

the physical details of the barracks in the camps—the bare floors, the iron barrel serving as a wood-burning stove, emitting suffocating fumes, the ranks of two- or three-tiered wooden sleeping platforms with no bedding at all unless it was a worn-out, lice-ridden mattress and a filthy blanket; the sanitary facilities or lack thereof; the inferior quality of the food and the skimpy rations; the impossible workload and the long workday; the primitive tools and equipment provided for work; the terrible subarctic climate; the cruel and inhumane treatment, the humiliation and dehumanization that reduced the inmate with an intellect a hundred times that of the crummy warders or the sleazy Chekists to a mere number, that robbed him of his name, his past, his life; and most abominable of all, the larger-than-life portrait of Stalin (occasionally Stalin and Lenin together) hanging in the mess hall to greet the prisoners, usually with a banner reading “Long Live the Great and Wise Stalin, Father of All the People.”

It took a long time for my father to be able to confront his traumatic experience and begin to write it down. And once he did begin working on his memoir, he didn't have time to finish it or fill in the details of the horrors of the Gulag. So, strangely and ironically, I learned about my father's life in the Gulag through the works of Solzhenitsyn in the 1960s and 70s, and later in what Gurgun Mahari, Suren Oganessian, Suren Ghazaryan, Mkrtych Armen, Vahram Alazan and many others, non-Armenians as well, diligently described. I heard my father speaking of the dreadful life in the labor