

Koozma J. Tarasoff

Under the Influence of Interesting People in My Life

Updated November 10, 2025

As compiler and organizer of this eBook on Doukhobor biographies, Koozma J. Tarasoff, presents a capsule view of his own life. Much can be found in his Spirit Wrestlers website article '[Trailblazers](#)'. In Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living* (2002): 253-262.

A Poem About My Life

Between the covers of many books, radio, TV and internet
I have learned much about the Doukhobors,
but personal contacts
and observations tops it all.
In this journey, I feel like Charles Darwin in early
1800s
sailing around the world
writing careful notes on his observations
on the origin of the species.
My field notes number many thousands of pages
going back to the 1950s.
Here are some poetic comments
on interesting people that influenced me in my life's journey.



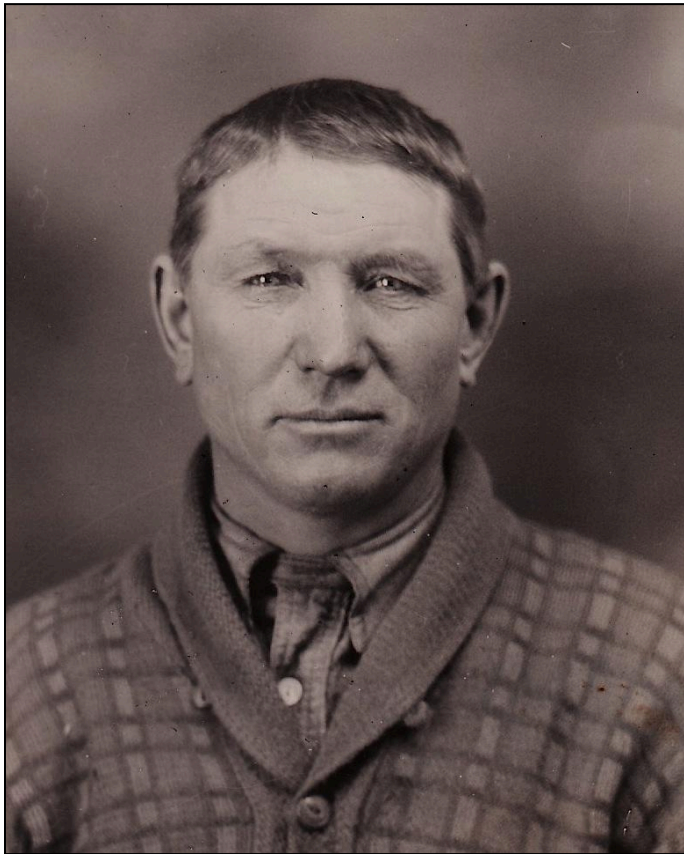
My **Russian-born mother Anastasia** had a heart of gold.
With only three months in English public school,
she created great food for the family and worthy visitors and
gifted slippers to them which she made with her hands.
She nurtured me to be good
as her Doukhobor tradition in Transcaucasia had taught her.



Mom came to Canada in 1926 at the age of 16;
when she was about to be deported by immigration officers in Quebec City,
a French Canadian couple stepped forward and said 'She came with us'.

Much later in the city, Mom once sat on a trunk
where I had stored my Boy Scout uniform.
Soon after I shed it as being 'imperialistic'.
Overnight I became a Spirit Wrestler for peace.

My grandfather Koozma Sr. was a master pioneer.
He once walked 300 miles to get a job.



Later he passed a test as an engineer in
operating a grain elevator.

Even though *Dedushka* (Grandfather)
had no public school education,
he served 19 years as Councilor for the
Park Rural Municipality where he lived.
He worked the wild uncultivated soil of
the Saskatchewan prairies
beginning with oxen, then opening
himself to new technology
by purchasing the first car in the district,
as well as
the latest in agricultural equipment.
He transported local Doukhobors and
neighbours on his truck
to the closest town to learn about new
farm machinery.
And when he needed to load his truck
with wheat,
he did not hesitate to fill it up using the
power of his muscles with shovel —

he worked with gusto until the truck hopper was full.
'Toil and peaceful life' was his path.

He was friendly to the youth.
Even during the busy seeding period,

Dedushka took them to sports events around the province for baseball, hockey, soccer and track and field.

He was a *plakun trava* resembling a plant that grows against the current.
He was not afraid to speak up and act on his dreams.

My Babushka Poliya [Grandmother Polly] also came from Russia.

She had 'golden hands' as she spun linen, knitted clothes,
made rugs, milked cows, planted gardens, harvested them;
in the fall, she gathered berries and vegetables

and preserved them for the winter.



To protect her two sons while plowing the
turf with oxen

Babushka was afraid that wolves might eat
them —

she sat at one end of the furrow and looked
out.

What would happen if the wolves came, she
had no physical weapons?

She replied: 'The spirit of love will protect
them'.

My Babushka tenderly looked after her
grandchildren and played fun memory
games with us.

She taught us singing, prayers, and the
Russian language.

My Dad John (Ivan) was a farmer. During WWII,
he volunteered as registrar for Conscientious Objectors.

He shared the notion of many that 'war is a crime against humanity'
and society must put an end of it,
or else we will all be consumed in a global holocaust.

When will we learn?

That goal is still before us.



Dad, with three grades of schooling,
travelled by car to Chicago in 1926
to learn the practicalities of electricity and mathematics,
as well as the Charleston dance.

At home on an isolated farm with no electrical power and no telephone,
he set up a windmill device to create electricity.

Also he installed a temporary 5-3 mile phone line using the barbed wire fence
from our house to my grandparents
who lived on the main telephone line.

Thanks to Dad, we connected to the wider world.

The Eastman Kodak folding camera was a mainstay in our household.

Dad had one and recorded the early family pictures
which he developed in his basement darkroom.

I acquired his collection of images

and used them as the beginning of my own extensive collection
as a photographer and ethnographer.

Bolshoe spasibo [a Big thank you], Dad, for sharing these visual gems.

Philosophy professor **Robert Paton** at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon
instilled in me the wonder of asking questions and listening carefully.

He even hosted a public lecture series on the history of ideas and world thinkers
which Dad and I attended with pleasure in the mid-1950s.

Dr. Paton contributed essays to the monthly journal that I edited and published called
The Inquirer. This was a tribute to my ancestors and
also to the inquiring attitude needed
in a healthy society to ensure its future sustainability.

We all know that it takes a village to raise a family.

My Russian ancestors who came to Canada in 1899

understood that working together was the way to survive on the new land.

My friend **Jim Deacove** was born in Saskatchewan to a Doukhobor father and a
Polish mother. He and his wife Ruth from Manitoba moved to Perth, Ontario in early 1970.
They established a cottage industry called Family Pastimes which has continued to
the present time in producing board games based on cooperation instead of
conflict.

Many of Jim's customers came from the USA where
the individualistic ethic is paramount,
where socialism tends to be a dirty word, and
where extremist capitalism promotes competition, yet
its rich elites often secretly fear it.
Anything that smells of socialist cooperation is 'traitorous'.
Even free universal healthcare is difficult to achieve
where the smell of profit reigns.

A few words about the City of Saskatoon in Canada
which remains the current hub of prairie Doukhobors.
Here most think for themselves (in theory at least)
to be Independent Doukhobors.

The much larger numbers are community brothers and sisters,
most of whom reside in British Columbia
and are influenced by the followers of the late **Peter V. Verigin**,

his son **Peter Petrovich**, grandson **John J. Verigin**, and now '**JJ**' (**John J. Verigin, Jr.**). Today practically all in both camps are assimilated and only a few still speak and understand their original heritage language of Russian, but inspiring singing continues and peacemaking persists.

Saskatoon is the home of the most successful volunteer Doukhobor Bread Baking project in Outdoor Brick Ovens. Since 1951, when my grandfather and friends made the first oven, the special bread from these ovens was sold each summer for one week during the annual Exhibition. Visitors from all over the world come here just to taste this delicacy — supporting the notion of friendship through the stomach, including the central message of 'Thou shalt not kill.' I fully endorse these words. Is anyone listening?

Bravo to my hometown friends where I moved from a farm to Saskatoon in the early 1940s. Here I took my undergrad studies at the University of Saskatchewan, learned to sing in the Doukhobor Community Home (which I am glad still exists) and where I was president of the avant garde Saskatoon Doukhobor Student group which pioneered panel discussions, concerts, peace acts, and intervisits with their BC friends. We were young bucks ready to change the world!

I was one of 13 Canadian Doukhobor youth who in 1957 went on an unforgettable bridge-building trip to Moscow, USSR to participate in the VI World Festival of Youth and Students. The doors to our neighbours began to open.

En route, thanks to elder **Peter G. Makaroff**, I stopped in the UK to attend the 10th Triennial War Resisters International Conference at Roehampton, London. We, the 84 participants present, declared: 'War is a crime against humanity. We therefore are determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.' Here I met **Bayard Rustin** of the USA who later became the main organizer for Martin Luther King Jr.; Professor **Johan Galtung**, Norwegian sociologist who later became the head of a world famous Nonviolence Institute, and members of the impressive Indian **Vinoba Bhave** land reform movement designed to help poor Indian villagers.

In Russia, I joined my Festival friends and visited **Lev N. Tolstoy's** Museum in Moscow as well as the summer home in Yasnaya Polyana near Tula where Tolstoy was buried in 1910 in a simple

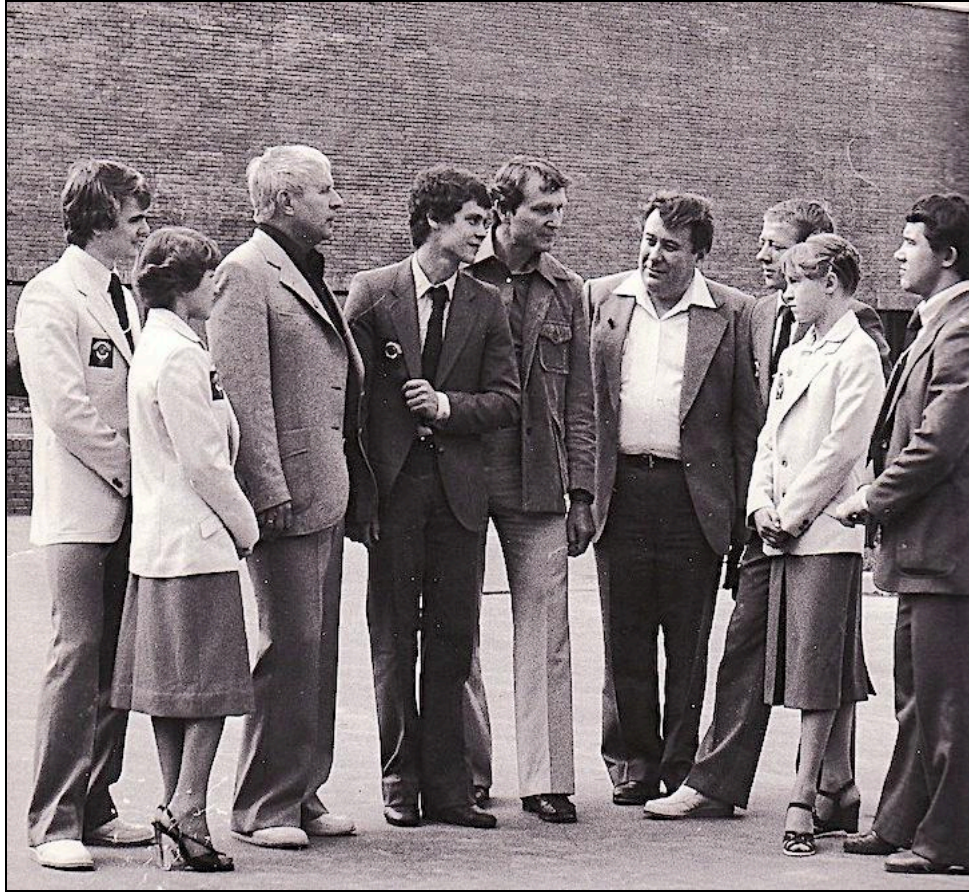
grave on the Estate grounds. Tolstoy's philosophy was based on love and nonviolence, and was similar to my ancestors.



The June 29th, 1895 historic public arms burning brought out 7,000 Russian Doukhobors in three areas of Transcaucasia, including Kars, Turkey, where my Dedushka came from. Many of the activists were beaten and exiled to remote places, while others died. It was world writer Tolstoy, his Russian intellectual friends and Quakers who assisted one-third of the more persecuted group to move to Canada in 1899. The Doukhobors rejected the authority of the Orthodox Church, saying that God is love and exists in every person. This is parallel to what Tolstoy believed in resulting in his excommunication by the church in 1901.

Lev Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and his novel *Resurrection* contain the seeds of his new philosophy which essentially (through Peter V. Verigin) percolated to the rank and file of the Russian Doukhobors. I was impressed! Tolstoy envisaged the creation of a new renaissance in the church, but he died before he could accomplish it.

On 12 other occasions I visited the former Soviet Union and Russia. One of these was the 1964 International Ethnological Congress in Moscow where I served as a student interpreter, meeting **Margaret Mead**, Sol Tax and others. In 1980 I was at the World Olympics in Moscow where I was a photojournalist representing Slavic peoples from North America. What an awesome honour!



Later I did research trips to the Russian Doukhobor areas as well as leading groups on tours of the Soviet Union. In preparing for one of these trips in the mid-1980s, I held 17 Saturday afternoon Living Room Discussions in my home in Ottawa with public participation and invited speakers from the Soviet Embassy. Both Soviet and Canadian citizens gladly exchanged opinions and knowledge about the hot issues of the day on war and peace, politics, economics, culture and sports in the friendly setting of my living room. I believe I helped bridge the East and the West during the dangerous and stressful Cold War era where the common refrain of the ignorant was 'Better dead than red'.

As an anthropologist / ethnographer, I learned the wisdom of getting to know 'the other' in order to get to know the stranger. This is the kind of respect we urgently need today for people and countries. We are all related as members of one human race and are responsible for the survival of our civilization on planet earth. For me and my friends, 'All Lives Matter!'

As a young researcher studying the indigenous Saulteaux and Cree Indians of the Broadview area of Saskatchewan, in the mid-1960s, I was known as the 'Cameraman who claimed he was neither white nor black'. I was homo sapien. Period!

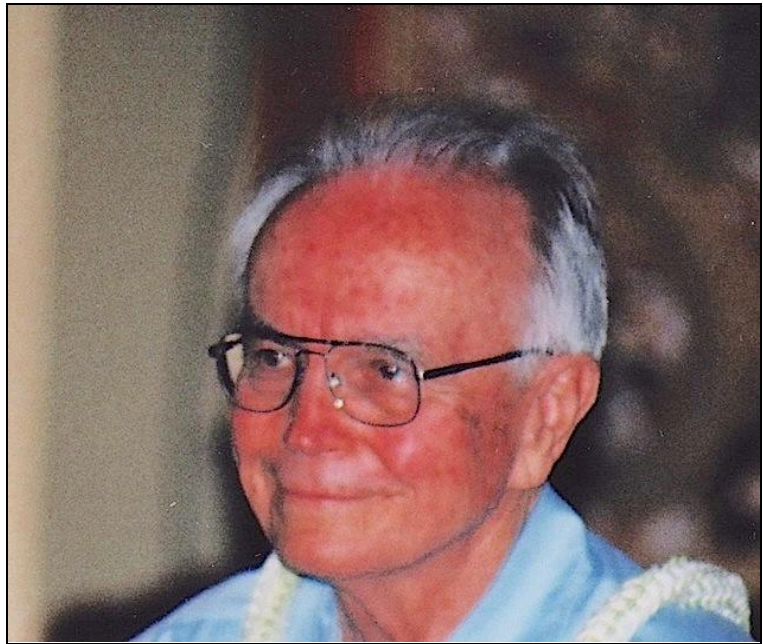
At the 2007 Leadership Forum and the creation of the Global Center for Nonkilling in Hawaii, I was privileged to present a paper on Lev Tolstoy as one of the inspirers of the innovative nonkilling concept.

Organizer **Dr. Glenn D. Paige**

recognized this pioneering venture and wrote a Preface note to me for my book *Spirit Wrestlers:*

Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living (2002): xi: 'When we know more about nonviolent cultures...we will be much clearer about possibilities for liberating ourselves from violence at home and throughout the world.' From my

study of Tolstoy, I conceptualized that Doukhobors are 'a nonkilling social movement'.



I credit Canadian ethnographer and musicologist **Kenneth Peacock** for teaching me the art of recording audio and visual data when we study people in their own environments. Ken was the first Canadian professional to transcribe traditional Doukhobor singing into musical notations. My research materials grew and grew and formed major collections that I gifted to the Public Archives of Saskatchewan as well as to the Public Archives of British Columbia. The insights are available to anyone interested.

Peacock early conceptualized what **David T. Suzuki**, Canadian scientist and popular broadcaster on CBC TV (confirmed on his 40-year LifeTime Achievement Award May 20, 2021) that the environment is not isolated out there, but includes us! My Ottawa friend Kenneth Peacock instilled in me the need to be sensitive to the people we interview in the wider context. Walking gently in the shoes of others became my approach to life.

Another friend, **David Haggarty**, gifted me my first professional digital camera when I needed one to take many photos at the Ottawa Peace Festival. Earlier in the 1970s, he and I organized four weekend summer sessions on the Quaker-owned Grindstone Island peace and human development centre in Ontario. Our guest speaker was **Manfred Halpern**, renowned Professor of Politics from Princeton University, who stated in one of the lectures that our modern human society is unlikely to succeed unless ‘we learn to collaborate in this task as a species’. Is anyone listening?

Peter Taylor, brilliant statistician and mathematician from New Zealand, generously helped me design stats when I worked in Ottawa for the Canadian Dept. of Regional Economic Expansion. He was known for his brutally honest critiques.

[Robert Klymasz](#), of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, hired me to be co-curator of ‘The Doukhobors: Spirit Wrestlers’, commemorating the centenaries of the 1895 arms burning as well as the 1899 migration of 7,500 Doukhobors to Canada. It was a great honour to work with Dr. Klymasz on being the voice of the Doukhobors.

The memorable people that I met in the Soviet Union and Russia were many. They helped me understand how citizens of a socialist state were able to win WWII with 27 million dead and then again spring back from the collapse of the Soviet Union to become a modern democratic republic. Here are some of these remarkable people:

- **Vasily M. Chutskov**, professor of mathematics and physics in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1957 came to meet me and the other 12 Canadian Doukhobor youth at the world festival of youth and students in Moscow. Vasily was a bridge-builder at heart.
- **Alexander Ilich Klibanov** of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR described the Doukhobors as ‘a social movement’ based on nonviolence and love. I found this designation fitted well with the studies of my ancestors. I met him in Moscow.
- **Svetlana A. Inikova**, Russian ethnographer in the summer of 1990 joined me in a three-month 25,000 km North American Ethnographic Expedition on Traditional Folkways Revisited, which resulted in a huge collection of interviews on audio cassettes. These unique research materials are now available for scholars to study.
- **Vladimir Petrovich Gubanov**, Russian Doukhobor artist, sculptor, and designer spent four months in Canada as guest of Canadian Doukhobors during the 1995 Centennial of

their historic arms burning in 1895 creating sketches of exceptional personalities. He brought with him a large classic Arms Burning triptych depicting the dream of humanity for a world without wars. We all embrace this dream in our peace work.

- **Vladimir V. Kuchin**, medical researcher of anti-viruses, found time to preserve the heritage of his Doukhobor ancestors in Rostov-on-the-Don by being an accomplished singer and performer. He was a renaissance man!
- **Irina Apollonovna Anosova**, professor of philosophy at St. Petersburg State University, paid special attention to the Doukhobor peace roots, with links to the philosophy of Lev N. Tolstoy and adherence to their spiritual traditions in Canada for more than 100 years.
- **Vakhit Sharipov**, filmmaker, invited me in 1988 to a month-long home visit to Kazan and a return bridge-building East-West visit to Canada. We remain in touch as promoters of peaceful coexistence.
- **Alexei Melnikov**, Chief Correspondent for Soviet Radio and Television in Canada, was a talented, friendly man who greatly enriched my understanding of Slavic people. He was a master cameraman and journalist when such professionals used film not video. He even produced one short film on the Doukhobors. When my future wife Kristina, a Bulgarian, asked him who the Doukhobors were, Alexei replied: 'They are a sect.' 'But what do they do?' Kristina asked. 'They sing', he replied. Kristina, with professional interest in linguistics and folklore became curious and I offered her first trip across Canada to meet the Doukhobors.
- **Jan Topper**, animation cameraman from Moscow, came with wife Mila and two sons to Canada, to find education and employment opportunities in the 1980s. Jan's candid comments on life in the Soviet Union were useful in my search for the truth.

Those Doukhobors who have been featured in my previous books and studies since the 1950s were all interesting people who made a mark on me. Limited space only permits the mention of a few:

- **William P. Sherstobitoff** and his wife **Mary** in Saskatoon were core members in producing 50 issues of *The Inquirer* publication that I edited and published in the city during my university days in the 1950s. Both stimulated young people to use their critical thinking about history and inner beliefs. Their son Nick, with a photographic memory, became a provincial Supreme Court judge.
- **Peter G. Makaroff** was a noted Canadian lawyer and humanitarian who cherished his ties with Russian culture and the Doukhobor heritage and actively promoted and organized peace manifestations with me and others. I recall in the 1950s attending with him an international meeting of lawyers in Banff, Alberta, where he stood up and courageously criticized the whole legal system for failing to create real mechanisms for world peace. I was very proud of this brave and intelligent pioneer who was the first Slav

to become a University graduate in law in Western Canada. At a Unitarian meeting earlier, he said that his pacifism came from his 'mother's breast'. (See photo below).



- **William ('Bill') N. Papove** of Vancouver area British Columbia, a remarkable civil engineer from Saskatchewan, served as Commissioner of land Surveys in Western Canada, and was invited to survey Doukhobor lands in BC. Following his South East Asia work, he influenced the creation of the Canadian International Development Agency. Bill invited me to his home to write an essay on the Doukhobors, but it eventually expanded into a classic 1,006-page manuscript 'In Search of Brotherhood: The History of the Doukhobors' (1963); he went on to finance the publishing of two important books on Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич archives on Doukhobors.
- **Peter P. Legebokoff**, first editor of the Canadian Doukhobor community journal *Iskra* from 1952 to 1973, was readily accessible for interviews and reviewed my large 1963 manuscript on the Doukhobors. He continuously looked for ways to overcome stagnation in our community organizations.
- **John J. Verigin Sr.**, leader of the Community Doukhobors invited me to serve as photojournalist at the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympic and as an ambassador of Russian ethnics in North and South America.. In 1982, he engaged me to coordinate the first International Doukhobor Intergroup Symposium in Castlegar, BC, bringing together over 900 Doukhobors, Molokans, Mennonites and Quakers. And in 2003, he reviewed my big book and called it 'the best encyclopedia of the Doukhobors'.

- **Dimitri (Jim) E. Popoff**, editor/publisher of the short-lived *Mir* publication, published my classic *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (1982). He and his father **Eli A. Popoff** have been helpful in searching the roots of Doukhobor history.
- **John A. Popoff** of Yorkton, Saskatchewan, helped many young and old preserve their historic roots with tape recordings, family trees, film showings, and correspondence. Only a few of his meticulous records survived due to lack of serious interest by his wife and daughter.
- **William (Bill) Kanigan**, a responsible entrepreneur in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, learned the meaning of the Golden Rule of helping others from his parents. Bill generously supported my research activities when I needed it most.
- **William (Bill) Perehudoff**, acclaimed Saskatchewan Doukhobor painter, produced 16 pioneering sketches for my first major book *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (1969). He was also a man of conscience who spent a half a year in jail instead of going to war.
- **Larry A. Ewashen**, actor, singer, filmmaker, writer, invited me as historical consultant and voice over for his film documentary *In Search of Utopia, The Doukhobors* (1981). I was delighted to accept. We have since collaborated on common projects.

Public archivists inspired me to dig further into my research on the Doukhobors. The Public Archivist of Canada personally came to see me when I was doing my research at the old archives Sussex location in Ottawa during the 1950s and arranged to copy a thousand pages for my personal use. In my home city of Saskatoon, the Public Archives of Saskatchewan was very generous to me in setting up a special public collection on Tarasoff Fonds (on Doukhobors, First Nations, multiculturalism, community development, east-west bridge-building, the peace movement, and on health), as was the Photo Curator at the Public Archives of British Columbia on my historical photo collection on the Doukhobors. Public access to important historical and ethnological materials was our common goal.

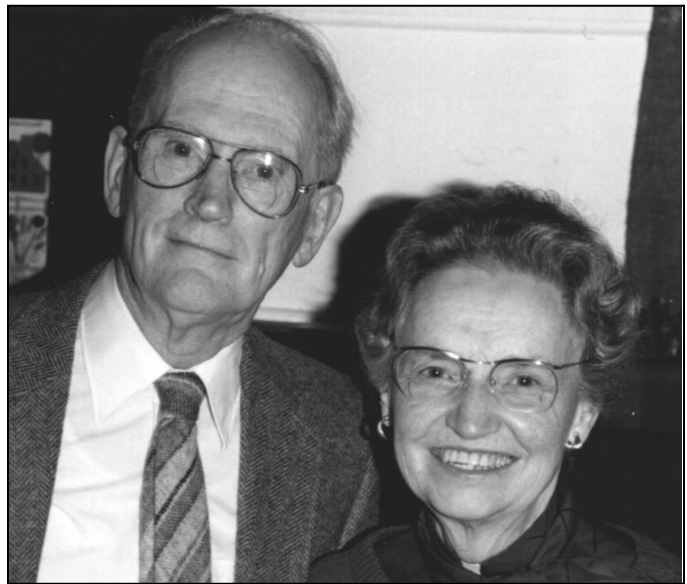


An array of North American professors, scholars, and well wishers inspired me to search for the truth. These include:

- **Harry B. Hawthorn** (head of the Anthropology and Sociology Department at UBC) for accepting me in 1962 as postgraduate student, and for recommending me for a Wenner Gren Foundation grant in 1964 to attend a world congress in Moscow;
- **Charles Frantz** (University of Chicago), a fellow anthropologist and mentor instilled in me the need to use all of our senses in seeking authenticity and maintaining our curiosity on the health of humanity (see photo right);



- **Frank H. Epp** (Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario) featured me as lecturer in several of his classes in the 1970s; he understood the meaning of multiculturalism;
- **Andrew Donskov** (former Head of Slavic Research Studies, Ottawa University) published many scholarly books on the Doukhobors and Tolstoy, and invited me as speaker and photographer at many of his learned meetings; he was generous in sharing his knowledge with me;
- **John Woodsworth**, professional editor, poet, musician, and translator (Russian-English). For an English ethnic, that is quite an achievement;
- Dramatist **Francis W. Mavor Moore** reached out to me with stories about his grandfather James Mavor, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. His grandfather was a friend of Lev N. Tolstoy, who served as an intermediary between the Doukhobors and the Canadian Government in 1899;
- Creative history teacher **Gary O'Dwyer** of Cobourg, Ontario, in the 1990s invited me and Kristina to speak to his high school classes about the latest historic democratic changes in Eastern Europe;
- **David C. Elkinton**, a Quaker friend whose lifelong interest in Doukhobors began at the age of 12 when in 1927 he visited Doukhorbor communities in BC and Saskatchewan with his father J. Passmore Elkinton. The wider Elkinton family met the first shipload of Doukhobors to Canada in 1899. Right photo of David with his wife Marriam in Pennsylvania, USA.



- **Gunter Schaarschmidt** (Slavic Department, University of Victoria) featured me in 1997 in presenting three public lectures in Victoria, BC on the Doukhobor theme;
- In 1953, the all-time baseball great **Tyrus R. Cobb** invited me to a training camp for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Enroute to Anaheim, California, I had a chance to be his guest at his winter home in Menlo Park, California. While I did not make the team, the experience of preparing for my dream led me to adopt a daily physical exercise and health program (much was adopted in the mid-1940s from **Lloyd Percival** of CBC Radio program 'Sports College of the Air') which I continue to the present day; and

- **Jon-Lee Kootnekoff**, of Penticton, BC, a former Olympic basketball coach, shared with me much joyful wisdom with the story of the Battle of Two Wolves Inside Us All ('the one that wins is the one that we feed').

Historian/ statistician **Andrei Conovaloff**, of Arizona, is a pioneer on the information highway who first stimulated Canadian Doukhobors to make use of the new computer technology. He created the first [Molokan Home Page](#) early in 1996, with my articles about Doukhobors, as others watched and followed. As webmaster for my Spirit Wrestlers website beginning in 2006, Andrei has taught me much about the internet and has served as a formidable volunteer editor for my many stories on the world wide web.

Kristina Kristova, my wife of 30 years, with 24-years experience as anchor-journalist with the Bulgarian National TV, has been an important critical reader and editor of some of my essays. Her comments have helped keep me focussed on facts of the story and on my central message.



Kristina with Koozma in St. Lucia 2014, with UNESCO designated pitons in back.

To all of the above (those I have featured here and in my earlier books), and others that I have met, I am deeply honoured to learn from you. *Bolshoe spasibo!* [A big Thank you!]. With much appreciation and respect! In my books, you are all interesting WISDOM PEOPLE who have influenced my life and I am humbly grateful.

Today, at 89, I remain at heart an active ethnographer, historian, photographer and peace activist. I am concerned about the future of humanity. While **love** and **respect** are the keys to our survival on Planet Earth along with the **search for truth**, let's hope that the new generation embraces these eternal sacred goals for the sake of all of us. Remember the wisdom of one of

the learned professors, that our society is unlikely to succeed unless **‘we learn to collaborate in this task as a species’**. Young and old around the world — is anyone listening?

Spirit-Wrestlers.com