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DEAR READERS

This edition is the first in the book series titled *Russian Scholars of International Relations*. We will publish stories about the personal and professional lives of our fellow citizens who have made valuable contributions to the study of global politics and economics, international relations, international law, civilizations, cultures, and ethnic groups.

Undertaking with our colleagues such an ambitious project under the patronage of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, we, quite understandably, would like to reach out and take on board other authors. Thus, we would welcome all who wish to contribute to this arduous and painstaking work. We invite, first of all, the “kindred” teams from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), specialized institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), as well as archives, libraries, museums and other similar institutions that may be in possession of the personal archives of relevant individuals.

We are well aware that this sort of undertaking will require years, possibly even more than a generation, to complete. For example, one can look at the successful continuing series, *The Lives of Distinguished People*, which continued to develop according to the rules of the genre: its first installments were published by Florenty Pavlenkov in St. Petersburg in 1890–1907, and then the series was resurrected by Maxim Gorky in the Soviet period (Soviet-era installments were published starting in 1933 in Moscow, and beginning in 1938 by the Molodaya Gvardiya Publishing House).

I believe that work on the series’ guidelines, selection criteria, and the individuals to be featured should be determined later, as the project moves forward. It would be premature to discuss these matters now.

However, one thing that already seems indisputable is that even this initial stage of the series’ production will serve to clarify and refine, and in the case of some “semi-forgotten” individuals, to simply highlight the role, significance, and creative features of every scholar who has made a distinct contribution to the “golden fund” of Russian academic research. I am convinced that set amidst the heritage of fellow luminaries, each one’s body of work is certain to reveal new facets.



Moscow's suburbs, 1988

This book is a tribute to the memory of Natalia Evgenievna Bazhanova (née Korsakova), my Natasha, who was an ideal wife, a sunny and beautiful person full of love for those around her, as well as a prominent scholar, journalist, diplomat, and educator.

For forty-six whole years, we were always together. Working together, writing books and articles together, watching TV together, walking and relaxing together. Together we travelled the world on academic and diplomatic business. People who knew us were accustomed to thinking of us as a single entity, so that all invitations were extended to the both of us. For instance, if I received a call from China to participate in a conference, the caller would hurry to add, “And of course, we are looking forward to seeing your wife, as well.”

Everything I did was for Natasha, for her sake, to please her, to earn her praise.

That was the focus of every effort I made to succeed in life. And then suddenly, she was gone... All that remains is the cherished memory of her.

Born into the family of a sea captain and a physician, Natasha spent the early years of her life with her grandparents in Baku, where she first went to school at the age of six, after that she moved back to Moscow, to reunite with her parents. She was a perfect student in high school — not a single “4”, only “5’s” during her entire course of study. [A “5” would be equivalent to an “A”, a “4” to a “B”, and so on.] Natasha Korsakova’s classmates recall that she was the most serious girl in class, interested only in the acquisition of knowledge. She did not go to dance halls or date boys and dressed quite modestly. Once the homeroom teacher even paid a visit to Natasha’s parents, intending to give them some financial support to purchase outfits for her favourite pupil. But she immediately understood that the matter at hand was the Korsakovs’ parental principles, not poverty.

When Natasha developed an interest in Indian culture, her parents supported her decision to enroll at the Institute of Oriental Languages (IOL; later the Institute of Asian and African Studies) at Moscow State University (MSU). Her documents were accepted, but with a warning: the competition was so great that girls would not be considered at all. The Korsakovs sought the advice of a family friend—the renowned Orientalist



Georgy Kim. He said that his own daughter was also applying to IOL, but was uncertain whether she would be accepted. This made Natasha and her parents think about other schools offering courses in India studies. They gave some consideration to MIMO—the Moscow Institute of International Relations (presently MGIMO-University)—which regularly accepted boys and girls from Natasha’s rather prestigious school, located in an equally prestigious neighborhood on Kutuzovsky Prospect.

At the school graduation party, the physics teacher lamented Natasha’s decision. With her unique abilities in natural sciences, the teacher wanted Natasha to study at the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, or MSU’s School of Physics. Even Natasha was unsure about her choice. She kept saying to her parents that only applicants with connections were admitted to MIMO, and connections were likewise vital for career development after graduation from school. Yet, Natasha’s parents did not doubt that she would succeed. Her father used to say, “Natasha, you have a gold medal [in academics], people with connections aren’t going to get in your way.”

Some of her classmates, who also applied to MIMO, managed to skip high school final exams, thus saving them energy and stress. The most “outstanding” children, due to their parents’ social connections, were even granted exam-free admittance to



Natasha’s mother Nina Antonovna Korsakova,
physician



Natasha’s father Evgeny Pavlovich Korsakov,
sea captain



Natasha's first photo



Natasha as a child

MIMO. Natasha, meanwhile, was exhausted and straining to fulfill every requirement, but passed the entrance exams with flying colours and was admitted to the School of International Economics (IER).

I was placed in the same academic group as Natasha. I was assigned Chinese language classes while Natasha, instead of her coveted Hindi, began to study Korean. For that young girl, Korea was an abstruse country. Previously, the only thing that had linked Natasha to that Far Eastern nation was a Korean doll presented to her in childhood. The doll still exists, seated in an armchair in our country house, dressed in its faded blouse and little pants. My wife also remembered an incident from the distant past when she was on a train travelling with her grandmother from Moscow to Baku. One of the neighbouring compartments was occupied by Koreans, and since the Korean Peninsula was then engulfed in a bloody war, fellow passengers felt great pity for them.

Yet, being a disciplined and industrious girl, she energetically set about studying that country, as well as mastering other disciplines. At the university she performed as brilliantly as she had in high school. She received a “4” only once, on a Finances and Currencies exam from a professor who had never given a “5” to anyone, meting out only “3’s” and “2’s”.¹ But because Natasha’s performance was impeccable, the examiner

¹ A “5” is equivalent to an “A”, a “4” to a “B”, “3” to a “C”, “2” to a “D”, and a “1” to an “F”.



A MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) student Natasha Korsakova inherited her father's sailor genes



The wedding of Evgeny Bazhanov and Natasha Korsakova on the 16th of March, 1968

was unable to detect any deficit of knowledge and had to give her the highest grade on his scale.

By the way, I did intervene on Natasha's behalf, asking the professor why he had given her a lower grade. The professor said, "There were many things she did not understand". I objected, "The only thing that the student did not know was whether Belgium introduced currency conversion through legislation". "Exactly!" exclaimed the professor. I replied, "But this is as difficult to understand as the score in a *Spartak* — *Pakhtakor* soccer match. Either you know it or you don't."

The cranky professor lost his temper, grabbed me by the arm, and dragged me to the dean's office to issue a reprimand. And later, throughout the year he would shout during his lectures: "Study well and you'll become decent people, unlike this one who'll play for *Spartak* and *Pakhtakor*."

Natasha was so good at studying Korean that as soon as she began her fourth year of college, the Korean department entrusted her with teaching the language to first-year students. That was unprecedented! Still, the young girl handled the challenging task brilliantly and during the subsequent three years was teaching Korean to first-year,



and later, second- and third-year students. Some of her former students now say that initially they were not enthusiastic about Korean, which was not their language of choice; it had been foisted upon them by the school's administration. But after the appointment of the young, charming, cheerful, inquisitive, serious and intelligent teacher, they suddenly experienced a rush of enthusiasm for it, falling in love with the Korean language and Korea in general.

Natasha's students included Anatoly Vasilyevich Torkunov, Rector of MGIMO-University and an Academician in the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS); Valery Iosifovich Denisov, Russia's Ambassador to North Korea in 1993–1996, DSc (History), Full Professor; Andrei Gennadyevich Karlov, Russia's Ambassador to North Korea in 2004–2008, Russia's Ambassador to Turkey in 2013–2016; Svetlana Serafimovna Suslina, Senior Researcher at RAS's Institute of the Far East, DSc (Economics), Full Professor at MGIMO-University; Valery Nikolaevich Ermolov, Russia's Ambassador to Malaysia, and many others. At a very young age Natasha, astonishingly, contributed to the training of Russia's best Koreanists.

Natasha, however, was not keen on becoming a teacher of Korean language. Having graduated from MGIMO with a “red diploma” (with honors), she cherished the idea of pursuing an academic career. This proved to be quite difficult. The Ministry of Foreign Trade (MFT) had a hiring preference to graduates from the School of International Economics, and in Natasha's case insisted on adhering to that priority. She was expected to take a job at the MFT's East Department.

It was only with great difficulty that the “conscription” to the MFT was avoided and a job at the Institute of the Peoples of Asia of the USSR Academy of Sciences (now the RAS's Institute of Oriental Studies) was secured. The only unpleasant thing was that the job was on the lowest rung of the institute's hierarchy — a junior researcher was paid a mere seventy-five roubles per month — while the work assignments were far from simple. In particular, the young staffer had to assist in writing memoirs, such as a book about the Korean experience of General Lebedev, who liberated the peninsula in 1945, and the memoirs of Film Director Ivan Lukinsky and the Hero of Socialist Labor worker Antonov.

At the same time, Natasha worked hard to secure access to various state archives (at such institutions as the Soviet International Economic Cooperation Committee, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Trade, etc.), where she hoped to collect material for her dissertation devoted to the thorny topic *The Role of Soviet-Korean Economic Cooperation in the Development of the North Korean Economy (1954–1970)*. Our authorities did not want to make a show of these ties, classifying most of the documents and keeping them under lock and key in state archives. As for the North Koreans, by then they were denying receipt of any aid from the USSR. And in any case, in North Korea, official statistics were virtually non-existent and all statistical data in print was



fabricated. When Natalia Bazhanova placed a request to travel to North Korea for the purpose of collecting material for her dissertation, the North Korean Embassy in Moscow replied: North Korea does not have the relevant materials and, accordingly, there is no need for the thesis writer to visit the country.

Naturally, preparing this type of dissertation was an extremely arduous task. First, one had to secure a pass to the secret archives. This could be done only after obtaining numerous formal approvals from officials working at different governmental agencies. For each approval, one had to bring a corresponding request from the institute's administration with a convincing explanation of the importance of the research subject. As might have been expected, the thesis was also classified, which, quite understandably, created a lot of additional hurdles. Just think of the amount of energy and effort needed to describe the economic ties between two countries!

However, despite all obstacles, Natalia Bazhanova successfully defended her thesis in January 1974. It was an impressive piece of research with serious and far-reaching implications. After 1991, the data in it were declassified and Natalia undertook to publish a monograph based on the study. While the book was in the making, South Koreans "got on the ball": the country's leading economic publisher (*Hanguk Gyeongje Ilbo*) quickly translated the manuscript into Korean and by 1992 had released the book titled *Between Dead Dogmas and Practical Requirements. External Economic Relations of North Korea*. In Moscow the monograph was published in 1993, as *North Korea's International Economic Ties. In Search of an Exit from the Impasse*.

The books attracted considerable attention not only in the international academic community, but also within the political and economic establishment of South Korea, Japan, and China. The young researcher immediately received a flurry of invitations to deliver lectures, conduct seminars and consultations, participate in press conferences, and to prepare articles. As a result, Natalia Bazhanova devoted nearly her entire professional life to the subject and truly achieved a great deal. It suffices to recall the following event. On September 30, 2003, South Korea's President and Nobel Prize winner Kim Dae-jung held a reception in the city of Busan for the world's leading Korea scholars. In the course of the party, an academic from Germany asked Kim Dae-jung to characterize the state of the economy in North Korea. The South Korean President replied, "One of the guests here is Professor Natalia Bazhanova — the world's foremost expert on North Korea. She will help you understand the situation better than I can."

Another interesting remark was made by the high-ranking American official and prominent scholar Dr. Mitchell B. Reiss. In the preface to an impressive collection of articles written by Korea scholars from Russia and the USA, he noted: "Particularly noteworthy are two chapters by Natalia Bazhanova, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences... On economic reform, she argues that 'reforms [in North Korea] are likely to create inflation, unemployment, and social instability ... one can expect