

ZHANNA ARSHANSKAYA: A BIOGRAPHY IN VERSE

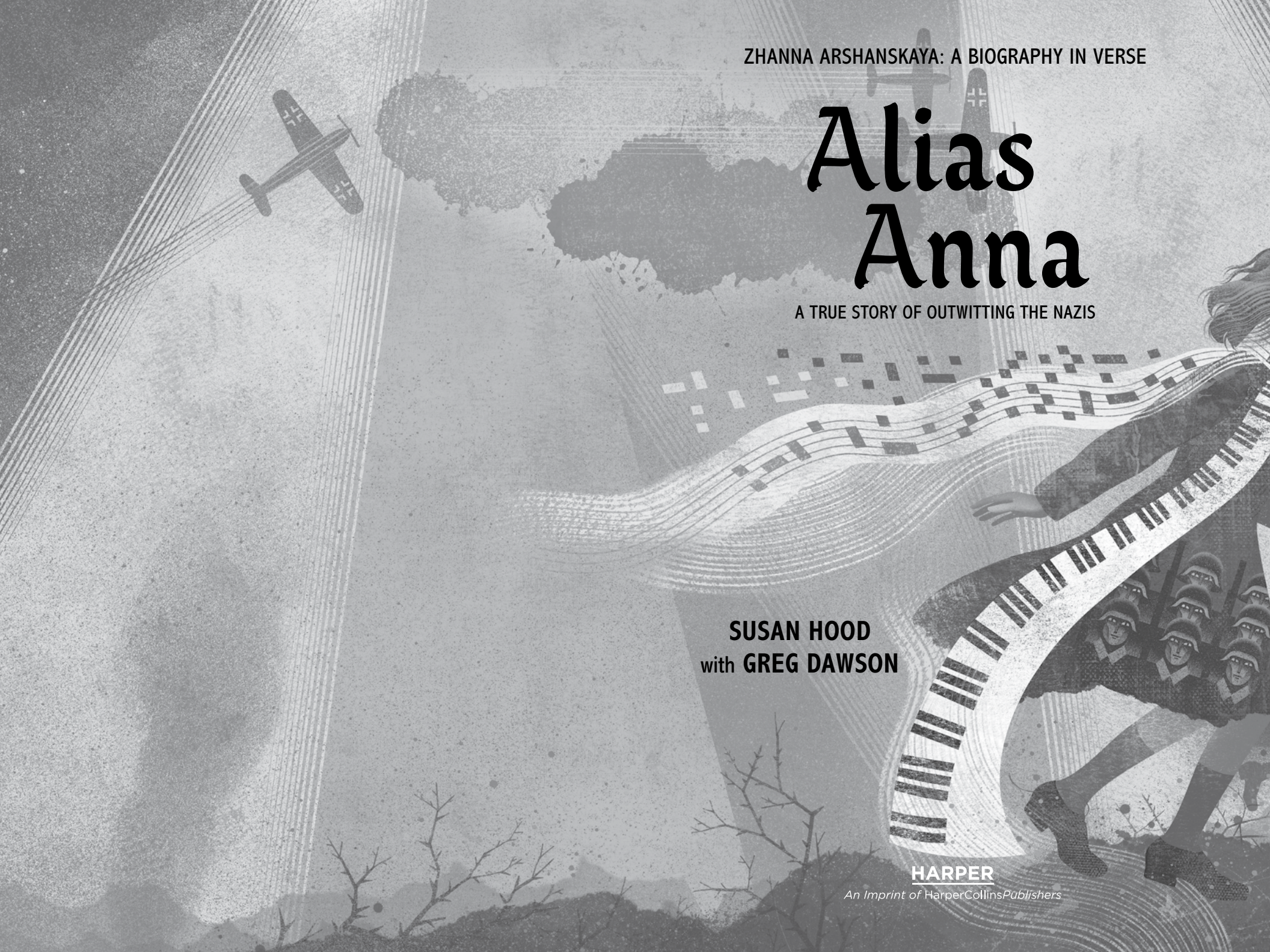
Alias Anna

A TRUE STORY OF OUTWITTING THE NAZIS

SUSAN HOOD
with GREG DAWSON

HARPER

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First Edition

NOTES

WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW

Most of us have heard about the gas chambers at concentration camps like Auschwitz, Treblinka, and others, but not about the killing fields that preceded them. Most people have no idea that the Nazis' systematic mass extermination of six million European Jews began months before the permanent gassing facilities in the death camps became fully operational. In Ukraine, thousands upon thousands of Jews were murdered en masse (at Kamianets-Podolskii in August 1941, at Babi Yar that September, and in Odessa in October). Most were shot in the back and pushed into ravines. These massacres and others happened well before the December Chelmno gas van murders in Poland, and it was just the beginning. Historian Alexander Kruglov estimates that more than 500,000 Ukrainian Jews died in the second half of 1941. By 1944, almost 1.5 million Jews in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe had been assassinated in this "Holocaust by bullets." These

crime scenes were quickly covered up, first by the Nazis and then by Stalin.

For the Nazis, these brutal, cold-blooded shootings took a toll on the soldiers' psyches. Some questioned killing women and children. SS chief Heinrich Himmler had a ready answer: if they didn't kill the families, the children might grow up to avenge their fathers' deaths, causing harm to German sons and grandsons.

So the gas chambers were invented to be more "humane" for the Nazis, allowing them to try to emotionally distance themselves from the killings. This method was deemed efficient, and was relatively secret, close to the Jewish ghettos, and far from prying eyes.

By the time the first concentration camps gassed their victims, most of the Jewish people in Ukraine had already been eliminated by bullets. In 1943, Soviet-Jewish journalist Vassily Grossman wrote, "In Ukraine there are no Jews. Nowhere—Poltava, Kharkov, Kremenchug, Bristol, Yagotin . . . A people has been murdered." Zhanna and her sister Frina are among the few known survivors of the estimated 16,000 men, women, and children murdered in the killing field of Drobitsky Yar.

The stories of the ravines, of Babi Yar, Drobitsky Yar, and others, continued to be covered up for decades. After the war, Stalin slammed the Iron Curtain down on the story, keeping it from the West and suppressing the truth

from his own countrymen.

Novelists and poets picked up the cause, perhaps most famously Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who wrote “Babi Yar” in 1961 and “The Apple Trees of Drobitsky” in 1989. His poems protested the Soviet Union’s refusal to acknowledge the killing fields and the anti-Semitism that still pervaded his country. One section of “Babi Yar” reads:

The wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar.

The trees look ominous,

like judges.

Here all things scream silently,

and, baring my head,

slowly I feel myself

turning grey.

And I myself

am one massive, soundless scream

above the thousand thousand buried here.

I am

each old man

here shot dead.

I am

every child

here shot dead.

Nothing in me

shall ever forget!

Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich set “Babi Yar” to music, and it became his Symphony No. 13. It was this poet, this composer, and other authors who exposed this tragedy for the world to see. Such is the power of the arts.

Even so, a memorial to those who died at Babi Yar erected in the 1970s did not identify the victims as Jewish, but simply referred to “peaceful Soviet citizens.” It was only when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 that this tragedy was fully revealed as the ruthless extermination of Jewish people. And it wasn’t until 1991, half a century after Zhanna and Frina’s family and so many others were murdered, that a memorial at Drobitsky Yar was begun. The memorial opened in 2002.

The story of Zhanna and Frina is a true story. And one we should never forget.

Permission to reprint an excerpt from “Babi Yar”
granted by Maria Yevtushenko

PHOTOGRAPHS

Courtesy of the Dawson Family (unless otherwise noted)

How did photos of Zhanna and Frina as children survive when the Nazis forced the family to leave Kharkov without most of their belongings? It was thanks to Zhanna's aunt and uncle, who took family photos with them when they fled east.



*Zhanna at the piano,
age five*



*Zhanna and Frina were ages
eight and six when they moved
to Kharkov and became the
youngest students ever awarded
scholarships at the famed Kharkov
Conservatory of Music.*



*Zhanna and Frina's
father, Dmitri*



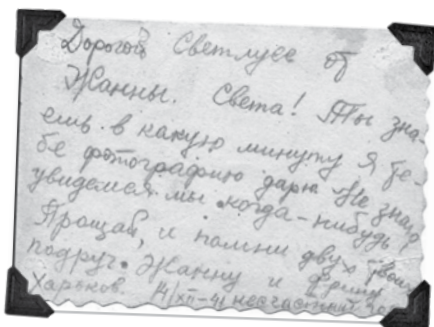
Their mother, Sara



*Front row, left to right: Cousin Tamara, Uncle Simyon,
Uncle Moisey, Frina, Mother Sara
Back row: Cousin Celia, Aunt Eve, Zhanna, Father Dmitri*



Photo of Frina, age twelve (left), and Zhanna, age fourteen (right), which the girls gave to Zhanna's friend Svetlana the day before they were marched out of Kharkov



To Dear Svetulya from Zhanna! Sveta, You know at what kind of moment I'm giving you this picture. I don't know if we will ever see each other again. Take care. Remember your two dear friends Zhanna and Frina.

*Kharkov, 14.XII.41
sad/sorrowful year*



The Bogancha family, who sheltered Zhanna and Frina for two weeks when they first escaped from the death march. From left to right: Prokofiev Philipovich Bogancha, Evdokiya Nicolaevna Bogancha, and Zhanna's classmate Nicolai Bogancha. Yad Vashem has honored them as Righteous Among the Nations.



Zhanna (left) and Frina



*The troupe: Zhanna, trying to hide center stage
(third row, center, with her head turned)
Frina refused to pose for this photo.*



*Lieutenant Larry Dawson
from Charlottesville, Virginia,
was head of the Funk Kaserne
displaced persons camp in
Munich, Germany.*



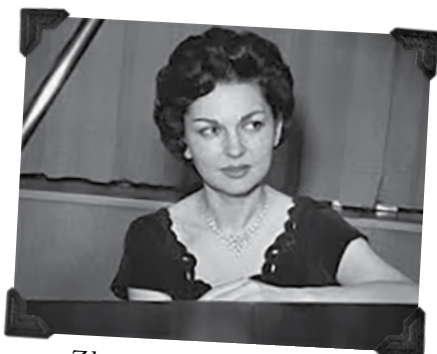
Larry Dawson's best friend, Ed Savage, escorted Zhanna and Frina to the SS Marine Flasher, the ship that set sail to America on May 11, 1946.



*Zhanna and her husband, David Dawson
(brother of Larry Dawson), 1947*



Frina in her early twenties



*Zhanna in her early thirties,
circa 1961*



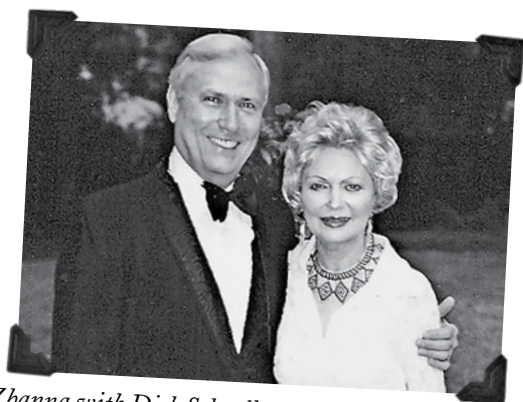
*Zhanna with grandchildren
Chris and Aimée, 1987*



*Aimée at her high school graduation
with her grandma Z, 1999*



*Greg Dawson and Zhanna on her
eightieth birthday, 2007*

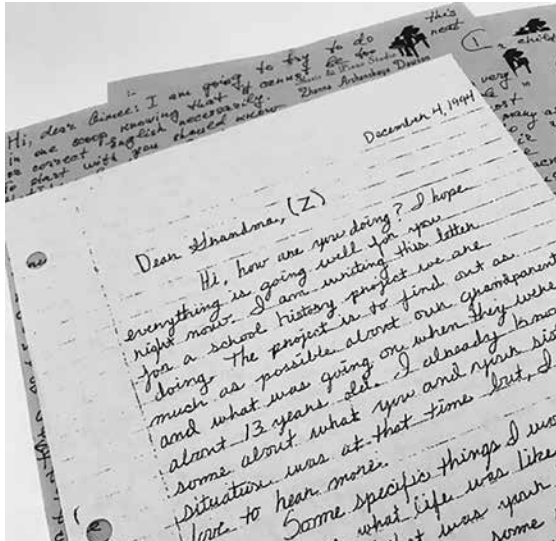


*Zhanna with Dick Schnelker, her partner of 35 years,
circa 2008*



*Zhanna (age 93) with her daughter-in-law
Candy Dawson, 2020*

THE LETTERS



The letter that eighth grader Aimée wrote to her grandma Z, and Zhanna's letter in response

HOW DID AIMÉE FEEL

WHEN ZHANNA ANSWERED HER LETTER?

“More than anything, receiving her letter felt like an act of cosmic defiance,” said Aimée. “Z doesn’t like others to tell her what to do or tell her who she is. So when the

world was convinced she *wouldn't* share, she did. It may have been a reward for my own defiant act—asking! As others said it was fruitless to ask, I did it anyway. And she responded with a gift. It felt a little like a playful dance of defiance.

“I was in middle school when I got that letter, and we all know what happens in middle school—we feel an outsized influence from others’ opinions and words can cut deep. This piece at the very end of [my grandmother’s] letter really hit home. Zhanna wrote, ‘I found out how little death mattered to me if you weren’t ridiculed, laughed at.’”

Humiliation is much worse than death. . . . Our honor is life itself.
—Zhanna Arshankaya

Thinking of typical humiliations kids face in middle school, Aimée said, “While there were vast differences in gravity, I realized it was basically the same thing—being harassed and being humiliated and treating people poorly for things they couldn’t control could, in its worst state, bubble up into [what] Hitler created—a mindset that is true bullying.”

Zhanna’s letter heightened Aimée’s awareness of injustice, fueled even earlier by the schoolyard bullying of her brother with intellectual disabilities. She said that what she learned from Z “has been an undercurrent in all the work

I've done since then." Her volunteer work for organizations that fight bias, bigotry, and racism began shortly after learning her grandmother's story, and her advocacy for all people disadvantaged by the system continues today.

FINDING ZHANNA'S STORY

AFTERWORD BY ZHANNA'S SON GREG DAWSON

I never had the experience of being a grandson. I never rode on my granddad's shoulders or went downtown with him on Saturdays for ice cream. I never sat on my grandmother's lap as she read me *Tom Sawyer* or helped me learn how to swim. I never heard stories about where my grandparents grew up, what life was like when they were my age, and what my mom and dad were like when they were kids.

All this seemed normal to me. I never even thought about it, never asked my parents why I didn't have grandparents like other kids. The space filled by grandparents in most families was empty in mine—a vast desert devoid of family trees, stories, faces. It stretched to the horizon beyond my ken.

“Why didn't you ever ask about your grandparents?” I was sixty years old when first asked this question. It came from someone in the audience at a Barnes & Noble, where

I was speaking about *Hiding in the Spotlight*, the adult book I wrote about my mother's escape from the Holocaust. I had no answer for the baffled questioner and jokingly said I was a clueless kid only interested in sports and TV cowboys.

But I wondered, too, and the question kept coming up. The grandparents in question were my mother's parents, Dmitri and Sara, murdered by Nazis in Ukraine. Why didn't I ever ask her about them when I was growing up? To begin with, I never heard their names until I was nearly thirty years old. That's when my mother—for the first time—told me the story of how she and her sister Frina survived the Holocaust.

Still, why hadn't simple curiosity ever led me to ask Mom about her parents—*my* grandparents? Wasn't it natural to want to know? My guess is I didn't ask because my other grandparents, too, were absent from my life. My paternal grandfather died when my dad was thirteen. I have only a dim memory—a wraithlike silhouette across a darkened room—of the one time I visited my grandmother. You can't miss something that was never there.

There was something else that was never there, conspicuously missing from the home of a Holocaust survivor: Any rituals or traditions or celebrations common in Jewish homes. No synagogue, no Seder, no bar mitzvah for me or my brother. And, of course, no stories of those

who perished in the Shoah. In December, we celebrated the holidays with a Christmas tree, as my dad's family had.

Ours was a thoroughly secular home—as was my mother's in Ukraine—and yet it was culturally Jewish. How could this be? Maybe the best way to explain it is to recall something my mother once said about my father, who grew up Roman Catholic in Charlottesville, Virginia: “He was the best Jew I ever knew.”

A violin prodigy, my dad at age fourteen was given a scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music in New York. In those days the great majority of Juilliard students were Jewish. He absorbed and fell in love with the Jewish cultural milieu, and on weekends was invited to the homes of classmates whose mothers fed the kid from Virginia potato latkes and matzo ball soup.

It wasn't just the food that made my father the best Jew my mother ever knew. It was the shared humor and politics and music. After Juilliard, he commenced a career in which, again, he was surrounded mostly by Jews in symphony orchestras and string quartets, in the company of luminaries such as George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein. This was the world I grew up in. When my parents threw a party most of the guests were Jewish faculty at the Indiana University School of Music. As a kid, I took it all in.

Unlike me, my children, Chris and his younger

sister, Aimée, were blessed by rich relationships with grandparents: my wife Candy's mother and father and his second wife, and my mother, Zhanna. They never knew my dad, who died four months after Chris's birth—a priceless connection short-circuited. If not for my mother's vivid presence in Aimée's life, her remarkable story would have gone untold, buried like her parents in the annals of Holocaust horrors.

Aimée was thirteen when her middle school history teacher asked students to interview a grandparent about what their life was like at the same age. Aimée, unschooled in the Holocaust and not aware of her grandmother's story, turned to "Z," as she affectionately called her. We silently wished Aimée luck in penetrating a fortress of silence, which I had breached only once, sixteen years earlier.

I had been working as a columnist at my hometown newspaper in Bloomington, Indiana, when NBC aired the groundbreaking miniseries *Holocaust*—nine and a half hours spread over four nights in April 1978. All I knew then was that my mother was a Russian refugee who came to America after the war. I hoped she had a few wartime memories I could cobble together for a column to run during the miniseries.

Gingerly, I asked her to share her memories. Grudgingly, she divulged the story she had kept from me as a child because she deemed it "too cruel" to subject young children

to such things. The column ran, but my mother did not watch *Holocaust* and made it clear she had no interest in ever speaking again about her experience. So when Aimée wrote to Z with her request, we crossed our fingers and did not hold our breath.

We had underestimated the mystic bond between grandchild and grandparent. Aimée’s “Dear Z” letter elicited a “Dearest Aimée” reply—four handwritten pages on eight-by-ten inch stationery—my mother relating her Holocaust experience in deeper and more personal detail than she had years earlier for my column. It rang with love for her homeland, sorrow for her lost family, fury for the Nazis—“I can never tell anyone what hatred I had for them”—concluding with a commitment to making her story “known to this world.” It was a long-delayed catharsis, an unlocking of memories, a second liberation—and her granddaughter had supplied the key.

Fired by a new mission, my mother agreed to be interviewed for Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Project—a video archive of survivor testimonies—and sat down with me over several years of interviews leading to the publication of two adult books about her experience and the Holocaust in Ukraine, *Hiding in the Spotlight* (2009) and *Judgment Before Nuremberg* (2012). Books with artful covers, numbered pages, and compressed narratives may give the false impression of history as an orderly beast.

Like history and life itself, book research is disorderly—a long and crooked road with hard obstacles and sweet serendipity, dry wells and gold mines, despair and triumph. The Nazis blew up Ukraine, scattering ashes to the winds. Imagine a crime scene with evidence, victims, and missing persons strewn across thousands of miles from America to Ukraine and Israel.

I thought I could write *Hiding in the Spotlight* using the interviews with my mother plus material gleaned from the internet, like the ship manifest from the SS *Marine Flasher* that brought them to America. I thought I didn't need to visit the distant crime scene. I was wrong. My first draft of *Hiding*, which I hoped was the final one, recounted the amazing facts of my mother's journey, but it didn't *feel* amazing. It lacked passion, a sense of place. "You need to go to Ukraine," Candy said.

She was right. I had to walk the streets of Berdyansk where little Zhanna roamed the bazaars, played by the sea, and joined funeral processions, bewitched by the mournful music. I had to visit the grand music conservatory in Kharkov where she and her sister Frina studied, and stand at the door of the apartment where Nazis terrorized her family. I had to see the barren field where the Arshanskys were among sixteen thousand Jews kept for two weeks in a factory with no heat or water in the dead of winter. I had to walk their final walk—their exact route, on the same day, in the same weather—to the killing field of Drobitsky

Yar. I needed to see the spot where my mother jumped out of line into the woods, cheating Hitler.



A sign under Drobitsky Yar's broken and twisted menorah memorial says, "Here the dead teach the living" in Latin, Ukrainian, and Hebrew. Photo credit: Patrick Breslin, patrickbreslin.net



Another part of the memorial complex. Photo credit: Patrick Breslin



Under the dome appears an open book engraved with one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not kill," written in ten languages. Photo credit: Tanya Zaharchenko

entertainers—singers, dancers, musicians—forced to perform for the Nazis, and to pose for the photo. All are staring straight at the camera except my mother, head turned in fear of being recognized. The photo was given to us by the woman who took it. She and her sister had worked with the troupe and read in a Jewish newspaper that we planned to visit the Kharkov Holocaust Museum. We were stunned when they introduced themselves and presented us with the photo.

Only because we traveled to Kharkov could we visit the home of Zhanna's classmate Nicolai Boganha (and meet his widow), where his Christian family sheltered the fugitive sisters for two weeks at great peril to their own lives, helping them invent aliases and a new story, before the girls began their long journey from persecution and fear to freedom.

In May 1946, when Zhanna and Frina boarded the SS *Marine Flasher*, which carried some eight hundred Holocaust survivors for the voyage to America, all she brought from her life in Ukraine was the sheet music for her beloved *Fantaisie-Improptu*, five perishable sheets she had miraculously preserved through five years of war. She brought no hope of ever being reunited with family or friends.

One day sixty years later, my mother answered the phone in her Atlanta condo. A woman speaking English

with a heavy Russian accent said she was Tamara, her cousin, calling from Israel, where her family had settled after the war. She had been trying to find Zhanna for decades, Tamara said. My mother was skeptical, suspecting an imposter, but Tamara persisted and made her believe. Tamara sent her the family photos subsequently used in *Hiding* and *Alias Anna*. It was the first time I had seen photos of my mother as a child and my grandparents, Dmitri and Sara. When we visited Tamara in Israel, she gave us more photos which expanded the picture of my mother's life—and mine.

Nearly eighty years after Nazis banged on her door in Kharkov, pieces of my mother's fragmented story continued to appear, fruit of our research and publication of the books. In 2018, I had a Facebook message from a stranger in Ukraine, a Ludmila. She explained that her mother, Svetlana, had been a friend of Zhanna's and lived on the same street. Before the Jews were marched away to the tractor factory, Zhanna gave Svetlana her blue silk concert dress for safekeeping.

After escaping the death march to Drobitsky Yar, Zhanna returned to get the dress, but on the way out the door a matching sash "dropped unnoticed and was left with me forever," said Ludmila, recalling her mother's words.

"Forever" ended in 2019. Svetlana's granddaughter, Kate, who lives in Brooklyn with her Russian husband,

Dmitri, visited her mother in Kharkov that summer and returned with the blue silk sash. A short time later the precious cargo arrived by mail at my mother's home in Atlanta. The sash and *Fantaisie* sheet music—the only remnants of the life she lost—have become our most treasured possessions.



*Zhanna's beloved sheet music from Chopin's
Fantaisie-Impromptu and the sash to the dress
she gave her friend Svetlana for safekeeping.
Photo credit: Candy Dawson*

On our next visit to Atlanta we sat with my mother as her still nimble pianist's hands caressed the silk. By then, at age ninety-two, dementia had largely silenced her speech and dimmed her memory, but as she ran her fingers through the silk, she nodded and smiled with a faraway look in her eyes. And I thought of the last thing she told

me in our many hours revisiting the past.

“Somehow the story, the history, went around us instead of through us. It is a miraculous thing because anything could have been done to us at any moment in those five years. We did not remain the same, I assure you.”

Nor did we.

THE PIECES ZHANNA AND FRINA PLAYED

ZHANNA'S SOLOS

Beethoven

Appassionata Sonata

Egmont Overture

Pathétique Sonata

Brahms

Hungarian Dances

Chopin

Étude in F Minor, op. 10

Étude No. 5, op. 10

Fantaisie-Improvisation in C-sharp Minor, op. 66

Nocturne No. 1, op. 9

Scherzo in B-flat Minor, op. 31

Waltz Brilliant in A-flat Major, op. 34

Waltz No. 14 in E Minor

Grieg

Piano Concerto in A Minor, op. 16

Liszt

Chasse-Neige, Transcendental Étude No. 12

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11

Mendelssohn

Scherzo à Capriccio

Rachmaninoff

Prelude in C-sharp Minor

FRINA'S SOLOS

Beethoven

Sonata in D Minor, op. 31 ("The Tempest")

Chopin

Nocturne No. 1, op. 9

Étude in F Minor, op. 10

Grieg

Peer Gynt Suite

Liszt

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2

Rachmaninoff

Prelude in G Minor

Schubert

Military Marches, op. 51

HITLER, STALIN, AND MUSIC

FASCINATING FACTS

Throughout World War II, music was used as both a weapon and a balm by dictators and citizens alike. Hitler and Stalin greatly increased access to “approved” music and used it as an important propaganda tool to rally and manipulate their people and to assert their racial and cultural superiority. For Resistance fighters, prisoners of war, and people like Zhanna and Frina, music was a way to protest, to communicate, and to survive. A way to stay human in the face of great suffering.

- In 1933, Hitler appointed Joseph Goebbels as the minister of public enlightenment and propaganda. Goebbels greatly increased the number of music halls available to the public and introduced a low-cost radio, “the people’s receiver.” He used both to spread Nazi-approved music and propaganda. Jewish musicians were thrown out of orchestras and banned from the radio.

- Classical German composers Bach and Beethoven were highly favored, especially music that applauded a patriotic past.
- Chopin was born in Poland, but in 1944, the Germans declared that he was German, of course, because they claimed he was descended from an old Alsatian family named Schopping.
- Jazz and other “degenerate music” was banned by Hitler and Stalin, as were composers of enemy nations such as Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, and Maurice Ravel.
- From 1946 to 1964, music banned by the Soviets was secretly recorded on “bone records,” X-ray film discarded by hospitals, thanks to an invention by Ruslan Bogoslawski.
- Hitler’s favorite composer was Richard Wagner (1818–1883), who was intensely anti-Semitic.
- Hitler’s personal music collection uncovered in a Moscow attic “included Russian composers labeled by the Nazis as ‘subhuman’ such as Peter Tchaikovsky, Alexander Borodin and Sergei Rachmaninoff.”

- The Composers' Union and the Writers' Union in the USSR got to work composing songs for the masses to boost morale and stir up patriotism. To the Soviets, music was a mighty weapon, a way to rally the people and armed forces and to assert the greatness of the Slavic culture that the Nazis defiled and called "subhuman."
- Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich took a job as a rooftop firefighter, sweeping incendiary bombs off the top of the Leningrad Conservatory. It was there that he began writing his renowned Symphony No. 7, a testament to the twenty-seven million Soviets who lost their lives in World War II.
- The score for Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 was smuggled to America and the rest of the world on microfilm. Performed and broadcast to thousands in America, the heartfelt symphony boosted American sympathies for Russian suffering and led to quadrupling American aid to the Soviet war effort in one year. Astonishingly, this music score translated into donations of airplanes, tanks, ammunition, medicine, and food that helped end the war.
- Chopin requested that upon his death, his heart be

buried in his native Poland. His sister smuggled it from Paris to Warsaw, where it was buried under a church monument and became a rallying point for nationalists. During World War II, the Nazis stole it and outlawed his music. It was returned to the church after the war.

FIELD TRIPS AND PLACES OF NOTE

Frederick Collection, Ashburnham, Massachusetts: A small museum where you can view and play an astounding collection of historic pianos dating from 1790 to 1920, including the same model Chopin played.

www.frederickcollection.org

Holocaust Museums, United States: You can visit many Holocaust memorials and museums across the country. Find them listed by state here:

[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Holocaust
_memorials_and_museums_in_the_United_States](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Holocaust_memorials_and_museums_in_the_United_States)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York: One of three remaining pianofortes made by Bartolomeo Cristofori, the man credited with inventing the piano around 1700.

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cris/hd_cris.htm

Morgan Library, New York, New York: Music manuscripts by Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, and many others spanning six centuries and many countries are available online.

[www.themorgan.org/collection/music-manuscripts
-and-printed-music](http://www.themorgan.org/collection/music-manuscripts-and-printed-music)

Steinway Factory, Astoria, New York: See how Steinway pianos are still handmade on a factory tour. For ages sixteen and up.

www.steinway.com/about/factory-tour

POETRY NOTES

Most of this book is written in *free verse*, which has no set meter or rhyme scheme. However, it uses poetic techniques, such as alliteration, anaphora, assonance, onomatopoeia, refrains, rhythm, and so on. Other poetic forms used in this book are as follows:

“A Candy-Coated Childhood” is a *tercet*, a poem with stanzas of three lines. They can rhyme or not.

“Burdens and Blessings” is a *list poem*, a descriptive list with specific details that define a person, place, thing, or experience.

“Testing” is written in *couplets*, stanzas of two lines each. Couplets can rhyme, but they don’t have to.

“Five-Year Plan” is a *cinquain*, a form of poetry composed of five lines with a pattern of two, four, six, eight, and two syllables.

“S for Slaughtered by Stalin” is an *ABC poem*, which uses words with initial letters from A to Z. A similar type

of poem is an *acrostic*, in which the first letter of each line spells out the subject of the poem when read from top to bottom.

“What Goes Around Comes Around” is a *reverso poem*, a form invented by Marilyn Singer. The poem reads one way going down and presents another idea or point of view when the same lines are read going up.

“Elegy” is named for its form. An *elegy* is a poetry form used to praise or mourn the dead, so it often has a sad or somber tone. Elegies follow no set pattern.

“True Terror” is a *triolet*, an eight-line poem in which line one repeats as lines four and seven and line two repeats as line eight. The rhyme scheme is ABaAabAB; the capital letters show lines that repeat.

“Awakened” is a *haiku*, a traditional Japanese form of unrhymed poetry, originally written as one vertical line and measured in morae, or breaths. Haiku taught in English usually have three phrases or lines and a set structure: five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Haiku are keen observations about single moments in time written in present tense; they refer to the natural world and often allude to season or time of day.

“Pyramid Scheme” is a *concrete* or *shape poem*, where words are arranged to form a picture of the subject of the poem. It can rhyme or not.

“Pain” is a *lyric poem*, a broad category that can

include a variety of poetic formats, but it's a short, private expression of emotion or powerful feelings. This one uses two quatrains and a couplet.

“What They Left Behind” is a *nonet*, a poem of nine lines. The first line has nine syllables, the second eight, and so on, until the last line ends with one syllable.

“Traveling On” is a *found poem*, which can take existing text found in signs, newspaper articles, graffiti, letters—any text—and use selected words to create a poem. The poet can add or delete text, change the lines or spacing, or leave the words unchanged. It's like a word collage. In this poem, each line is the title of a popular World War II song in the Soviet Union.

“Spinning Secrets” is a rhyming *quatrain*, a form that has one or more four-line stanzas. It's also a shape poem.

“Ode to Victory” is an *ode*, which means it celebrates a person, animal, object, or idea. It often has no formal structure and may or may not rhyme.

SOURCES

I am indebted to my co-author, Zhanna's son Greg Dawson, and his in-depth research tracing his mother's past. Reviewing the mother-son interviews, I was often astonished at how articulate and poetic Zhanna was in her off-the-cuff comments. This book relies on Greg's primary sources, including more than one hundred pages of interviews with his mom, family letters, emails, photographs, videos, a reparations statement, her oral histories as well as his adult books *Hiding in the Spotlight* and *Judgment Before Nuremberg*.

I first met Greg in Florida, where he and his wife Candy shared Zhanna's astounding story, memorabilia, and a video of their trip to Ukraine and Israel that shows his mother's house, piano school, and friends who helped Zhanna and her sister escape. It was fascinating. When I got up to go, none of us realized that we had been talking for five hours! We continued talking all that spring and

decided we wanted to work in concert to tell Zhanna's story to a younger audience, to kids Zhanna's and Frina's age when they first escaped. I suggested a biography in verse to echo the music that played such a big part of their lives.

Other sources include secondary sources: books, websites, museum files, and films. Zhanna has been interviewed by Steven Spielberg's Shoah Project, for the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, and for the National WWII Museum in the U.S.

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"The wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar . . ." Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Excerpted with the permission of Marie Yevtushenko.

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