

# Tamara Usachenko - Усоченко Тамара — 1941 - 2025

“She hath done what she could!” — Mark 14:8

A tribute to the life of a true Sister in Christ can only be a brief sketch and certainly not a biography. Since 1998 Bible Students became acquainted with her from Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, allowing many visitors from European countries and America. Each have their own memories and accounts. Sister Julia Shilyaeva, the youngest neighbor to Tamara for many years, probably knows more than the rest of us. Yet even with composite memories from all of these, even the half is never told. So what follows are a few stepping stones in her life's journey.

Tamara Usachenko was born September 1, 1941 in Kazakhstan. Very little is known of her very early life. But as a young lady she had a son named Sasha. As a youth, he acquired polio and was afflicted with some crippling paralysis. His father abandoned this mother and son and did not support them. Tamara dearly loved her son and was left as a single mother. In time she moved to Uzbekistan for work to support themselves. Doctors could not improve Sasha's condition, but recommended that a colder climate would bring Sasha some relief.



This was the reason for her moving to Tulun in central Siberia. There she could find some work and rent an apartment with her son. Life was about to take some tragic turns which also were soon to open new horizons. When Sasha was in high school, he and his classmates went to work in the fields. They were transported in an open-body truck. For some reason, the truck overturned, all the students managed to jump out, but Tamara's son could not jump because of his paralysis. The truck rolled over on him. His death was a terrible blow for Tamara. For years after, whenever she heard a door open, she always thought he was coming home to her.

While desperate for the meaning of life and death, she encountered a small group of Christians that had a special sort of message from the Bible. Not being any part of Russian Orthodoxy, this group met secretly when possible to avoid rigorous communist controls and punishment. It was this group that explained Christ's ransom for all, explained redemption for both Jews and Gentiles, explained the Abrahamic promise for a spiritual seed, showed the times and seasons and the time for Jesus' second advent. Most importantly the message of a resurrection of all the dead brought Tamara new hope for her son.

Here is a little side road to explain the forming of this group. Before Tamara's encounter, there were numerous nationalities deported to Siberia in the Stalin and war years, particularly between 1941 to 1953. These included persons from Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova (Bessarabia), even Finland and more. These were part of the Russian Gulag labor camps. Still there were some private moments to collaborate with family or trusted friends.

In the Russian sweep of persons for labor from Poland, it seems that a newly-married sister of Brother Roman Kopak and her new husband, Stefan Waziwoda (Vazivoda) were both taken to Siberia. Brother Kopak collaborated with a Ukrainian brother to clandestinely travel across Russia with the Divine Plan, a Manna, a Photo-Drama and Chart of the Ages. The brothers found the couple in Tulun and stayed some time to give them the fundamentals of the truth message. Here Stefan Waziwoda, Roman Kopak's brother-in-law from Poland, became convinced of the truth and its details. So the couriers of truth literature then returned to their homelands. Waziwoda became the

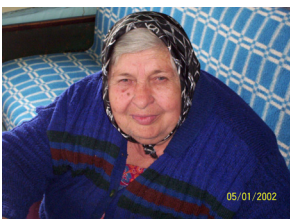
leader and teacher of the small but expanding group of Bible Students. Soon other consecrated minds accepted the message of salvation and the hope that rose above the oppression in Siberia. Some leaders of this fellowship were: Brothers Afanasi Donczuk, Stefan Halushko and Zhenia Sirmulis. These shared the message of present truth with a little circle of Bible Students. The leaders have all since died, leaving the sisters to carry on with their truth legacy. This group held to the hope of the High Calling and the overlapping of the ending of the Gospel and beginning of Millennial ages.

In 1998, Sister Tamara was meeting with about 20 Siberian Bible students. Only sisters had survived the dark years and heavy experiences of the labor camps. Each one had hand-written copies of the Volume, Manna and Photo-Drama. After 1987 Gorbachev and his successors lifted some of the oppressive measures on Christian groups and these sisters began to experience some relief. Some were even able to receive the Ukrainian Dawn from the Winnipeg ecclesia in Canada.

Sometime after 1990 the Epiphania group (known as Laymens in the USA), made contract with these Siberian Bible Students. The Epiphania brethren told the sisters that the harvest had ended, the High Calling was finished, the sisters should wait for the earthly kingdom, and the work of the Holy Spirit was not for them. Some who had studied the truth message for 30-40 years were confused by the Epiphania teaching. Other, younger ones felt unworthy of such hopes and were unable to affirm if the spiritual calling was open or not, despite the general consensus of Bible Students in the rest of the world that the high calling was still open.

At this point Sister Tamara, along with a number of other sisters, were convinced of the work of the holy spirit's and their consecrations. They wanted to find other Bible Students in the world who believed as they did. By this time some Bible student literature from other countries began to find its way into Russia and Siberia. Tamara found a pamphlet titled: "The Faith once Delivered unto the Saints" with an address of Dawn Bible Students Association, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. Tamara wrote to this address and asked her key questions. The English translation stirred many to ask, who were these Bible Students in Siberia? Taken to Moldova where brethren speak both Russian and Romanian languages the letter prompted Marusia Neagu, Natasha Neagu and Costia Gronic to travel by train for a week across six time zones in March of 1998 to find this outpost of faith. They reported back that these were indeed Bible Students of faith, not having connections with "Jehovah's Witnesses."

A second trip was arranged later in August of 1998 with Vasia Neagu (Moldova), Zoriana Boychuk (Ukraine), Cher-El Hagensick and Jerry Leslie (USA). In this trip we found Sister Tamara deeply consecrated and with the Kingdom message in her heart and joy on her lips. Russian-speaking brethren from Ukraine and Moldova made supporting visits as well as brethren from Europe and America in years following. What should be noted is that the Epiphania message was creating stress among those with heavenly hopes and those with earthly, and also with those that were not sure. In 2003 the fellowship found it useful to meet and study separately with about ten in each group.



Tamara's deep devotion and commitment to help those who brought the truth to her is notable, including her support for the aging and infirmed. Though she watched over the welfare of every one, we will just mention two of them. Tanya Malivanova. This was a heavy-set sister with legs that no longer carry her. She seldom left her house on the other side of Tulun, located near Tamara's shared plot of land in a community garden. As a side-note, the garden was often pillaged before Tamara could arrive to gather the vegetables. Nevertheless, Tamara always made a point of

regularly visiting and encouraging Tanya on this road, including bringing her the annual Memorial emblems. One time when we joined Tamara for the visit, we spoke with Tanya about the earthly and heavenly salvations. She lit up and said she always had the heavenly hope if she would be found faithful.

Arisha Kruglova lived on a high hillside beyond Tamara's apartment. Traveling there took the better part of an hour to climb the hill. More than 92 years old, Arisha was totally deaf, unable to hear a door bell or anything else. To communicate with her one had to use a white marker board. However, her mind was wonderfully clear with memories of the early days when the truth reached Tulun and of Brother Waziwoda's instruction. She had memorized all the Manna texts, their comments and hymns. When speaking about the High Calling, she said she always believed this and cited 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.



Arisha's family took her small pension, but supplied none of her necessities in a small apartment. Tamara brought her food. In the last year of her life, Tamara found her in a very neglected state in her apartment. So she carried her out, down the hill and then up the 5 flights of stairs to her own apartment to care for her there. In Arisha's humble gratitude, she simply said, "This is like Paradise!" After some weeks, Arisha said that her family only received the pension when she was in her own unit, so she should return. This she did and soon died there a victim of family neglect and abuse. Tamara never neglected to look in on every one of her spiritual family, no matter how inconvenient to herself.

Translated truth literature of Pastor Russell's writings were soon welcomed by all and awoke new interest to share it far and wide, including Siberia. Tamara kept a notebook of anyone who had a little or lot of interest. On one visit, she wanted to connect with a group of ex JW's in Kwitok, about six hours north by train. This group of about 40 persons, had some old original Watch Towers, but then followed on with J.F. Rutherford for a time, but later cutting their relations with the Watch Tower. While being most hospitable, they were set with some of the Rutherford thinking and fearful of any teaching beyond the 1940s. Nevertheless, they welcomed the new copies of Volumes one, two and three of Pastor Russell's studies. Tamara also followed up leads in Tayshet and as far away as Tomsk and Novosibirsk, 1300 or 1400 kilometers from Tulun and sent them literature.

In early travels to Tulun, the DVD version of "For This Cause" was played in the home of Sister Tamara, with Sister Julia and the few other sisters there. Tulun is a small town of about 40,000 persons in a depressed economy. Tamara asked if it could be possible to show that video to her community of Tulun? All sorts of questions arose. The video would need to be translated to Russian. How could it be advertised? Could a central theater be reserved? What compatible audio and video equipment is necessary? Could all the literature, equipment and able bodies move across Russia without restrictions? Sister Tamara said if this were possible, she would find a public place for a witness. All the rest was a matter of faith for the Lord's work.

Brethren in Ukraine set to work preparing public literature in Russian and also hundreds of large posters for placing all over Tulun. Brother Richard Gawronski in Seattle of the USA, made contact with a Russian film maker who was willing to work on a Russian translation and synchronize with the video. In 2004 a new Russian DVD was ready. Computers, a powerful video projector and audio equipment were ready. Ukraine had printed the advertising posters and Russian literature. And most of all, Tamara had acquired a well-known theater in Tulun without incident. From there we flew to

Irkutsk, Siberia, near to Lake Baikal. From there a six hour train ride was taken to Tulun. All seemed ready for the final preparation.

The Siberian brethren hosted two showings in Tulun in 2004 and another in 2006. Julia, Andriy and Halya Laybida, Zoriana Boychuk (Ukraine), Roland Osipov (Moldova), Allen Springer, Jerry Leslie and of course Tamara and the local sisters worked together on the showings. Brethren properly wrote the date, time and place on the posters. Posters were tacked, pasted and placed in every possible public place. Julia's tireless labor was an inspiration to all. Last minute electrical changes were made for the theater. Then all seemed ready. Would anyone come? Slowly but surely they came. Ones, twos, families, children came. The room began to fill soon reaching about 75 public. After the showing, they eagerly came to the tables for the free literature. Some even left their addresses.

Sister Tamara stood with a handful of literature along with a few aging sisters who loved the Kingdom message so much, it had to be shared. They were so blessed that they said: "Let's do this again." Another showing was arranged in 2006 at another theater. At this time restrictions for public programs were being imposed. Brother Laybida from Ukraine accompanied Tamara to the town administrator requesting permission. It so turned out that this man was also a Protestant with a Ukrainian background. So he granted permission. But that year there was an enormous flood that covered much of the city. But many waters did not quench Tamara's faith, Julia's faith and others. She had acquired another hall and it was on high ground. "If it is God's will, they will come." And they did come. Some who had not seen the first showing were amazed with the Bible message. Still a few at this showing discerned the message that Jesus was the Son of God and not the trinity. So 4 or 5 persons left in the middle and missed the final glorious promise to all mankind. The rest were blessed with the message.

Seeds of hope and peace were sown in Tulun, because Tamara had faith and dared to act on her faith. Tamara and her few spiritual companions lived simple lives in a remote corner of this earth. The truth and Biblical promises made all the difference in the world.

Through all her love and labors, it was not generally known that Tamara was herself afflicted with advancing medical issues, including pleurisy, liver and kidney infections, diabetes, and more. She seldom let such things be known, because the message and work were her motive. Yet her own afflictions were becoming overwhelming in 2015. Most of the other sisters had moved to be closer to younger families elsewhere in Russia, or had died one by one, some of neglect or abuse like Arisha. Only Zenia, Valia and a Sister Valentina and of course dear Sister Julia remained. Soon Zenia also died. So in 2015 Tamara left Tulun for assistance, to be near some relatives in Kirsanov (Tambov region) 550 km from Moscow. It turned out that this family were of minimal help for Tamara and she often longed to return to her spiritual family in Tulun. But age, strength and afflictions were too great. Brethren from Ukraine and Moldova continued some fellowship over phone calls and the internet. In the end, she died of a stroke on March 8, 2025 while in hospital care, all far from those she so dearly loved and had served so faithfully.

While not even half is told with the pens of mortals, the fullness will be found in the "book of life." Truth, faith, courage and consecration are all a tale yet to be told.

**"She hath done what she could!"**



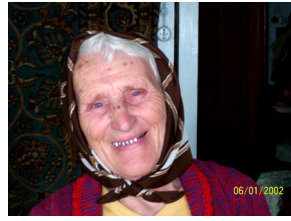
## A few Faces from Tulun



Arisha



Tanya



Stefanida



Valia



Zenia



Lena



Julia



Tamara

**Editor's Note** – the 2004 Bible Student Newsletter Volume 1 included this note about the Russian volumes “With the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989 Br. Ed (Bielicki) provided an old language Russian Volume I to the New Brunswick Class for translation into the modern Russian language. Before New Brunswick had the modern language translation available, they printed the old language Russian Volume I from negatives, also provided by Br. Ed, which were distributed extensively throughout the former Soviet republics, with over 200 enthusiastic responses. An old language Russian Volume I reached the main library in St. Petersburg where several readers requested the additional Volumes. Another reached, the then unknown Tulun Siberia Class. Br. Ed was also instrumental in an early effort to have a Russian short wave radio program beamed into the Soviet Union.

See also:

[http://www.biblestudentsnewsletter.com/content/V30\\_2\\_2001.pdf](http://www.biblestudentsnewsletter.com/content/V30_2_2001.pdf)

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