 37.
- 50 See, for instance, the estimates of average annual wages for Soviet employees cited in Murray Yanowitch, "Changes in the Soviet Money Wage Level since 1940," *American Slavic and East European Review* 14, no. 2 (April 1955) 219.
- 51 Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2614, l. 39 ob.
- 52 Undated letter, mislabeled as [February 1945]: Ibid., l. 63.
- 53 Letter dated October 29, 1945: Ibid., l. 70.
- 54 Letter dated [February 18, 1946]: Ibid., l. 75.
- 55 Letter dated October 12, 1945: Ibid., l. 67.
- 56 Letter dated September 13, 1945: Ibid., l. 6 ob.
- 57 Undated letter: Ibid., l. 65.
- 58 Undated letter, mislabeled [February 1945]: Ibid, l. 63.
- 59 On wages and bonuses in the camps, see: Leonid Borodkin and Simon Ertz, "Coercion versus motivation: Forced Labor in Norilsk," in *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag*, ed. Paul R. Gregory and Valery Lazarev (Stanford: Hoover institution Press, 2003) 95-98.
- 60 "Triskuliar No. 6 ot 7 ianvaria 1944," GARF f. 9401, op. 1a, ed. khr. 117, l. 12.
- 61 Biographical information included here is drawn from a standard Memorial questionnaire for camp survivors and their descendents and also from the transcript of an interview given to Memorial by Marina Fedorovna Kuzina in 2002. See: Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, f. 1, op. 3, d. 334, ll. 1-3 and f. 2, op. 5 respectively.
- 62 Undated postcard, tentatively labeled [1939]. Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, B. S. Berkovskaia, f. 1, dop. op. 3, d. 334. Most pages in this file are not numbered.
- 63 See the interviews with Marina Fedorovna Kuzina: Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, f. 2, op. 5, ll. 4-5.
- 64 Letter dated December 10, 1941. Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, B. S. Berkovskaia, f. 1, dop. op. 3, d. 334.
- 65 Letter dated March 5, 1945. Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, B. S. Berkovskaia, f. 1, dop. op. 3, d. 334.
- 66 Undated postcard, tentatively labeled [1939]. Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, B. S. Berkovskaia, f. 1, dop. op. 3, d. 334.
- 67 The fact that orphanage staff helped the girls remain in contact with their mother appears not to be unusual. Although the children of enemies of the people were systematically sent to orphanages

even in cases when their relations begged to be allowed to take them in, the children's homes that received them, like many Soviet institutions, operated under conflicting directives. Administrators were told both to monitor the children's mood and loyalties so as to ensure that they grew up to be good, unconflicted Soviet citizens and at the same time, periodically received decrees obliging them to keep imprisoned parents informed of their children's progress and to allow regular correspondence. Depending on the concrete individuals involved and the political climate in a specific institution at a particular time, orphanage staff could either facilitate communication between parents and children or render it next to impossible. While in the camps, Broneslava Berkovskaia received a couple of letters from orphanage staff detailing the educational progress of each of her daughters. For more on the policies of Soviet children's homes and colonies, see: *Deti gulaga: 1918-1956. Dokumenty* (Moscow: MFD, 2002), 234-38, 275-76, 309, 465-66.

⁶⁸ Undated letter, tentatively labeled [1943]. Arkhiv obshchestva "Memorial," Moscow, B. S. Berkovskaia, f. 1, dop. op. 3, d. 334.

⁶⁹ Letter from Rena, 1946. Ibid.

⁷⁰ Letter from Rena. February 28, [1946]. From Novosibirsk. Ibid.

⁷¹ Letters from Rena and Lina. Undated and tentatively marked [1939]. Ibid.

⁷² Letter from Rena, April 21, 1946. Ibid.

⁷³ Letter dated May 10 [1946]. Ibid.

⁷⁴ As cited in: Stephen Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 99-100.

