

PRASKOVYA ANGELINA

*My
Answer*

TO AN AMERICAN
QUESTIONNAIRE



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MY ANSWER

*to an
American Questionnaire*



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow 1951

I HAVE received a letter from America. A school-teacher friend of mine has translated its contents for me. The letter states that at No. 296 Broadway, New York, there is being published *Biographical Encyclopedia of the World*, containing the biographies of distinguished people of all countries.

Incidentally, the letter explains what is meant by "distinguished people"; they are, firstly, leaders of the United Nations, secondly . . . the creators of atomic bombs, and only after these come workers in other sciences, art, literature and industry.

On a letterhead that depicts a thick volume against the background of an unfolded map of the world, the editor informs me that the name of Deputy Praskovya Angelina has been included in *Biographical Encyclopedia of the World* and requests me to fill out the enclosed questionnaire.

In addition to the usual questions (name, surname, date and place of birth, etc.), I am asked to give a list of my occupations "from the beginning of your career to the present time," titles and

decorations, place of work, residence, the names and occupations of my parents and children, military distinctions, published works, and very many other things.

This is my answer:

"Angelina, Praskovya Nikitichna. Born 1912. Place of birth (also place of work and residence), the village of Staro-Byeshevo, Stalin Region, Ukrainian S.S.R. Father: Angelin, Nikita Vasilievich. Collective farmer, formerly, farm hand. Mother: Angelina, Yefimia Fyodorovna. Collective farmer, formerly, farm hand. 'Beginning of career': 1920; worked as a hired farm hand with my parents for a kulak. 1921-1922, worked as a coal heaver at the Alexeyevo-Rasnyanskaya coal mine. From 1923 to 1927 again worked as a farm hand. From 1927 onwards, worked as stable hand in the society for the collective cultivation of the land which later became the Lenin Kolkhoz. From 1930 to the present time (with an interruption of two years—1939-1940, when I was studying at the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy in Moscow), tractor driver. I have three children—Svetlana, Valeri and Stalina. I have been a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) since 1937. I am also a member of Land Department Employees' Union. Published works: in addition to a small booklet entitled *My Team*, published in Kiev in 1938, I have had published numerous newspaper

and magazine articles and lectures on how to organize the work of tractor teams, and on other agricultural problems, in which I described my own experience at my work and tried to analyze it. "As regards military distinctions, I regard as such the title of 'Guardsmen' conferred upon me by the front line men of an artillery brigade, of which our collective farm was the patron, for successful work conducted deep in the rear under difficult war-time conditions. I have been elected Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. from the 474th Amvrosiyevo electoral area. Titles and awards: Hero of Socialist Labour, Stalin Prize winner, Winner of the Grand Gold Medal at the Agricultural Exhibition of the Soviet Union. I have been awarded two Orders of Lenin, the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, and a number of Medals. . . ."

The questionnaire is so detailed that I am even asked to give such particulars as the date of my marriage, or, for example, my mother's maiden name. But this detailed questionnaire does not contain the chief question, *viz.*, what were the circumstances that enabled me, a former illiterate farm hand, to become a legislator, a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet?

This question was put to me in another letter from America that I received long before the questionnaire. That letter was sent to me by a farmer named Benjamin Marten, a native of Alabama,

Concerning his own affairs he wrote very briefly; he put it in two words: "very bad," and I knew without the translator telling me that this means "byeda."*

Marten was not curious to know the date of my marriage; he wanted to know how it was possible for a person in the Soviet Union to have a career like mine: farm hand, tractor driver, legislator.

I get the magazines *Amerika* and *Britanski Soyuznik*. In my opinion, much is painted in too rosy colours in those magazines, and they publish things that are the very opposite of what Marten complains about. But that is not the point just now....

In those foreign magazines we often read descriptions of "amazing careers," "exceptional" biographies.

I remember, for example, the rapturous description of the life of a certain gentleman who, according to the magazine, "came from the people." He started as a news vendor, subsequently became a millionaire and the owner of numerous newspapers, and was elevated to the Peerage.

I thought to myself: now there will be two biographies, one after another, in that encyclopedia, mine and that lord's (mine under letter "A"

* The Russian for "trouble," "misfortune."—*Tr.*

and his under letter "B").* About him it will say: "Surname, name, date of birth, date of marriage, father and mother were poor people, started as a newsvendor, became a Peer." About me it will say: "Surname, name, date of birth, date of marriage, father and mother were poor people, started as a farm hand, became a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R."

On reading this, my American friend Benjamin Marten, and thousands like him, will ask: "What is the difference between them?"

Yes, that is true. Unless you ask "what were the circumstances?" you cannot understand and appraise the career of a Soviet citizen, and hence, my career. The chief thing is not my particular person . . . but the fact that my elevation is not an exception. Whereas the gentleman I referred to "*rose from the ranks of the people*," "came from the people," as was quite rightly stated in that magazine, and became a Peer, *I rose with the people*, I became a heroine together with the whole of my heroic people. This is the chief thing.

Therefore, I will take the liberty of going beyond the limits of the questionnaire sent me by *Biographical Encyclopedia of the World* and, addressing myself not so much to the worthy editor as to the thousands of farmers in America, talk about

* This refers to Lord Beaverbrook.

this chief thing. At the same time I would like to answer the question that is put to me in thousands of letters that I receive from my fellow Soviet citizens in all parts of our boundless Union: "How did you become what you are, Pasha?"

It is particularly appropriate today to look back from the height of the past thirty Soviet years at the road we have traversed, to recall the thrilling career of our country, which is at the same time the career of everyone of us, its people. Our destiny is so inseparably bound up with the destiny of our state and of our Party that, in recalling one's own labours and successes, sorrows and joys, one involuntarily sees something that is a hundred times bigger than one's own, personal career.

All the good things we enjoy today, all our knowledge, all the things that make us wealthy, strong and happy, are the results of one great cause—the triumph of the Soviet system. . . .

I have been a tractor driver for many years. To me this is something more than "merely a job." It is the place I occupy in the struggle to carry out our Five-Year Plans, it was my place in the fighting line in our Great Patriotic War, it is the source of my happiness, prosperity and fame. . . .

To me, as well as to the whole of our Soviet people, the term "tractor" means not only "a traction machine with an internal combustion

engine," but something more. The tractor helped us to change the entire life of the countryside; it wiped out the field strip boundary lines that had been like scars on the living body of the land, it led millions of peasants into the collective-farm way of life....

Tractor.... I shall never forget the day, thirteen years ago, when Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, after receiving us village girls at the Commissariat for Education, took us to the Lenin Mausoleum.

We walked round the coffin in which Lenin lay, holding our breath.... And when we got out into the Red Square Nadezhda Konstantinovna said softly:

"He dreamed of Russia having a hundred thousand tractors...."

When I took my seat on a tractor for the first time, in the spring of 1930, I did not know about Lenin's dream, or of the thousands of tractors our country already had. Of the sixty thousand tractor drivers we had in 1930, I was the only woman, I was the first tractor "driveress" but, of course, I did not know that.

I realized the magnitude and scope of what Stalin and our Party were doing in our countryside in my heart rather than my mind.

This was in 1930, the year of our victorious battles for collective farms, which brought about the

great change in rural life. This was at the height of our fulfilment of the First Five-Year Plan.

New construction was going on all over our vast Soviet Union. And everywhere you were sure to find the young people in the front ranks of the builders.

In the evenings, the young people of our village, Staro-Byeshevo, would gather in our clubroom in front of the map of the Five-Year Plan and talk about the future of our country, and about our own future. Both opened a bright, wide vista for us, and they were inseparable.

None of us thought of waiting for the future with folded arms; we Young Communist Leaguers were an active lot and played by no means the least significant role in the teeming life of our village. . . .

But I had a notion that outside of our village of Staro-Byeshevo that we were so accustomed to, something more important and difficult was going on. I wanted to go and work on some construction job, and I was determined that it was to be one of the urgent jobs of the Five-Year Plan. I eagerly scanned the "workers wanted" ads, that filled our newspapers at that time.

At one moment I wanted to go to distant Siberia to help to build Kuznetsk, the future garden city, and at another I made ready to go to the Dnieper Dam project. But there was really no need to travel miles and miles away, because our village, Staro-

Byeshevo, was right in the middle of the Donbas, and no matter in which direction you went, you would be sure to find an urgent construction job, such as the Gorlovka machine-building plant, the Kramatorsk machine-building plant, the famous Rutchenkovo coal pits, or the Azovstal steel mills, all of which were in the course of construction then.

My brother Ivan tried to prove to me that the Five-Year Plan was being carried out in our Staro-Byeshevo too, but I was not convinced and all the time wanted to go away.

One day Ivan, who was the first tractor driver in our district, and secretary of the homestead Party organization, was sent away to get a higher education. I there and then decided to take my brother's place and be a tractor driver (the term "tractor driveress" had not been even heard of then).

At first everybody laughed at me, but since the local authorities had not sent anybody to take my brother's place, and his tractor was standing idle, the manager of the Tractor Station consented to try me out. My brother had taught me something about tractor engines, and after a brief period of additional instruction I passed the test. The manager said to me:

"All right, then, take the job, but please be careful. . . ."

And so, one morning, very, very early, I made my first trip to the fields. It was rather cold, so

much so that my cheeks burned. My tractor clattered on, and every now and again I turned round to see my first furrow curling over the ploughshare like a black wave, from which a light vapour was rising. . . . I wanted to sing, to shout at the top of my voice. . . .

I had decided to become a tractor driver, and I became one.

It is easy to say now "decided and became," but it was very difficult in the spring of 1930. How much strength and tears it cost!

But I was not afraid of difficulties, and as for strength, that did not worry me. I had turned eighteen then, and I was already an "old Young Communist Leaguer." The Y.C.L.'ers of that time were used to difficulties; many of them had been already overcome and many lay ahead. . . .

By 1930, what had happened in numerous villages throughout our country had happened in our village, Staro-Byeshevo, too. The kulaks (we called them "kurkuls" in the Ukraine) were routed and expelled. The Lenin Kolkhoz was organized. The fields, now cleared of boundary lines, were ploughed with the aid of tractors.

All this was achieved by dint of great effort, and the new system was still feeble, like a newborn infant.

I remember that my father, half in jest and half in earnest, called himself the secretary of the "fam-

ily Party organization." He, and my brothers Vasili, Nikolai and Ivan, were members of the Communist Party, and my brother Kostya, my sister Lyolya and I were then members of the Young Communist League. We, too, in conjunction with the Party and Y.C.L. organizations, bore the brunt of the work of organizing the collective farm, of exposing and expelling the kulaks and of conducting political educational activities among our fellow villagers.

It was downright good luck that we had such a family!

Since 1927 we had had a society for the collective cultivation of the land. The kulaks were still firmly established on the land then and were strong. We were only just beginning to learn how to run things.

The society was obliged to use farm implements, traction animals and harvesting machines that belonged to the kulaks.

When the crop was distributed among the members of the society, payment was made not only for work done, but also for the use of implements, traction animals and machines.

And so it happened that our old enemy, Naum Nikolayevich Savin, the kulak for whom we had laboured for several years on end for a mere pittance, was, as before, better off than we were. He loaned the society horses, oxen and a reaping machine, but did no work himself, and yet he received

several times as much grain as we seven Angelins, who had toiled in the fields all the summer.

Evidently, we were not the only ones who dreamed of a more just state of affairs. The peasants were looking forward to such an arrangement of rural life under which the grain would go to the toilers and not to the idlers.

The Party, which looks far ahead, turned the countryside towards the collective-farm way of life. The "Rules Governing Agricultural Cooperative Societies" was the charter of liberty we had all long been waiting for.

I will never forget the village meeting in the square outside the church. My father, a stern, reticent man, delivered his first public speech here. I remember every word of it. He said:

"Fellow villagers, do you see that heap of stones lying over there? It's a big heap.... But it can be scattered not only with your hands, but even with one foot." To prove his point my father kicked a big stone that lay on top of the heap, and the whole heap collapsed. "Do you see.... The stones are rough and uneven. But suppose you take them to build a wall. Match each stone to the other, fit the projections of one into the hollows of another, so that no gaps are left. If we do that, we can build a wall with these rough stones that could not be knocked over even if five men pushed against it. We, fellow villagers, have been living like that

heap of stones up till now, each one for himself. . . . We ought to get together and organize a kolkhoz. . . . Fit man to man, like fitting the stones in building a wall. We would be as strong as a fort then, nothing could vanquish us! . . .”

Father finished his speech and stepped down from the church porch. Nobody uttered a word. The place was as silent as a graveyard. Usually, the village meetings were very noisy. If it was a matter of levying a kopek or so per head for the purpose of erecting a fence there would be a vociferous argument about it. . . . But here it was something that affected their whole lives; a new world was being opened for them, and yet deathly silence reigned. . . .

Why were the peasants of Staro-Byeshevo silent?

The situation in our village in those days (as it must have been in many villages throughout the country) was very complicated. The middle peasants wavered; they were waiting, afraid to take the risk, afraid they would commit a blunder. The kulaks, the Lefterovs, Savins, Antonovs and Paniotovs, owned all the agricultural implements, they were a power. And that is why the majority of the villagers, from old habit, feared, if they did not respect, them.

But we were not afraid.

We opposed the “kurkuls,” who were strong and ruthless in their hatred of the new system