

THEY CALLED HIM A RADICAL

The Memoirs of Pete Maloff and the Making of a Doukhobor Pacifist

BY PETE MALOFF

with Vera Maloff

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To all spiritual heroes, known and unknown, champions, heralders and martyrs, who perished on crosses, scaffolds, stakes and in prisons; the participants in the past and present great historical procession-struggle against folly, hypocrisy and the universal evil: militarism; and to all future pulsing hearts of world conscience, the vanguard and builders of universal brotherhood of all human beings in the world—I dedicate my work.

—P.N. Maloff, March 20, 1948
from Pete Maloff, *Doukhobors: Their History, Life and Struggle*

FOREWORD

by Vera Maloff

I am the granddaughter of Pete Maloff. Living next to and growing up with my grandfather, I became imbued with his passion for the Doukhobor movement. It is my great privilege to implement the English translation of this memoir as he wished. I help bring this book into fruition out of love and respect for my grandfather and the Doukhobors of the past centuries. May their lives be an example to us of the twenty-first century who still struggle with oppression, killing of fellow human beings and desecration of our planet Earth.

Grandfather Pete Maloff was born in 1900 to Doukhobor parents newly immigrated from Russia. He spent his childhood in Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood communal villages in Saskatchewan. Desiring education for his sons, his father made the difficult decision to become an Independent farmer; however, Pete's grandmother, who stayed in the community, instilled in him an ardent belief in the Doukhobor faith and way of life. Pete went to school first in a one-room schoolhouse in Saskatchewan and then in Oregon where his family moved to join the Doukhobor Colony of Freedom in 1913. After graduation, Pete apprenticed at a Russian journal in San Francisco. The editor of the magazine inspired Pete Maloff to become a writer and a Doukhobor historian.

Pete Maloff traces the roots of Doukhobor beliefs to early Christians who clung to their principles despite being thrown into the fiery furnace. Their belief that the spark of God lives in all creation including humanity, thus they will not kill, that conscience is their guide rather than the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and civil authority, subjected them to severe retaliation, imprisonment and exile to remote corners of Russia. Periods of prosperity and of punishment were tied to retribution, rarely clemency, of various tsars.

In 1804, Doukhobors appealed to Tsar Alexander I (reign 1801–1825) to free them from this barbarous treatment and to give them land where they could practise their Christian religion in peace. In a display of tolerance unusual at the time, the tsar liberated the Doukhobors and bequeathed land to them in the Milky Waters area of Tavria,¹ to protect the Doukhobors from further needless

and vain meddling with their religion and their personal beliefs. Doukhobors organized nine communal colonies along the Milky Waters River and about 4,000 people settled there by 1812. The villages prospered.

Under the next tsar's reign (Nicholas I, 1825–1855), Doukhobors were again forced into military conscription and admonished to convert to the Orthodox Church. Those who refused were banished and, in 1841, 4,500 Doukhobors were exiled to the remote Caucasus Mountains in Georgia, a volatile area bordering Turkey with an inhospitable climate. Doukhobors adapted their farming practice and thrived, expanding their herds of livestock on the high grassy plateaus and developing nine colonies throughout this area.

When the Russian-Turkish war broke out in 1877, the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich Romanov insisted that Doukhobors assist the war effort. Even though it was against their principles, Lukeria Vasilievna Kalmikova, the Doukhobor leader at the time, agreed that Doukhobor men would help transport food and provisions to the front and remove wounded soldiers. Following this, in 1886, Doukhobors were enlisted in compulsory military training.

Under the new Doukhobor leader Peter Vasilievich Verigin,² in 1895 those who had been in military battalions laid down their guns and, as a result, were arrested, cruelly disciplined and marched in chains to Siberian gulags. The Doukhobor villagers continued in their declaration of pacifism. They gathered their weapons and burned them in huge bonfires in three areas of Georgia. These flames of peace spread throughout Russia and Europe. Tsar Nicholas II responded by giving orders to punish the Doukhobors, drive them from their homes and disperse them amongst indigenous villages where they had no means of subsistence. Many perished.

On hearing of their plight, Russian author Lev (Leo) Tolstoy sent out a plea to his followers to help the beleaguered Doukhobors. Quaker groups in England and the United States responded and, together with the author, contributed money for Doukhobors to emigrate as this seemed to be the only way they could survive. Canada at the time was searching for settlers to cultivate the prairies and with their reputation as excellent farmers, Doukhobors were looked on as desirable immigrants.

Following the country's handling of Quaker and Mennonite pacifists,

2 After the passing of Lukeria Vasilievna Kalmikova in December 1886, Peter Vasilievich Verigin became the leader of the Large Party of Doukhobors. He was immediately exiled to the province of Archangel, then Obdorsk, Siberia. He guided Doukhobors through secret couriers who carried letters to his followers. The Large Party of Doukhobors eventually immigrated to Canada.

Canada gave the Doukhobors conscientious objector status and, in 1898, over 7,000 Doukhobors boarded four ships, at Batum on the Black Sea, bound for Canada. This was one of the largest immigrations to Canada at the time. They were settled under the Homestead Act in several regions of what is now Saskatchewan. They formed the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB) and, working communally, were able to fairly quickly develop fifty-seven villages.

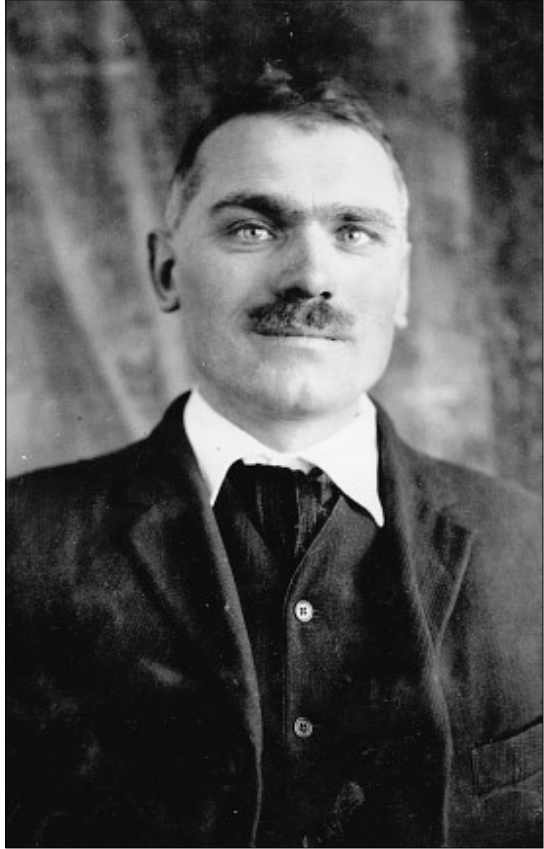
I knew my tall, strong, charismatic grandfather in his fifties and sixties, after his incarcerations, his lengthy illness due to ill-treatment in jails, and his forced withdrawal from public life. My family lived next door, and my grandparents' home was our home. Until my grandfather's passing in 1971, I worked beside him in the gardens, and sold produce at local markets where he would be surrounded by people wanting to talk to him. I heard fervent conversations with his friends, Grandfather often punctuating his words with gesturing hands. I knew my grandfather as a kind, caring man interested in his family and his correspondents throughout the world. He was also an avid reader. His passion ignited my spirit. His personal experiences and literary knowledge, and his awareness of the many different aspects of life, opened my eyes to the diversity of people and cultures and fed my eagerness to learn.

Pete Maloff wrote this memoir about the experiences that shaped his character and made him a pacifist. The years from his birth in 1900 to 1927 take us from his family's involvement in the Doukhobor pioneer life in Saskatchewan to a co-operative freedom village in Oregon. In his youth, he apprenticed with a renowned Russian/Ukrainian journalist, Anton Sherbak, and lived with a Russian Molokan family in San Francisco. Later, in a kind of rebellion, he joined some Russian adventurers to travel as a hobo, riding the rails in California. In the 1910s and 1920s he met many in the pacifist movement in California. A Protestant missionary, Mr. Greenfield, who had written the banned book *Ethics of Killing*, gifted him one of the two books that survived. The anti-war activist and writer Fanny Bixby Spencer welcomed him. He befriended those in the early beatnik movement and corresponded with pacifists Scott Nearing and Ammon Hennacy. His memoir chronicles these lives, from the wealthy and well-known to folk who were experimenting with alternative lifestyles.

Through my grandfather's memoir, I have been able to discover the experiences that made him the complex, fascinating character he was. My research into the people he knew and corresponded with, and whose books were left on his bookshelves, led me on a search for information about their lives. Some were

the radicals of the early twentieth century and I have been astounded to read of the similarities of their beliefs to those of Pete Maloff.

This book will add personal experience and understanding to the history of migration and the pacifist movement in western Canada and the United States. Anthropologist and folklorist Dr. Mark Mealing of Selkirk College said of this memoir: “A unique, valuable addition to Canadian Immigrant literature, especially strong for research in Canadian and Sectarian History. One must remember the great purpose to which Pete Maloff devoted his time and his labours—indeed his whole life: the spread of pacifism, of fuller understanding of Doukhobor ideas, and the betterment of the human spirit. May the preservation of this manuscript bring his goals a little closer.”³



Pete Maloff was a Doukhobor pacifist who, despite severe repercussions to him and the family, stood up for his beliefs in the sanctity of human life during World War I and World War II.

CHAPTER 1

CHILDHOOD

I was born in the province of Saskatchewan⁴ a year after the Doukhobors immigrated to Canada; that is in the year 1900. My childhood was spent under the influence of that period when the valiant achievements of Doukhobors—the burning of their firearms and their transition into a higher moral standard of life—were still fresh in the memory of many who participated in this amazing enterprise.

I do not know and do not remember what happened in the first few years. My parents moved north from Buchanan to Preeceville, and then, two or three years later, returned and settled in the new settlement then called Khristianovka.

The village of Khristianovka was about four miles from Buchanan, Saskatchewan. It was situated on a plain, and not far off a tree-shrouded river shouted joyfully, almost splashing against some of the outlying houses. On all sides stretched groves of poplars, with various northern conifers amongst them.

We lived communally, two families to a house. The rest was built up later. The field work was done communally. The community house for prayer and meetings was distinguished from the other buildings and we had a communal granary, a bakery, barn and sheep shed. In our village, we had men of initiative with ideas on how to better community life; prominent amongst them was Anton Savelievich Popoff. He took upon himself the responsibility of planting trees around the homes and through his efforts and insistence, rows of trees were planted on each side of the avenue.

Sundays were spent happily; there were choirs whose singing blended and mingled with the twilight and faded into the distant reaches of the night. On Sundays, many of the villagers gathered in the boulevard of trees. Here were the older people, some in their latter years; greybeards who had seen much of life. In our village there were several who distinctly remembered the Molochna Vodi (Milky Waters) and the villages of Tavria.⁵ Especially prominent were

4 Prior to 1905 this area was part of the Northwest Territories. In 1905 it became a province, Saskatchewan.

5 Wikipedia: Tavria is primarily a geographic toponym for a subregion of Southern Ukraine that encompasses steppe territories between Dnieper and Molochna rivers and Crimean peninsula.

Vakulyushka Strelieff and Alyosha Fedosoff. They came from Tavria when they were between ten and twelve years old. Alyosha was perhaps the older.

Often the youths and even the adults would gather round saying, "Vakulyushka, tell us about Tavria."

Grandfather Vakul was a fascinating storyteller. He would stroke his long grey beard and begin: "So, you want to know something about Tavria. Life was not easy there either. In the Caucasus life was better." Then he would add, "Yes, children, we started out from Tavria by caravan early in spring, and long did we ride; some by oxen, some by horse, and some marched along on foot. How difficult was the migration to the Caucasus? At first it wasn't too bad, but when we came to the Kazbek mountains,⁶ how different! There we met with cold, wind, snow. There was no grass and hay had to be hauled from a distance. But with the help of God, we finally gained our destination."

Here someone interrupted, "But did you see the long bridge?"

"What do you mean, did we see it? How else would you be able to cross the mighty Don? What do you take us for, birds? Yes, the bridge was there, boys, I tell you it was there! In all my life, I never saw anything like it. You walk and walk and the end is not in sight and then you take a glance at the river, so wide and so deep that your heart fails within you. How wealthy Russia is! What breadth, what spaciousness, what rivers and forests, but there is no place for her children to live in her; just look where she drives us."

We children were attracted to him by these tales and crowded closer around him. Order was kept by Zakhar Nazaroff. He was a cripple, injured by lightning while still a child. His head seemed loose on his shoulders and wobbled in all directions. He had nowhere to go and he usually spent his time with the old men of whom he was a fiery defender from any attack made upon them. And why shouldn't he defend them, when they held him by the hand and let no harm come to him? Some boys, as you know, like to pester old men and just for the sake of a little fun would ask them endless questions.

Then Zakhar would jump up and his wobbly head and body would writhe grotesquely. "Aha, me give you goot; God too," pointing his hand skywards. He was half mute.

In defence of such outbreaks old Vakul would twitch his whiskers, stroke his long grey beard and resume his story.

"You boys, of course, know nothing about it, and maybe you think that the Emperor Alexander I himself used to visit the Doukhobors in Tavria and

6 Kazbek Mountain is on the border of Russia and Georgia. An extinct volcano, it is one of the highest peaks in the Caucasus Mountains.

talk with Kapustin, and that if it hadn't been for his mercy that there would be only bones left of us. Well, I say: Thanks to our guides. They were pretty wise; they knew how to guard their flock, and that's why they were so friendly with kings and princes. Do you think there was any other reason? No. Why do you think Lushechka sent messengers to Petersburg? She knew even before that there would be a war with Turkey, and because of these messengers, Michael, the king's nephew, came to visit her in her home."

All this time, Alyosha would remain silent. From time to time he would tap his cane and gently cough, as though well content with his companion's story. Alyosha had a thin, long nose and reddish hair. His moustache dropped downward like a seal's and bristled so that looking at him, one would imagine that at any moment he might snort.

Sometimes the boys would say: "How about you, Alyosha. Why don't you tell us anything about Tavria?"

"And what do you want to know?" he would ask fiercely.

"Well, how did our ancestors live?"

For a long time, he would make no reply. You could see the feeling of longing in his eyes, and then he would speak.

"How did they live? In suffering and persecution. And now I see very little faith left: they are chasing after farms, selling their souls to the devil. Why do they break up and break away and break apart? That's no good." And spitting profusely, he would add: "What can we do about it? This looks like our fate. Our beloved Lushechka once told us, 'The Doukhobors will ride away on a grey horse to the River Swan and there will be few left. They will scatter in every direction; some will go to the cities to run after the glitter of wealth; and some will be lost for no reason at all. Very few Doukhobors will be left. Very few, indeed.'"

And thinking a little, as though he had just remembered something, Alyosha continued:

"Lushechka said that the Doukhobors would ride away on a grey stallion far across the sea, would live there their appointed time, and then would return on a white duck. This is plain to us now. You see, it took four or five ships to bring the Doukhobors here, but from here there will only be one."

To the villages also came various Doukhobor eccentrics who by their stupid escapades threw everybody off balance. Mitya Swetlikoff, tall and stately, more than once came to our village.

He would pass through the village several times with his coat turned inside out, and repeat these words again and again: "Cows shouldn't be milked, calves shouldn't be starved, eggs shouldn't be eaten, chickens shouldn't be killed, sheep

shouldn't be raised, and their wool shouldn't be clipped," and so on and on.

Children crowded after him, some repeating his words, others laughing and teasing him.

One day he went through the village and no one would give him a place to sleep. Our neighbour, that is, the mother of the family with whom we shared the house, Grandmother Kolesnikoff, brought him to her place to sleep. We had a common kitchen and we could see what went on in their quarters. They almost always kept their door open, so that they could make use of the warmth, and not have to keep their own stove going.

Whenever I would stand a long time staring into their room the old man, Vanya, would call out: "Peter, will you have some sugar?" and he would give me a piece so that I would go away.

This time Markhunya led Mitya into the room and asked her husband: "Vanya, I brought Mitya here to spend the night. How about you, have you anything against this?"

"No, no, you shouldn't have done that. He with his foolish ravings will cause trouble amongst the people. Everybody will say that Vanya Kolesnikoff is supporting agitators."

"Well, what shall we do? He is walking around and no one will give him a place to spend the night. And in our psalms it says: Welcome the traveller, feed the hungry."

"What kind of traveller is he? A babbler! He should stay at home. What good is he doing going around hollering, 'Cows shouldn't be milked, calves shouldn't be starved'? If he likes them so much, let him to the barn and sleep with them."

"Very well, let him sleep in the barn. But if I had my way, you would lie down with him and I would sleep on the bench."

"No, no! Heaven forbid! I do not even want him to stay with us."

Markhunya submitted to her husband. Turning to her guest she said to him, "Mitya, dear, please go into the barn. You see the kind of Christians we are. We have no room for a stranger to sleep overnight."

Next morning, alarm! The cows and calves were not there, the sheep fled, and the chickens were out of their coops. Mitya Swetlikoff had let out all the animals.

Vanya scolded his wife Markhunya: "And you wanted to leave him here for the night. I will not let him into this yard again, the scoundrel!"

"You would not let him in? How could you say that?" cried Markhunya. "But how do you know whom you would be turning away? The son of God, descendant of the King of Israel. In the embodiment of Mitya Swetlikoff. God's

truth walks throughout the land and if we do not accept it, we do not accept God himself.”

“Silence, you fool. Some God you found!”

“Oh, Vanya, Vanya, you do not yet know. Truth is not kind; it is always prickly, and that is why nobody likes it. And you think that our singers will show it to us? No, it will not come from them. They only like to show off and boast about their voices, and to ogle at the women’s eyes and breasts, but no good has come from them yet.”

One Sunday, a rumour spread that Anatole Konshin from Russia was coming to our village. Our people didn’t know exactly who he was. They welcomed all such visitors as messengers from Grandfather Tolstoy. And soon, Konshin appeared. A large crowd gathered and he began, saying that he came from faraway Russia just to visit us, and brought with him warmest greetings to the Doukhobors from all their Russian friends. “Though you left them, there are many who think of you and are lonesome without you.”

These cordial words moved our hearts and many wept. Grandfather Vakul couldn’t keep quiet; he kept asking Konshin: “How are they all there? Were you at the Caucasus? And how are the Doukhobors who were left behind? Did they let those who were exiled to Siberia return to their homes?” Thinking a little, he added, “Did you perhaps hear anything definite, whether or not Tsar Nicholas is yet begging the Doukhobors to return to Russia? Oh, my brother, to tell you the truth, we grieved the first few years. Here we are strangers, we lived our whole life there, and we are longing to go back—home.”

“Couldn’t you get used to it?”

“How can you get used to it? Their tongue is strange, just as if it were wooden, you couldn’t understand a word. And even these English people themselves, they’re so proud and so selfish. Not long ago one of them, a Mr. Schmitt, who lives near a lake and is considered in our locality to be quite rich, came to pay us a visit. Just imagine; we have been living here for five or six years and he did not come here once! A week ago, he bought himself a machine that the boys call an automobile, and he came down here on it. We were all on the boulevard, the whole village, and he didn’t even get out and take off his cap. He just sat there as if he were saying: ‘Look how rich I am; I came here on a car!’”

At the end of the discussion, our people sang psalms and spiritual songs, and so the day passed in solemn celebration. I remember that Konshin even sang a solo, and our people praised him.

In 1905 the Doukhobors from Siberia, whom we called Yakuts because they were exiled in the Yakutsk region, arrived from banishment. My family were by that time living in a different house, and Vasya and Vasyunya Chutskoff

and their children moved in with us. Vasyunya Chutskoff was the daughter of Markhunya and Vanya Kolesnikoff. They lived with us all winter and spring; it was crowded but we bore it. Life was far from quiet, but in a way very happy. We gathered to sing, to talk and to discuss. At that time the Japanese War was at its height and the Yakutsk people brought with them a new song: “The battle of Port Arthur brought us horror, shame and pain. For we say without question that the bloodshed was in vain.” This song was sung by everybody and it spun a sort of spiritual thread among us.

On the other hand, many already had left the villages to individual farms and this was tempting others also, among them my parents. They too were preparing to acquire a farm. From time to time the four families that had left used to gather at our house. Others also attended. I remember once, quite a sizable group gathered; among those present was Anton Savelievich Popoff and his educated daughters. My brother had also gone to school for several years, and here Anton Savelievich, apparently wanting to show how useful a school education was, took up a certain journal and said:

“See, here is the battleship Varyaha. The Japanese sunk it.” He turned over several pages and said: “And see here—Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin,⁷ the artist, who painted the war; he also perished.”

He turned to my brother and said: “Well, Nikolka, read to them what is written here.”

Nikolai took the journal; he did not yet know how to translate into the Russian language very well. Anton Savelievich took it from him and gave it to his daughter Vasyunya, and asked her to translate it. She did this so clearly and distinctly that it seemed as if she was reading Russian.

Many were astonished: “My God! So that’s an English school for you!”

Grandfather Grisha Sherstobitoff was sitting on the bed near me. He said: “And to think of it; we lived our whole life and yet like stupid fools we can’t read a word and don’t know a thing about anything! Now look for yourself, if we need schools or not! There’s no question about it! Vasyunya went through it as easily and as beautifully as a nightingale through her song. What joy it brings to the heart just to hear her, and how pleasant to look upon her—a mere child and yet being able to do that!”

Several other voices took it up. “Yes, Vasyunya, you read it beautifully.”

Still another episode occurred in our home at that time. There came from

7 Wikipedia: Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin was one of the most famous Russian war artists and one of the first Russian artists to be widely recognized abroad. He visited the Doukhobors in the Caucasus and painted their portraits.

Prince Albert several Sons of Freedom with Ivan Perepolkin at the head. They lived with us for three days. One evening some people from the village gathered at our house, and there were the Sons of Freedom also. I even remembered that they stripped naked and talked earnestly with my family. It almost ended in a fist fight. What they were talking about and quarrelling, I could not clearly understand. This gathering was incomprehensible to me, but it left a sharp impression.

Many years later, I met this Ivan Perepolkin when he was an old man. He told me in detail what had taken place that night, and my parents confirmed his account. His explanation appears in the chapter on “The Sons of Freedom” [in *Doukhobors: Their History, Life and Struggle*].

Thus, I spent my earliest years in the rural customs brought over from far-away Russia. Communally we ploughed, mowed hay, made bricks and prepared food. Everywhere there was the turbulent large-scale productivity of community effort. Music, that is, choir singing, spread out to the very horizon wherever people lived. Civilization was far away and we grew up and developed in these primitive, idyllic surroundings.