

I Heard My People Cry

Lenci Studios, Inc.

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Foreword:

Nancy K. Splain, J.D., Rule of Law Liaison with the American Bar Association's Central and Eastern European Law Initiative 1998-2002 (ABA/CEELI).

Glossary, Epilogue

Events of Russian history

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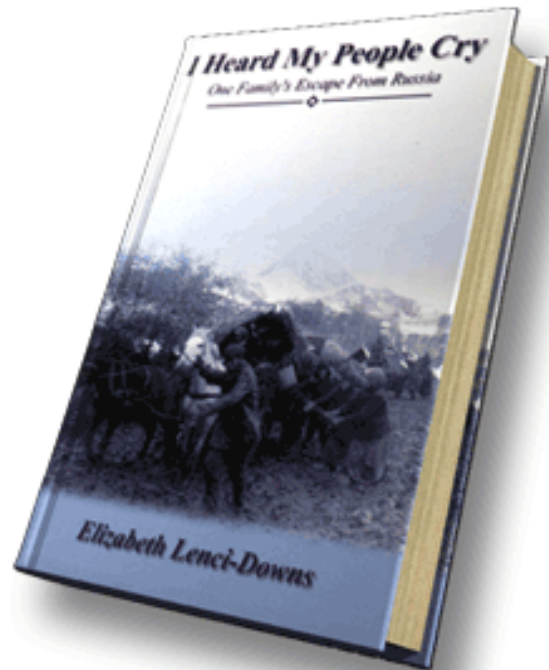
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Foreword

Foreword excerpt by Dr. Nancy Splain,
Rule of Law Liaison with the American Bar Association's Central and Eastern
European Law Initiative 1998-2001 (ABA/CEELI).

It is with great pleasure that I write this Foreword for *I Heard My People Cry*. I could not put this gripping story down, but read it well into the night, finishing it in one sitting. I am passionate about it.

The inspiration to write this book came one sunny January day in 1996 when author Elizabeth Lenci-Downs was walking with a new friend down the idyllic pathways of the greenbelt area of Scottsdale, Arizona. Suddenly Lise turned and said, "Elizabeth, I heard my people cry, and I can never forget it." In this way began Lenci-Downs' labor of love, resulting in a powerful book, one which indeed makes the story of Lise's family unforgettable.

This well-crafted book is a fitting tribute to one mother's faith, determination and courage. But *I Heard My People Cry* is much more. It is also an inspiring testimony to the strength of the human spirit and to the power of faith and love. As such, this book about the experiences of one Dutch German Mennonite family in the face of Stalin's red terror represents a story which transcends cultural, ethnic and geographical boundaries. By documenting, through the voice of Lise, the struggles and suffering as well as the strengths and triumphs of the Huebert family, Elizabeth Lenci-Downs gives voice to all of the silent victims of tyranny whose stories have been lost, forgotten or repressed. (For it is a tool of dictators, of course, to squelch the stories of their victims and to rob whole peoples of their history.)

I Heard My People Cry is an important book. In like manner as Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* or Anne Frank's diary, this book reminds all of us who would enjoy the fruits of liberty that they are not easily won nor, once established, automatically maintained. And what a timely reminder it is when, according to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, there are as of 2001, over 21 million refugees in the world.

I Heard My People Cry is a clarion call to all who enjoy a democratic way of life – to be active, responsible participants in civic life, working for the common good of all. It is a call to be vigilant, ready to identify, expose and challenge violations of basic human freedoms whenever they are threatened. What better way to honor the sacrifices of the millions, both known and unknown, who suffered at the hands of tyranny.

Certainly *I Heard My People Cry*, the story of courage of the Huebert family in resisting the forces that threatened their rights, livelihood and lives and their determination to live again in freedom, provides us ample inspiration for the task.

Synopsis

Spellbinding, unforgettable true story of a family who pioneers Russia's Ukraine in the 1800's and is trapped by the land as much as by its rulers. Over 200 relations of Huebert and Wiens families make their way to the southern Crimea and build the Village of Tchongraw. Lise Huebert Towes Gerig is born here in 1930, in a beautiful land of rolling hills under the spell of the ancient Krymskiye Gory Mountains of the Black Sea. This is an epic told through the actions of individuals caught up in events of Russian history that raise them to unbelievable heights and acts of courage. Secreted diaries out of Russia from 1917-1952 and Lise's words, refute the myth and propaganda that covers up what really happened to Lise and her family--to millions in the Soviet Union under Tsars, Lenin and Stalin.

Lise escapes in 1942 with her Dutch-German people as they are being taken to exile in Siberia. Love of family, uplifting courage, bonds them into a spiritual force that empowers them to evade Stalin's forces and finally escape Nazi controlled Russia. Lise walks in the midst of 140 women and children and two uncles as they flee through Ukraine between opposing armies. Her twenty-two-year-old mother emerges from Revolutions, famine and civil wars to empower her people and teach her children to survive. This young mother's passion for freedom puts her in peril as she escapes with Lise and her other three children to Poland. Ahead of an advancing Red Army they are forced to flee toward Hitler's Germany in the dead of winter.

The personalities and cultures that surround the people of Tchongraw bring home the reality of what Lise's people must overcome. Johann is a mystery, Nick Enns walks out of Siberia to hold Mariechen in his arms, seventeen year old Mary realizes war is too close as she clings to a train car, Justina defies Stalin's officers, heroic, pregnant Elizabeth Koop Huebert winds her way through a putrid Tatar prison to find her husband. Lise's childhood sweetheart walks over the Carpathian Mountains carrying his baby sister on his back. Walter finds Lise in post-war Germany. "Love is all we have," whispers Lise, "we have found each other, Walter and I, only long enough to say good-bye." Publication of this book waited for the escape from Moscow of a cousin who was granted asylum in 1998.

Reviews

Review by: Dr. Grace Kaiser,
Member, National League of American Pen Women

Author Elizabeth Lenci-Downs was captivated by the account of her friend Lise's six year family escape from Russia to freedom in Canada. "The story demanded to be told, and I had to write it." Lise's ancestors, Mennonite Brethren in 1840 to 1953 become a part of Russian history, in Gulags, hidden archives erased from history books. Tsars, Lenin, Stalin exploit their black-earth farms. Husbands and sons disappear into Siberian Gulags and work camps.

1941 purges of minorities include people of Jewish and German descent. We walk with 140 women and children, two uncles of Lise's family, singing hymns as they flee Siberian exile between two fighting armies. Booming cannon allow no time for rest or food. They cross open steppes in their passion for freedom, a loving family with uplifting spirits, leaving no-one behind.

Lise's mother, Elizabeth age thirty-two, teaches her four children to survive, Lise, eleven, Mary, twelve, Nick, nine, and Agnes, four, eating nothing but tomatoes and frozen potatoes wrested from snowy fields. Their clothing is inadequate, feet barely covered. Making it to Poland they must escape Nazi occupation in a dash to freedom ahead of the Red Army pouring out of Warsaw.

From secret diaries, five years research, interviews with Lise's help, this well-written saga was prepared for publishing. A can't put it down<must reread book.

Review: Karla C. Shippey
Approved Speaker / Stonecroft Ministries:
Law Offices of Karla C. Shippey, JD., Yorba Linda, CA

"Set in Eurasian history, this remarkable story of faith, courage, perseverance and love could easily happen again and is happening today. A mother's love and determination, a child's lost innocence, a tale of harrowing survival. What should never have occurred is as fresh today as it was then. I couldn't put down I Heard My People Cry the first time. I continue to pick up my favorite parts to read them over and over as a source and basis for my own faith. The words are so clear, the vision so real."

Review: Stonecroft Ministries, Stonecroft Book & Media Ministries
P.O.Box 9969 Kansas City, MO, June 27, 2003.

Dear Elizabeth, Thank you for sending the review copies of your book, I Heard My People Cry, for our inspection. If you would like to give your business cards or even order forms to persons at Stonecroft sponsored events to receive your book through the mails that will be fine. Thank you and God bless, Donald D. Ensign, Supervisor Stonecroft Ministries.

Review: Dr. Henry Baerg, past President of The Bible Institute. Chilliwack British Columbia, Canada -January 2002.

"Elizabeth Lenci-Downs, I compliment you on the excellent, superb job you did in writing *I Heard My People Cry, One Family's Escape From Russia*. I cannot recommend your book too highly."

I Heard My People Cry by Lenci Studios, Inc. with Trafford Publishing

This is the story of Louise Huebert Toews Gerig (Lise in the book) and "Her People" who were originally Dutch-German Mennonites of the Crimea and South Ukraine. The focus is on the years 1918-1949, the Great Revolution, Lenin and the reign of terror under Stalin followed by three years of occupation of the southern Ukraine by the German army and the family's life in Poland as trapped Black Sea Germans.

The saga takes us from early Mennonite history to Ukraine in 1778, until Lise's family take refuge in the Crimea in the early 1900's. The theme, "My People", threads throughout the whole book and gives the reader the impression that young Lise appreciated and treasured her grandfather's Christian teachings.

The author writes about the manner of life, joys and prosperity of Dutch-German farmers in Ukraine and of those in the marine climate of the Crimean peninsula jutting into the Black Sea. The fruit and the flowers, meadows and mountains, the agricultural fields and gardens are described in exquisite picturesque language. . .

. . .Lise's poignant words tell how her people found a haven in the village of Tiege under Rumanian forces of the German Army where they were able to survive for two years. However, when the German Army was retreating from Stalingrad, Lise's people joined millions of others who fled on wagons, by train when possible and on foot to Poland and finally to West Germany and British protection. It is a breathtaking and agonizing story of flight and escape.

The author must be complimented on her use of words and language to engage your mind so thoroughly. You can just feel the suspense and pathos from the danger of being captured. The story ends with Lise's family able to come to Canada despite all the obstacles including detention in Poland. One cousin was granted asylum in the west after *I Heard My People Cry, One Family's Escape From Russia* was completed.

Interesting facets in the development of the story are the romance and finally marriage of Lise and Walter Toews. The fire of love and romance cannot be extinguished even in times of separation, oppression and danger. To appreciate our freedoms and affluence, I recommend the reading of this life story which is skillfully woven through the events of Russian history that affected Lise's people. And to read especially to our young people.

Review: Dr. Becky Stevenson, Professor, Anthropology, University of Guam; Dr. Hiroyasu Kurashina, Dean of the Graduate School and Research, University of Guam. Director of the Micronesian Area Research Center

I Heard My People Cry, One Family's Escape From Russia

"When *I Heard My People Cry* was picked up neither of us could put it down. This book is very anthropological. The photos add extra meaning to the written text. It is a very compelling account: so many people-such very hard times-the ways in which people kept a grip on themselves and kept their determination alive-and Elizabeth Koop Huebert, and Lise! - what a remarkable book!

Elizabeth Lenci-Downs is to be admired greatly for writing it. I Heard My People Cry is an outstanding contribution to both history and literature. Between us, Dr. Stevenson's experiences in Russia, in the Soviet far East in Khabarovsk, for academic meetings, heightens her interest in Russia. Elizabeth Lenci-Downs has written a most compelling book I Heard My People Cry is a singular accomplishment. Well done - and thank you Elizabeth Lenci-Downs!"

Review: Lise's Sisters

"You did a marvelous job creating the tension, the fear, we must have always felt; the agony and uncertainty of daily events; the harsh realities as they were lived by millions of people. I thank-you also that you portrayed the faith our people needed and lived in order to survive - that God really heard His people cry and answered their cry. I am glad that you wrote our story that definately needed to be told. Thank-you, Elizabeth Lenci-Downs, with love." Agnes

"I am truly grateful...you did an excellent job of retelling the story of our lives. I really enjoyed reading I Heard My People Cry. It is also good for our children and grandchildren to have this book. Persons who have read I Heard My People Cry exclaim to me that they can't believe anybody could survive. Well, we did survive. I thank God very day that we can live in this beautiful country while the world is in real turmoil. I thank-you from the bottom of my heart for writing I Heard My People Cry. May God reward you for doing this." Mary

Comments

Elizabeth Lenci-Downs, we just wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed I Heard My People Cry about Lise and her people. We found it very interesting - hard to put down. Knowing Louise, we could hear her telling it! We compliment you on a very good book." **Paradise Valley, AZ**

"...We couldn't put I Heard My People Cry down. It is amazing...you write with an artistry combining intense research, and devotion, to the subject material. Lise must be thrilled with the way you told her sad, but uplifting, story." **New Jersey/Lady Lake, Florida**

"...I Heard My People Cry is a fantastic story of courage and perseverance through incredible circumstances. Elizabeth Lenci-Downs, you have done a beautiful job of crafting the story with vivid images. It is also helpful to have the historical review as you deal with several generations of this family. I imagine Louise Huebert Toews Gerig is pleased. Your friendship must be rewarding for both of you." **San Rafael, California**

"Elizabeth Lenci-Downs, about your book, I Heard My People Cry. The Blue Hill librarian, Blue Hill, Maine, has thanked me for donating such a wonderful book to the library, and has said there have been very many favorable comments on it. She herself found it historically valuable and a very powerful story. You've given pleasure to many of the Blue Hill, Maine, library patrons." **Jim -- Cambridge, MA**

"I Heard My People Cry! It is a splendid book and I enjoyed reading it--the sorrow and paths of Lise's life are only equaled by the courage, determination and faith that shine through the pages--many of them wet with my tears. It was noble of Lise to share her story and wise of you to recognize both the humanity and non-humanity of it--and to write it. Thank you so much." **Gilbert, AZ**

"Elizabeth Lenci-Downs I am sending you this note to tell you how much I enjoyed reading your book. I Heard My People Cry interested me a lot because my father suffered so many of the same experiences. Your book helped draw me into a deeper understanding of his suffering and that was very meaningful for me. As well, in reading Lise's testimony, we who have not experienced this level of pain also realize the importance of faith that is "tried by fire" and emerges strengthened. It is an important book for my children to read and appreciate. **Scottsdale, AZ**