

Dear Canada

Prisoners in the Promised Land



The Ukrainian Internment Diary
of Anya Soloniuk

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**Prisoners in
the Promised Land**

江苏工业学院图书馆

藏书章

The Ukrainian Internment Diary
of Anya Soloniuk

BY MARSHA FORCHUK SKRYPUCH

Scholastic Canada Ltd.

This diary belongs to Anya Soloniuk,
Village of Horoshova,
Borschiv County,
Crownland of Galicia,
Austria-Hungary
April 13, 1914

261-3 Grand Trunk Street, Montreal, Canada
February 10, 1914

Dear Anya —

I am sorry that I cannot be with you on your namesday. It is hard to believe that my little girl is now twelve. I am sending you this diary so that you can write down all that you experience as you leave our beloved village and travel across the ocean to be with me.

Your loving tato

x x x x x
x x x x x

Monday, April 13, 1914, early
at home in my beautiful Horoshova

Dear Diary, your soft cover is dancing-boot red and your pages are the colour of freshly churned butter. When I hold you to my cheek you smell clean and fresh like Tato when he's just shaved.

I like having a diary, but I'd rather have my father come home. He wants us to come to Canada instead. Mama showed me a drawing of the house Tato has found for us. It is so huge compared to our little home. The Canadian house is made of little rectangular bricks instead of plaster like all of the

houses in Horoshova. It is as tall as three regular houses stacked on top of each other! Each level has its own set of windows and a door, and there is a long metal staircase on the outside that goes all the way to the top! There must be a room on every level in this huge Canadian house — maybe even two rooms on each level! It will be fun to run up and down those stairs!

I wonder if I will have a room of my own — not like here, where we all sleep in one room. I would love to have a room at the very top of the house. I would be on top of the world!

The Canadian house has a flat road in front of it. It doesn't look like the dirt roads we have here. I wonder what the road is made of? Halyna says they're made of gold, but Tato would have told Mama about that if it was true. Along the road is a row of tall lanterns. Tato wrote that these are called street lamps and they stay on all night so people can see where they walk after bedtime.

Tato's sketch shows the front door opening up right onto the street. There is no courtyard and no stone fence. Where do you plant the flowers? Do they have flowers in Canada?

The houses in Canada are so close that I think they might actually touch. It will be strange to have neighbours that close. I hope they're friendly. How do you get to the backyard? Tato has sketched in

clumps of snow. He says there is more snow in Canada than we have, but it doesn't look like very much.

Will our Canadian house be robin's egg blue like home?

Our new house is on a street called "Grand Trunk." Mama says "grand" means big in English, and "trunk" is a carrying box. I think they named the street Grand Trunk because all the houses look like big boxes.

Speaking of big boxes, that's what I was doing today. I helped Mama pack for Canada. We can take one wooden chest each, and even Mykola can have his own. We put all of the dried *babka* in one box. I was surprised when Mama used her hope chest as her box and lined it with her embroidered wedding skirt and veil, but she told me that she wanted to bring them and there wasn't room in the other boxes, and dried bread wouldn't hurt them anyway.

Mama put a jug of vodka into my box, and two jugs of water and a jar of honey. That didn't leave me much room but Tato warned us to bring mostly food and water and not to try to bring mementos. I wanted to bring Volodymyr's *tsymbaly* but Mama said it wouldn't fit. I know that it is too long to fit in one of our chests, but it breaks my heart to think of leaving it here. I have only just begun learning how to play it, and every time I pluck out a tune, it

reminds me of poor Volodymyr. I told Mama that we could wrap it in a down comforter and I even offered to carry it, but she said no.

Mama got me to pack Dido's wooden pipe in between my clothing and the silver spoon that has been in the family for as long as anyone can remember. I also packed a small jar filled with my precious colourful glass beads. They don't take up much room and I don't know whether they make *gerdany* in Canada. Oy. I don't want to leave Horoshova. We put in one goose-down pillow too. Mama said that would stop the jugs from bumping into each other.

In Baba's box, we packed dried fruit and sunflower seeds and more water. Mama lined the box with embroidered linens from her hope chest and put everyone else's second set of clothing in there. There was enough room for Mykola's coat because it is little. Baba wrapped up the Icon in that old embroidery that's as old as the spoon. She tucked it in the middle of everyone's second set of clothing so it wouldn't get bumped. She wanted to bring her dishes and her wheat grinder but Mama said that they didn't fit. She was able to fit in her *kystka* for decorating Easter eggs though. Mykola's box was filled with nothing but the three other sheepskin coats. It was packed so tight that I had to sit on the lid while Mama tied the rope.

Mama said that I could take Volodymyr's *tsymbaly*

to Halyna's house. She loved him as much as we did, so I guess if I can't take it myself, giving it to Halyna is the next best.

Later

I am so sad about leaving Halyna. She is my dearest friend in the whole world. Baba gave her the dishes too. She is the closest thing to family in Horosova now.

I won't go.

I won't.

I won't.

Later

Baba told Mama that she is too old to go. Baba always uses her age as an excuse when she doesn't want to do something, but she really isn't that old. She might have aches in her legs, but her hands are fast and her brain is sharp.

Mama says that Tato sold our land to pay for our trip to Canada. I guess Baba has to go, just like me.

Friday, April 17, 1914

Hamburg, waiting for the ship

It has happened. There's no turning back. The sprig of lilac is now pressed between the pages of my diary. It is all that I have to remember dear Halyna

with. I am so sad that I can hardly stand it.

Things I won't miss:

- stupid Bohdan
- the priest
- the lord

Things I'm going to miss:

- my dear dear brother, Volodymyr
- Halyna
- my chickens, my sunflowers,
my garden, my dear little home
in Horoshova
- the Dnister River
- the beautiful cherry trees that
happen to be in bloom right now

One thing I wonder: are there storks
in Canada?



Later

We're staying in a rooming house in Hamburg. Our ship hasn't arrived back from its last trip, so we have to wait for it. I am not used to having so many people around me. I don't mind that Baba, Mama, me and Mykola are all crowded together in this little room and that there isn't even a table for me to write on — I am using my lap. However, the room smells like old fish and the walls are so thin that I can hear

everything my neighbours are up to. Just now, someone burped!

The streets in Hamburg are paved with cobblestones and the houses are crowded together like in Canada. There are so many people in the streets from so many different places that it's enough to make my head spin. I guess they're all waiting for ships.

Early Saturday morning, April 18, 1914

still waiting for the ship!

Here it is, Easter Saturday and we are far from home and far from Tato. Mama has never missed Sunday Mass in her life. What shall we do tomorrow? Easter isn't just any old Sunday! I wonder if Tato realized when he got our tickets that we would be travelling during Easter?

Later

In Hamburg, they deliver the milk by hitching wagons to huge dogs. It looks so funny!

Later

We have enough to eat as long as we don't have to stay in Hamburg too long. Before we left, Baba roasted our two chickens and packed them in a cloth

with cheese and fresh *babka* and a jar of cider. We have to eat this before it goes bad. It is what we have been eating since we got to Hamburg. We're just about out, though, and I know that Mama doesn't want us to start on the dried bread because we'll need that for our trip.

Yesterday afternoon, I went with Mama to see if we could find an inexpensive place close by to buy fresh food in case we run out. Our *kronen* are not lasting long. We do have some Canadian money, but we can't spend it because Tato told us they only let people into the country if they can show that they have money. I hope the ship

Later

Mama came in earlier and told me to put my pencil and diary down because she needed me to help her with Mykola. He was cranky and Mama was afraid he was going to get sick again. She was up all night with him. I would love to take him out for some fresh air, but we don't want to go outside too much. You see, Dear Diary, Tato has warned us to keep out of sight while waiting for the ship. He said that since we have no men here to protect us, we could be robbed! From the window, at least, this looks like an interesting place.

Mama set out a bit of our fresh food for lunch.

Mykola is now taking a nap and Mama asked me to stay with him and not be noisy. She said writing in my diary would be the perfect thing while she and Baba talked. I want to write down everything about leaving Horoshova so I don't forget.

On the day that we left, our neighbours gathered in front of the house to wish us goodbye. Halyna was there and she was holding Volodymyr's *tsymbaly*. I knew that it was the last time I would see her, and the last time I would see the *tsymbaly* and I almost started to cry. Roxolana was there too, and even Danylo came. Only Bohdan didn't come, and I hate him anyway. I can't believe I'll never see any of my friends again.

I got onto the wagon and then helped Baba up. Halyna reached up to me and gave me a sprig of lilac. I held it to my nose and breathed in the beautiful scent. Every time I touch it, I remember Halyna, and my brother, and home.

When the wagon pulled out of our yard, the church bells began to ring. All of our neighbours were crying. I kept my eyes straight ahead and thought of lilacs.

Manuschak the blacksmith took us to the train station in Chernivtsi and I watched the countryside roll by. I wanted to remember every detail:

- the rolling hills and our dear Dnister River
- the cherry trees in sweet full bloom

— an old kerchiefed *baba* walking her cow on a rope
— a stork's nest in a tree in the middle of the road
— the forest in all shades of green and a blanket of
wildflowers on the ground
— the church and the churchyard, where my *dido*
and Volodymyr are buried

Horoshova is such a beautiful place. Why are we
leaving?

But —

There's the lord, and the army, and the priest, and
our debt. Mama said that the lord had us so far
in debt that my great-great-great-grandson
would have still been in debt if we hadn't sold every-
thing to pay it off.

Tato says that everyone is equal in Canada. Don't
they have lords?

When we waved goodbye to Manuschak at the
train station, Baba started wailing. As the cart pulled
away, she even took a step as if to follow him, but
Mama wrapped her arms around Baba's shoulders
and said, "It will be fine, Mama. Everything will be
fine."

It's hard to think of Baba as being my own
Mama's mother because sometimes she acts more
childish than I do. Dear Diary, I feel like crying too,
and if I thought I could go home again, I would
have followed Manuschak's cart to the end of the
earth.

As the train pulled away from the station, I watched my dear homeland fly past me. Chernivtsi is such a beautiful city with modern buildings and many people, and maybe if we were there for a visit I would have enjoyed seeing it, but all I could think of was how sad I was to be leaving home. The train kept on going for two days. We passed huge mountains capped with snow, and villages that reminded me of Horoshova. We saw towns with tile-roofed houses, paved roads, and even big cities with fancy buildings that looked like something out of a book! When we crossed the border, I wouldn't even have known that we were in Germany if it hadn't been for the official who came onto the train to check our papers.

Easter Sunday, April 19, 1914

still in Hamburg

Mama said we had to find a church. This is a problem, because Tato told us not to leave the rooming house unless we had to.

Fortunately, we found a church close to the rooming house. It was a grey stone building that was so tall and pointy that it looked like it could pierce a cloud. Mama shooed us in. People were sitting on long benches. I have never seen people sitting in a church. It seems sinful. I wanted to leave right away, but Mama made us stand at the back, even though

the priest was speaking in another language. Suddenly, everyone stood up, and then there was a booming sound above us. Baba screamed and ran out the door. Mama followed her. I stood there, too afraid to move. Mykola held onto my hand and he didn't move either. I realized that the booming sound was actually nice to listen to. It was some sort of musical instrument. The people in front of us all began to sing.

I wonder what the people did special for Easter? No one in the church had Easter baskets and I didn't see a single *pysanka*. How can there be Easter without written eggs?

When we walked back to the rooming house, Baba said that that church was the place of the devil. They didn't seem to know about Easter at all, and only human voices are supposed to sing to God. As for the devil, how does Baba know? And as for Easter, maybe they celebrate it by playing musical instruments in church. I thought the music was nice. Besides, in our church at home Lysiak's wife sings so out of tune I bet God covers his ears when he hears her.

It makes me sad not to be in Horoshova for Easter. I wonder which girl brought the nicest basket? I hope it was Halyna.

When we got back from church, Baba set out the last of our food and she also had a surprise for us.

She gave Mykola and me each a *krashanka*! I wonder when she boiled and dyed these? She must have made them before we left. My egg was red and Mykola's was yellow. In case you don't know, Dear Diary, making *krashanky* is not very hard. It is just dyeing a boiled egg to make it pretty. A *pysanka* is a different matter. They are hard to make and my *baba* makes the most beautiful *pysanky* in all of Horoshova. *Pysanky* are raw and not meant to be eaten — they are given to friends and family for good luck. They have all sorts of colours and fancy designs on them. This is the first year that Baba hasn't made any. When I am older Baba says she will teach me how.

The chicken is all gone and our bread is stale, so Baba opened the jar of honey and spread each piece of stale bread with a spoonful. As we were eating, a bee flew in from the open window. It buzzed around and then landed on my bread. I am not afraid of bees. No one in my family is afraid of bees because my grandfather was a beekeeper.

I remember Dido's strong arms wrapped around my waist when I was Mykola's age. He smelled of smoke and honey. Dido would let the bees crawl all over him, but the only time he ever got stung was when they got caught in the hair on his arms. It makes me sad to think of going across the ocean and leaving Dido buried in Horoshova. At least Vol-