

Janina Neverovskis Vanags
Wife, Mother, Grandmother & Great Grandmother
October 13, 1909 to September 12, 1999
from

NOTES AND MEMORIES OF STATEMENTS
MADE BY HER LATE HUSBAND STANISLAVS VANAGS

The Russians occupied/invaded Latvia in 1940 but the members of the Vanags family were not made Russian citizens, they retained their Latvian citizenship.

For years, the Russians would sweep through Latvia sending all Germans to Siberia. Later the Germans would invade and send all Russians out of the country.

Janina's family lived on a 30-acre farm near a small village in Latvia. The family consisted of a brother, a sister 2 years younger who was married to Mr. Pllskans with whom the sister had three children. Janina's mother died in 1942. The village was about 90 miles from Daugavpils, 12 miles from Preiji and 75 miles from ENDRA. The name of the village could have been MAKSMA, MAXIMA or MACINO, none of which can be located on a map. The property became a collective farm. Stanislavs lived on the farm and also worked nearby at his post as a border guard for 4 years before he and Janina were married. Had they married sooner, Stanislavs would have to live 20 miles away from his post (regulations were just as difficult at that time). Stanislavs took Janina to live in Daugavpils in 1943 where they lived near the Russian boarder until 1944. Stanislavs worked in an employment office under a Dr. Prelick but when the Russians were in power, he worked in a building engineer's office. Daugavpils is in the Southeast part of Latvia near the border with Russia (about 150 miles North of Minsk). It is one of three major cities in Latvia, Riga by the Baltic Sea (Gulf of Riga) being the Capital located northerly in the central region and Liepaja directly on

the Baltic Sea on the West Coast of Latvia. Riga and Daugavpils are both on the Daugava River, a long navigable river

Stanislavs did not know anything about the whereabouts of Janina's brother and sister after 1944. Janina and Stanislavs would send clothing and canned goods to them but received a letter from them (probably written by the government or under at the government's direction) in which they asked them to stop sending goods, just send money. Janina and Stanislavs stopped sending anything, even letters so the relatives would stay safe under Russian rule.

During the time of one of these sweeps, Janina was walking from home to work and passed the railroad line. Some box cars filled with people were stopped on the tracks. As she passed the people asked (read begged) her for some water. She did not have any water but went to the station to tell someone about the plight of the people in the boxcars. The person told her they would be taken care of. She pressed for the action to be now. The person told her, unless you move on, you will be joining the people in the boxcars. She reluctantly moved on.

On the occasion of another sweep (I believe Russian this time), Stanislavs, in his position as part of the Latvian Government (see the picture of Stanislavs in his uniform), was informed of the pending sweep and tried to get all of the relatives to flee. Most of the relatives did not believe this was the last sweep so they stayed.

On July 4, 1944, Janina and Stanislavs Vanags, with their daughter, Dagmar packed up what they could and started for the railroad station in Daugavpils, Latvia (Dagmar was born in a Hospital in Daugavpils, July 15, 1942). Because the Vanags family lived on a farm outside of Daugavpils, they did not know how they would possibly make it to the station. As they arrived at the road, a farmer happened to be

driving by with his tractor and a wagon. Stanislavs asked for a ride into town and the farmer graciously obliged. When they made it to the railroad station, they boarded the fourth train out; the fifth train was blown up.

The train took them out of Latvia; their son Juris (George) was born on the train. The family settled in HOCHDERN Czechoslovakia in November (I do not know where the family stayed from July to November 1944).

Around February and March 1945, the Russians occupied Czechoslovakia. Stanislavs went to the Catholic Charities for help. As the main office was in London, they took his name and told him to come back in 2 weeks to get on the second to the last train out of Czechoslovakia. The Family left Czechoslovakia in June/July 1945 by train to Amberg, Germany. (See post cards of the church in Amberg). As the train neared the border, Stanislavs became very concerned, as he did not have any passport or papers. If the Russians stopped the train at the border, he feared the family would be sent back to Prague. The train was not stopped. The family lived in a displaced persons camp until May 1946. Stanislavs worked as a guard for the camp. On the back of one of the post cards of the church you can read the story of Dagmar's memory of a large (the size of a person) Christ child/angel statute which came out of the door in the front of the church while music played if you deposit one German Mark (about a quarter) into a slot by the door. When we visited the church in 1972 we could not find the slot for the German Mark at the front of the church. We walked all around the church and found a door leading to a storage area under the church. Many building items, windows, beams etc. were in the storage area but no big doors that the Christ child came out of at the front of the church. If the doors had been there, they had been removed and the door opening filled with

stone blocks to match the rest of the church (as shown in the post card). We then asked people at the beer garden at the back of the church (see brightly colored umbrellas), none remembered a Christ child coming out of the front of the church (they looked at us quirky but we thought it must be a language problem German/English) After the wedding rehearsal was over, we were able to go inside the church. We confirmed the Christ child was really a statute about 2-3 inches high which came out of a model church in a clear plastic display box, about 2 feet on each side, sitting in a side aisle inside the church.

The family lived in Gunenhausen Germany for a short time (to Stanislavs a short time is one year).

The family then lived in Ansback Germany until 1950. Voldemars was born in 1948.

Stanislavs loved to take the family on walks in the Black Forest. Janina looked for mushrooms; Dagmar looked to avoid snakes.

Stanislavs tells the story of getting on his knees in the forest and praying to God to help him make a decision - should he take the family to the U.S.?

Father Marasco, of Clarinda Iowa, sponsored the Vanags Family to come to the U.S.A. Dr. August Fralich also helped them obtain a spot in the U.S.

On November 29, 1950, the family arrived at the port of New Orleans on the General Taylor ship.

Dagmara Vanags (all Latvian female names end in a, all male names end in s, Stanislavs's name was Stanislaus) became Dagmar

Vanags and Janina Vanags's birthday was changed from October 13, 1909 to 21 November 1909 thanks to Immigration.

Stanislavs worked at the Wonder Bread Bakery, Janina worked for Babe (of Babe's restaurant) and for John Halamka's parents until she became employed full time by Drake University. She was truly an early superwoman, loving, working, and cooking all homemade meals including fresh bread, cake and soup every week. The family never once ate at a restaurant!!! God will rejoice in her magic meatballs and sauerkraut soup!! God will hear EAT, EAT, EAT, again and again!!!

We will always cherish her in our hearts even though her soul and spirit have lived virtually in God's hands for a myriad of days.