

Princess Natalya escapes the

Part III

BY MARION SOFTKY

"Thank God my father was a doctor. Thank God for Leo Tolstoy," says Mrs. Romanov. Still beautiful in her

seventies, she describes their three-year escape from the Revolution in a deep, dramatic voice.

Princess Natalya Golitzin's parents were influenced by Count Leo Tolstoy's theory that young people should do something for their country, not just fritter their time away in idleness.

So her father studied medicine and arranged clinics where peasants could come for medical care. Her mother did a great deal of embroidery and taught the peasant women how. "They did so beautifully their work was exhibited in Moscow," she says.

"Then it happened," she recounts. The peasants came to her parents saying, "Your family must get out. We are for you, but many nutty heads we cannot vouch for."

On the advice of Prince Lvov, they all headed for Siberia to "wait it out" instead of trying for the Crimea where so many refugees were going. "That was an incredible trek. It took over three years," Mrs. Romanov says.

Her mother—and part of the time her father—five children and three maids managed to stay mostly ahead of the Red forces as they headed east. They would stay in one place or another for a while; then when it became dangerous again they would wait for a train with a boxcar they could ride to a destination farther east.

"Boxcars were kind of cozy," she remembers. "It was easy to keep warm. You put a stove in the middle and made a hole in the ceiling and cooked on that stove."

How did they eat? "You eat by exchanging things that you have" for eggs and bread and sometimes a goose

or a duck, she says. "Everything was cooked on that little stove."

For a while they paused in Tyumen, a Siberian city near Ekaterinburg (now Sverdlovsk) where the Tsar and his family were murdered. Here their father practiced medicine for money during the seesaw war between the

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White and Red forces. When the Reds took over, her father was imprisoned. Then came the Whites and liberated the prisoners—and also discovered the grisly remains of the royal family 300 miles away.

Princess Natalya's father joined the White army as a doctor and sent his wife and family eastward. "Little by little," in stops and starts, they traveled across "the whole great expanse of Siberia."

In 1920 they finally arrived in Harbin, Manchuria, and settled down to school and a more regular life. Her father was lost for exactly a year—marked by danger, prison and typhus—before he joined them.

THE NEXT 60 YEARS

Vasili and Natasha Romanov escaped Russia in opposite directions. They also came to America from opposite directions before meeting in New York in 1931.

Mr. Romanov, who had been educated in Europe, came to New York with his father in 1929—"two weeks before the crash." His father was on a lecture tour, and young Vasili hoped to find work.

Mrs. Romanov came to Vancouver as a governess and moved to Seattle as a stock girl before getting an introduction to Hollywood. There she met "wonderful people." Irving Thalberg gave her a screen test; John Ford and Cecil B. DeMille became her friends. She played bit parts and earned the monumental salary of about \$300 per week.

She still has some of the publicity for "Napoleon the Barber" showing her as a languorous Josephine having



THIS PICTURE POSTCARD shows Grand Duke Alexander, Grand Duchess Xenia (sister of Tsar Nicholas II) with their youngest son, Prince Vasili, who now lives in Woodside. Such postcards with pictures of the royal family were sold for people to use for letters or to hang on their walls.