

POISK, issue #40, Oct. 2, 2003

## Father's Last Wish

***A German family from America found their siblings, who did not even have a clue that they had relatives, in Kramatorsk.***

### The Historical Roots

The replanting of the historical roots of the Renner family happened at the time of Catharine II, when German immigrants settled in the south of the Ukraine. The Renners did well for themselves on the Cherson Steppe, and at the end of the last century they owned their own chutor in the town of Wosnesensk, called Renner Chutor. At that time Michael Renner was the head of the family.

The peaceful, constructive work of the Germans on the Ukrainian soil was suddenly interrupted by the revolution. German heritage and the prosperity of the working farmer gave the Bolsheviks enough grounds to have the adult family members shot. The execution was brutal – it took place in front of the children. The Soviet Government replaced the executed parents for the children. Michael Renner, who later made his way to Kramatorsk, was 10 years old.



Семья Реннер в усадьбе своего отца.  
Слева направо сидят: Энджи,  
Эмма, Эдуард и Валери, справа стоит Дэвид.  
Familie Renner vor dem Haus ihres Vaters.  
Sitzend von links nach rechts: Angie,  
Emma, Eduard und Valerie, rechts steht  
David.

[**Photo caption:** Family Renner in front of the house of their Father. Sitting from left to right: Angie, Emma, Eduard and Valerie, David stands on the right]

According to the order of the “Leaders of all times and all people”, the children were not responsible for the deeds of their parents, and so the boy, who had come to Kramatorsk, who was named Renner, learned the trade of electrical mechanic, and was given a highly responsible job as director at “DonNarPit”. He fell in love with a Kramatorsk girl, Lubochka Kosenko. His feelings were returned, and soon they became husband and wife. With his own hands, the diligent Michael built a home in “Novi Svet”, where they lived peacefully.

In 1935 they had their first child – their daughter Emma. Two years later the family grew when Adolf was born. The caring father and loving husband did everything so that his wife and children had no wants. But their family happiness did not last long.

Then came the difficult times, the late 30's and early 40's. The time of the repression. One could get arrested for any reason at all. Whether it was something you said, or if you belonged to a different nationality. When the threat of an impending war came,

an attempt was made to banish the German-Russians to the farthest places possible. Many were deported to Kazakhstan. Michael could still remember the terrible happenings in his childhood, and that is why he decided to emigrate with his whole family. But his attempts to convince Luba of that were futile. His wife did not want to leave her homeland. She had not experienced the things that Michael had. She hoped that everything would somehow work itself out for the better.

In 1941 Michael made up his mind to emigrate by himself. But he hoped that his wife would follow him soon. He thought that their separation would have better results than his attempts to convince her, and that Luba with the daughter and son would follow him. When he left, he took along a photograph of his much-loved children. And after all these decades, exactly that picture became the link between the family members, whose fate had taken them to different continents.

### **Without a Father**

Luba with her German family name and her two children remained back in Kramatorsk. From that time on (and now that her husband was abroad) the persecutions started. Luba, who had been working in a kindergarten, was fired. From then on she was fired from every job, which she had painstakingly acquired. She sold her beautiful house, which she feared would be confiscated anyway. She had to move into the summer kitchen with the children.

During the time of the German occupation, Lubov Renner suffered as much as everyone else. The German heritage of her children did not help her in her plights. The Renner family had to endure the horrors and burdens of the war just like all the other inhabitants of the city.

[**Caption under photo:** Thanks to this old photo, which shows the young Emma and Adolf, is responsible for the family re-union. ]



На этом старом фото, благодаря которому братья и сестры нашли друг друга, маленькие Эмма и Адольф.

Dieses alte Foto, dem es zu verdanken ist, dass die Geschwister einander finden konnten, zeigt die kleinen Emma und Adolf.

After the war nothing had changed for her. The children went to school. The boy with his name of Adolf probably had the most difficulty. His peers did not leave him in peace. Adolf decided, cost what may, he was going to force the others to respect him. One teacher helped him with that, when she wrote on his note book: "This notebook belongs to Eduard Renner". "My name is Adolf", insisted the boy. "You will be an Edjik from now on", insisted the teacher gently, knowing how difficult it would be for a boy with such a name.

Adolf, now known as Edik, became involved heavily in sports. His class mates realized that he was physically superior, and did not dare to insult him. His industriousness and honesty did the rest. With time, when the students voted for a class representative, the children all voted for Edik.

Lubov Alexandrovna Renner tried to find her husband. But to all her many requests, she got the same cool official answer: “unknown – lost”.



Он такой же, как наш отец.  
Та же мимика, те же жесты

Er ist genau wie unser Vater. Die gleiche Mimik, die gleichen Geste

[captions: He is exactly like our father...  
The same mannerisms, The same gestures.



Я вначале не поверил...

Zuerst glaubte ich es nicht...

First I didn't believe it.]

## " Relatives are looking for you "

Years passed. Lubov Alexandrovna, who had remained faithful to her husband and his name, died. Emma and Adolf grew up. In any case, their destinies took a different turn.

Eduard Michaelovich (that is what he is called at work, even though the entry in his passport says Adolf), worked 50 years at NKMZ in the manufacture of industrial machines. He became a highly qualified journeyman (master). He was awarded the honorary title of “Earned NKMZ Industrial Machine Builder”. With much ado he was given his well-earned pension in 1997. But two years later he was asked to return to his work, where he is to this day. He and his family – wife and daughter – still live in the house he was born in, the one that once belonged to his father.

His sister Emma lives and worked in Kramatorsk as a sales clerk in a store. She was not saved from misfortune. At first she lost her husband, then her son, who died while serving in the Marines in Murmansk. She now only has her daughter, Svetlana.

Eduard Michaelovich was the only bearer of the Renner name left. On January 22<sup>th</sup> of this year the telephone rang in his house. It was somebody from Nikolaev. The woman on the other end gave her name as “Valentina Evgenievna Fromm”. After she reassured herself that she was speaking to a Renner, she said: “Relatives from America are looking for you”. – I didn't believe it at first, recalls Eduard Michaelovich. What kind of relatives? From where? Dad disappeared unknown. And other relatives we don't have. But the woman on the phone continued, on the internet is an old photo and the sentence: “Looking for Emma and Adolf Renner”. On the picture are two children – a boy and a girl. When I heard the description of the picture – *The girl sits on a chair, her right arm on her knee, and the boy sits on a*

*tree stump with his arm around the girl.* – my soul stirred, I almost cried, maybe I even cried, remembers the excited Eduard Michaelovich. Because I have the same picture at home.



Михаил Реннер (слева) и Эдуард Реннер (справа) в молодости.

Michael Renner (links) und  
Eduard Renner als Jugendlicher.

### **The Fate of the Emigrants**

There was another house in which that same picture was kept. That house was on the opposite side of the globe in the State of Washington. In 1995 in this house died Michael Christianovich Renner, who, until the end of his days kept the remembrance of his first family alive. He thought of them, loved them, and would like to have seen them, but could not. In 1941 Michael Renner did not dare to stay in the Soviet Union. The terrible pictures in his mind of the death of his father and mother

reminded him all the time of the possible impending danger. He emigrated to Germany, to wait there and hope for five long years, that Luba would find him and come to him. Out of fear that he might bring difficulties to his family's situation, he did not try to look for them himself. Every time he thought that his family might be deported to Siberia, or even worse, that they could be shot, he was horrified. The war and the uncertainty did not leave him any hope.

In 1947 Michael met a likable girl. It turned out she was German, a refugee from Rumania. – They lived in the same apartment. – so Valerie Renner, sister of Eduard and Emma tells the story of their parents' meetings. "Mom lived a story below, exactly under dad's window. Dad found out she was good cook, and so they got to know each other."

They started a new family. In Germany three sons were born to Michael and Angela (that was the name of his second wife). Soon after that Michael took his family to America. It was not easy in their new home. In North Dakota, where he had settled, one could only work as a farmer, which wasn't exactly Michael's strong suit. In 1950 he moved his family to the State of Washington.

There Michael found a job as a mechanic in a factory. He learned the language and the intricacies of his profession, dreamed to become an engineer one day. His diligence and enthusiasm at work made it possible for him to buy a house, where three more children were born, two daughters and a son. And on the wall of the new home, in a place of honor, hung the picture of little Emma and Edik from Kramatorsk.

### **7 Years of Searching**

- Valerie explains: "We knew that dad loved the family he left back in the Soviet Union. Once we even suggested that we look for them. And if it has to be, we could go there and find out everything. We would find them for sure." Dad was horrified. He was still afraid that he could somehow harm them by doing that. To be honest, we

did not think that we would find them alive. We were afraid that we would only find death certificates.”

Emma and Eduard’s American siblings lost all hope. But they still kept searching. For 7 years. From 1995 on, when father, shortly before he died, begged his children, “Find them, tell them that I always thought about them and loved them. And the most important part – you are one family.”

The first thing Valerie did was to put the picture on her web site on the internet. Information was sent to a German search –magazine.

And finally fate brought Valerie and Valentina Fromm of Nikolaev together. This German lady was busy doing her own family tree at one time, and then with those of others, until she finally decided that this was her calling. She founded the public organization, “Rebirth”, which is dedicated to searching for lost people. Now this organization works in close conjunction with the American organization “GRHS”.

After Valentina saw the picture on the internet, she looked in the Ukrainian telephone directory Telecom for the Renner family.

### **They found their own Chutor – helped strangers**

Before their arrival in Kramatorsk, part of the Renner family – Valerie, Angie and David (Eduard and Emma’s sisters and cousin) looked for the place where at one time stood the family chutor, where their grandfather was killed. They found the graves of relatives, even the house that Christian Renner built. Of the whole German village, it is the only house left standing.

The exterior was impressive, a huge old house, that looked like a cultural palace.

Naturally, the grandchildren of the original owner of the house wanted to see the interior of the place. It turned out that the woman who lives there now, is very poor. She constantly apologized for her poor circumstances. Afterward she told of her misfortune. Her daughter is very ill, she suffers of swelling of the brain. She needs an expensive operation, but has no money for it.

When they heard that, Valerie decided that they had to help that poor woman. David, Angie and Valerie gave her the money needed for the operation for the sick child. The woman started to cry and kiss their hands.

- I asked God for help, she said, but could I think which way this help came?

### **The Re-union**

The long awaited moment of the meeting. Valerie, Angie and David in Kramatorsk. They are sitting in the same yard in which their father once lived. Now her oldest brother lives here.

- “Since the call on January 25<sup>th</sup>, I lost 7 kilo of my weight, while I



was waiting,” admitted Eduard Michaelovich

- [**Caption:**He reminds us of dad, gasped Valerie and Angie. He has the same mannerisms and gestures. There is no doubt that he is our brother. ]

The siblings were in a state of euphoria, speaking to other with the help of a translator. But it seems, they understood each other in silence. Their eyes are filled with warmth and happiness.

There are three more brothers in America. Altogether, the American family consists of 38 persons. The large and friendly family lives in one town, and meets two or three times each year as a family.

- “We are happy that our family was enlarged by 7 people,” grinned Valerie.

Their father’s last wish had been fulfilled. Right now he can be happy in heaven, and his soul can finally be at peace.

**By Elena Neylad and Oleg Kubar**

**Photos: the authors and the archives of the Renner family**

## **Kramatorsk Greet the Re-united Family**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September in the lecture theatre of the History Museum of the City of Kramatorsk were gathered representatives of the mass media, the city council and veterans of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war. The visiting Renner family got places of honor.

Natalya Voloshina (director of the history museum) opened the meeting. She mentioned especially that, on the eve of the 135<sup>th</sup> jubilee of the city, that the re-union of the large family represented a genuine surprise present for Kramatorsk. Natalya Evgenyevna emphasized that this re-union did not accidentally take place in the halls the historical museum. Because history is made of individual destinies. History – that is people , their lives.

The search was naturally very long and difficult, says Valentina Fromm. But the most important thing is the result. One could see the excitement of these people, as they prepared to meet their siblings. They were not able to eat or drink. They worried the whole journey, tried to imagine the re-union. An exciting, touching moment.

I want to thank you, the burghers of Kramatorsk Thank you very much that your city has no un-feeling, but sincere people. During my search I was lucky to find three of them: Natalya Voloschina, Nikolai Kulinich and Vladimir Kozarenka. They opened their hearts to me and helped me with everything they could. First I wanted to turn to Russia and the program “Wait for Me”, but then I decided to start my search right here in the Ukraine.

During the narration of the story of the Renner family, every eye in the hall of the history museum glistened with a tear.

At this re-union people were amazed that Valerie had a list 57,000 people in her

computer, people whom she could personally help to find their relatives. Valerie is a member of a Russian German organization, which deals with the search of lost relatives.

Nikolai Kulinich, a representative of city culture, heartily congratulated the re-united families, and remarked, that this is a joyful occasion for the whole city. Even our well-know town historian Vladimir Kozarenko took the podium: "I think this re-union will serve as a singular monument to honor all those held in esteem and survived all the horrors and persecution. It is a monument for your parents." Veterans of the Second World War told of their remembrances of war days. They assured that they did not fight against the Germans, but against fascism. They remembered how they met the allied American troops and now in time met the Renner family and through them, took the opportunity to send their greetings to their American comrades.

After that a remembrance-photo was taken of the Renner family. For history. And let us hope, that from this page, the history book will only be read with tears of joy and honor-filled hearts.

**By Elena NEYLA**