



Source: Yorkshire Post (South/Sheffield) {Main}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Monday 1, June 2009
Page: 15
Area: 479 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 47760 Daily
BRAD info: page rate £9,856.00, scc rate £16.00
Phone: 0113 243 2701
Keyword: The University of Sheffield

Stories of horror and courage in Stalin's gulags uncovered

John Roberts

UP to four times as many people lost their lives in the Stalin's gulags as were killed in the Holocaust.

Now the discovery of more than 400 letters from those living in the prison camps has inspired one Yorkshire University academic, whose extended family were among those trapped, to produce a book and film bringing their story to life.

It was a criminal offence to have contacts abroad during Stalin's reign and sending letters to the West could have terrible consequence.

But one family dared to send 131 letters to relatives in Canada who had managed to flee the Soviet Union.

The Regehr family, which included three-year old Jascha, nine-year old Lena, her 12-year old sister Tina, older siblings and parents, sent out letters which document the horror of working in one of Stalin's Gulags.

The letters were forgotten for almost 60 years until brothers Frank and Peter Bargaen discovered them in a old biscuit tin while cleaning out their parent's loft and realised they were from relatives left behind.

The family fled to Canada in 1929 but many of their aunts, uncles and cousins were sent to work in labour camps.

They gave permission for Sheffield University academic Ruth Derksen Siemens to study them.

The letters include nine-year-old Lena asking "What will become of us?" Her sister Maria sends a sketch of the smelter where she is forced to work for a ration of bread.

The letters also document her brother being tortured to death and her father pleading

"Remember us – Do not forget us".

Despite the hardships that the Regehr family endured, Lena and some of her family survived the Gulag. In Cologne in 2004, Lena was interviewed for Dr Derksen Siemens' film *Through the Red Gate* and the book *Remember Us: Letters from Stalin's Gulag (1930-37)* to document their bravery.

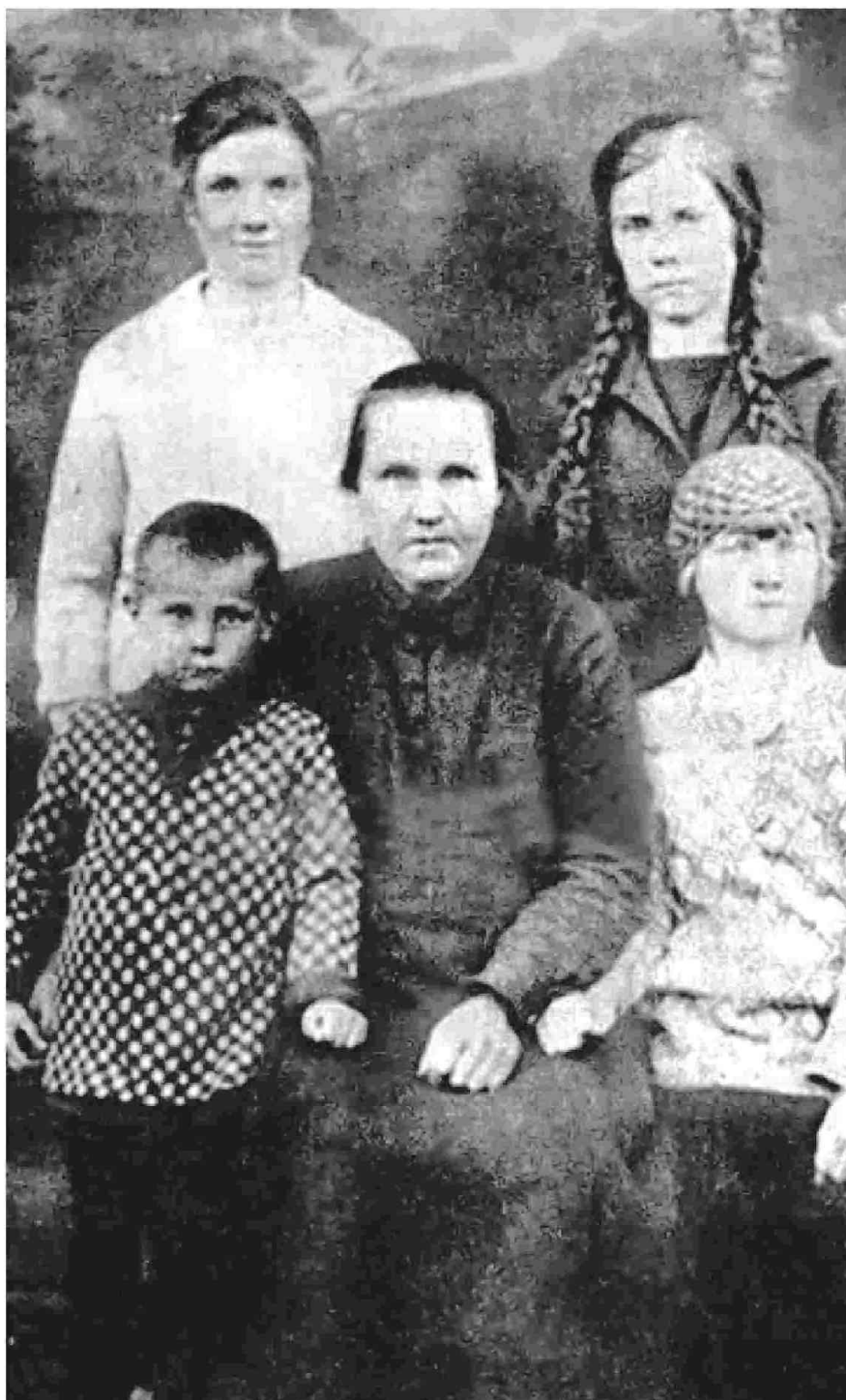
She said: "The silence needs to be broken. Growing up in Vancouver, I did not know my own story. But the world does not know this story.

"Too many see the red star or the hammer and sickle image and do not know that it is my relatives' swastika."



RED MENACE: The brutal Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.





DO NOT FORGET: Maria Regehr with her children, who worked in Stalin's forced labour camps.