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26 THE COURIER-JOURNAL MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER NIGHTMARE Continued

In Manchuria Marguerite and Arkady, both refugees, became Mr. and Mrs.

furs and expensive furniture, were exchanged for food the peasants were smuggling into the city. Finally the 'poor proletariat' had to be implored to give a pound of potatoes for a gorgeous sable coat.

"Potatoes were precious because they provided an ample menu. Peeled with care, they were boiled and eaten with salted and dried fish—the only product that was distributed widely among the populace. The peelings were dried in an oven and then ground in a coffee mill. Mixed with an egg, whenever one could be obtained, the substance was fried in linseed oil and eaten with molasses as pancakes.

"A mixture of dried carrots and acorns, finely ground in a coffee mill, served as coffee. It was drunk without sugar or milk. When people met, the conversation was usually about food—where to get it and how to prepare it—because the most unusual ingredients were used and mixed together just to keep us alive."

With such a poor diet, Marguerite said, "we had a life full of anxiety and fear. The nights were sleepless, because that's when groups of soldiers, armed with rifles and preceded by commissars, were searching the private homes and arresting people just for the little reason of being from another social class than the proletariat."

MARGUERITE's apartment was searched often because of her mother's connection with the grand duke's household. She recalls Grand Duke Constantine as "very tall and slender, a great poet and one who loved children. His wife, Elizabeth, was of German descent and, as a child, I was afraid of her. But I adored the grand duke, who died before the revolution."

The grand duke's sons were executed by the Bolsheviks. One of his daughters, Tatiana, is abbess of a convent in Jerusalem. His youngest daughter escaped to New York.

"Serving the grand duke," Mrs. Weber continued, "was already a terrible crime in the eyes of the Bolsheviks. Added to this, my father was a cousin to Dr. Botkin, the Czar's personal physician who was executed with the royal family in Tobolsk. Then, to incriminate us more, my sister and I were brought up in the most aristocratic institute of Smolny."

Even so, Marguerite found a job around Christmas of 1917 packing biscuits to be sent

to Germany for Russian prisoners of war. She managed to steal some of them.

A woman doctor whom Marguerite had befriended, and who had married a commissar, helped her get to Vladivostok, where she joined a retreating White Army unit and finally escaped into Manchuria.

Arkady returned to Moscow in 1919 after being released from his prison camp. A first lieutenant, he ripped off his insignia of rank for fear of being shot by enlisted men as his three officer brothers had been. He grew a heavy beard to escape identification.

He found his once-wealthy mother living in poverty in a little shack. She died in 1923.

THREE months after his return to Russia, Weber found himself drafted into the Red Army and sent to a Siberian post, from where he was returned to Moscow as a teacher in the Bolshevik-controlled Ministry of Education. But he managed to eat well, due to a bit of trading.

Moscow was practically without salt at the time. But there was plenty of it where he was located in Siberia, and he managed to bring two huge sacks of it back to Moscow. There he traded salt for such luxuries as butter, eggs, cheese and flour under the noses of the secret police. He would have been executed if they had caught him at that.

In 1920, Arkady was transferred to a post near the Chinese border. There two peasant girls, engaged in smuggling alcohol into Russia from China, helped him escape.

In disguise, Arkady boarded a train with the girls, sharing a compartment with them. They piled their coats and baggage on him. They even sat on him and ate their lunch while a Russian inspector checked the train. Weber wound up at Harbin, a White Russian haven in Manchuria.

In the meantime, Marguerite had made her way to Mukden. That's where Arkady and Marguerite became Mr. and Mrs. Weber.

Neither of the Webers ever recovered their family jewels or other valuables seized by the Bolsheviks. In their younger days in Russia both were considered wealthy. Then came the revolution and they had nothing but fear, privation and dreams of escape to a better land.

Last summer they returned to Europe to visit relatives in France, Switzerland and West Germany. But you can bet they never got near that Iron Curtain.



Arkady Weber's mother was Princess Chan Chin.



Marguerite Weber as a refugee in Manchuria.



Russian Imperial Army recruit Weber in 1914.