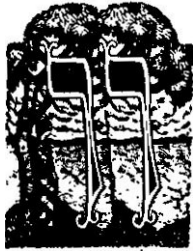


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What Josef and Miriam experienced travelling from Wilno to Vladivostok was one long chain of fear and horror - and it was only the strong will to stay alive, which every flesh and blood possesses, that made manifest the miracle, that Josef and Miriam were eventually able to leave the Soviet paradise. It was on 22nd September 1940 that they left Lithuania for the Soviet-Lithuanian border.

Right at the start of his voyage, at the Soviet-Lithuanian border, Josef's luggage was searched. The Soviet border gendarmes searched and rummaged through the papers, suitcases, clothes and even the baskets with food, which Josef took with him for the road. In those years, there was still was to eat in Lithuania. Of the food, the Soviet men only took a couple of lemons. To this day, Josef cannot comprehend why the gendarmes only cast an eye on the lemons, and not on the other delicious foodstuffs that he was taking with him.

Among the papers, the border guards found, on Josef, an old Russian passport, back from the times of Tsar Nicholas [II], when Poland still belonged to the former Russian State. This old Russian passport also included the signed certificate that he had been released from the military service.

The tsarist passport caused excitement with the young Soviet officials at the border. They allowed Josef and Miriam to freely travel onwards but, before letting them go, one of them asked Josef, "Citizen Józef Szalit - why do you carry this old tsarist passport about with you?"

"For no particular reason", Josef answered, frightened, "Just some document to show my correct name".

"Do you need to have it? Perhaps you'd prefer to leave it with us?"

"I can leave you the tsarist passport, if you like."

The eldest among the officials replied, "Well, thank you." With the tips of his fingers, he wrapped the passport very delicately and carefully in paper, as if it were a gemstone.

During the entire time Josef and Miriam were in Russian territory, they lived in fear. The border guards had indeed let them pass freely but, inside Soviet Russia itself, as is known, they can find anyone they want - even in the most remote Siberian villages. And even travelling on the train, the fear did not leave Josef and Miriam. They literally lived in mortal fear. At any moment, they [could] be taken off the train at the nearest station. In Moscow, Josef had enough friends and comrades. [He] even [had] their addresses. But it did not occur to Josef to look up anyone while he was in Moscow. He was simply afraid to [even] think of it.

The journey from Moscow to Vladivostok took eleven days. At several stations, GPU [secret police] agents boarded [the train]. Very often, they would go up to one of the passengers and take him off the train, only asking his name. With every day, fewer and fewer passengers were left in the carriage. Some alighted [of their own accord], and others were quite simply taken away in silence. Throughout the duration of the entire railway journey, it was terribly quiet.

The familiarity and friendship that are formed amongst passengers making a long trip together were not felt by any means. Travelling on the train, Josef thought about his young years as a bachelor in Warta, in the years 1903-1904, when fear was great in the city, upon seeing the Russian tsarist officials. Now, with the Soviets, with their little stars and pointed caps, the fear was even greater. Each time a seat was vacated in the carriage, following the visit of the Soviet GPU, the ensuing silence amongst the remaining passengers was filled with dread.

After another four or five days travelling on the train, one late afternoon, Josef heard his name being called out, resounding throughout the entire carriage, "*Józef Szalit! Józef Szalit!*" Josef's hands and feet started trembling. All the passengers turned their heads to Josef. The faces of the passengers looked scared.

Josef kept silent, because he was in turmoil and did not know what to do - to make himself known or not. He knew, however, that hiding here was not feasible. His passport with the visas were with the chief railway official. Josef stood up and presented himself of his own account to the railway official, who had called his name several times already.

"I was drowsing", Josef excused himself, "That is why I did not hear my name being called".

"*Charasho!*" [Rus., all right], the secret agent mumbled under his nose, "Józef Szalit, your tsarist passport was taken from you at the Lithuanian-Soviet border. Here you have your tsarist passport back - we don't need it!"

Josef breathed more freely. He thanked the official, but the fear did not completely leave him, until he rid himself of the tsarist passport, which had caused him such a fright. Later, sitting by the carriage window, Josef tore up that old tsarist passport into little shreds. He threw the shredded little pieces of paper out the window across the fields of Siberia. "Let this serve as an atonement for something worse", Josef thought to himself.

The trip took weeks. They passed through the cities of Minsk, Moscow, Sverdlovsk [Yekaterinburg], Brisk Tatarsk [?], Krasnoyarsk, [Lake] Baikal, Irkutsk, Chita, Kuybyshev¹, Birobidzhan and others. For days and nights, they dragged their way along on the Russian trains, crossing snowy roads, forests and fields, until finally reaching the city of Vladivostok.

From Vladivostok, it was already a short way to Japan. Josef and Miriam breathed more freely. The horrors of war and the spectre of the dictatorial country with the fear of death and eradication lay behind them. Gleefully, they boarded the Japanese ship Heian Maru, which brought them to the free land of America, to the city of Seattle, Washington.

¹ [TN: Probably ref. to the town by this name in the Novosibirsk Oblast in eastern Russia, although this would mean that, unlike all the other towns, this one is listed out of the geographical sequence, as it is to the west of Krasnoyarsk.]