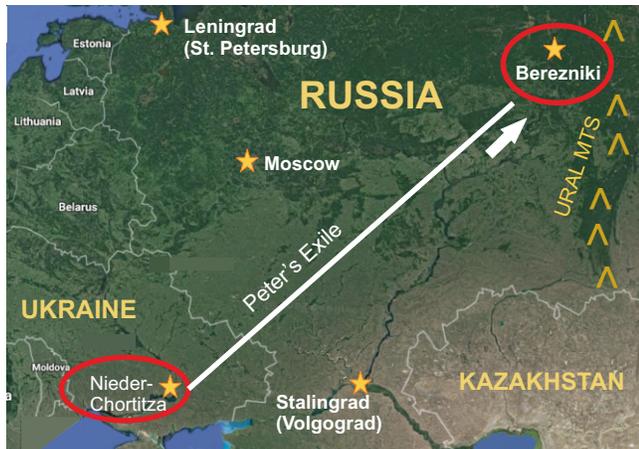


# PETER ♦ Sixteen Years a Slave in the Ural Mountains

Peter Dick (1915-2002)



In 1941, as part of the wartime evacuation of Germans from Ukraine, Peter and his family were sent separately to Siberia. Peter was imprisoned in a gulag camp in Berezniki, Perm Krai, and forced to do slave labor. He would be there 16 years.



## *Sixteen Years a Slave in the Ural Mountains*

After delivering his tractor, Peter was arrested and sentenced to work in a labor camp. He was sent to the northern city of Berezniki, in the Ural Mountains. He traveled with other prisoners by train in September, 1941. The carriage was very cold, with nothing but straw on the floor. There was little to eat and drink. Because of the harsh conditions, some died along the way.

In Berezniki, Peter was put into a hard labor camp, part of the Gulag system. Gulag was the acronym for the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps. There, Peter and other prisoners faced hard labor for 10 hours a day, relentless cold, and starvation rations. Peter didn't know where his family was, and believed them all to be dead. He became so tired and depressed that he wanted to die. One night he stayed outside in the sub-zero cold temperatures, hoping to end his life, but he survived.

(L) A memorial to the Latvian victims of the 1941 deportations, another ethnic group who, like the Germans living in the Soviet Union, were sent *en masse* by cattle car to Siberia.



Peter's condition was so intolerable, facing a life sentence of slave labor in the far north, that he stayed outside the barracks one night, hoping to die. But when the sun came up the next morning, he was still alive.

# Sixteen Years a Slave in the Ural Mountains ♦ PETER

Peter Dick (1915-2002)

After some time Peter met a woman named Katie, also sentenced to Berezniki. Katie had been sent there in January, 1943, and she had arrived by cattle car as well. In 1949, Peter and Katie married. They had two daughters in Berezniki: Anna was born on April 29, 1951, and Irina was born on April 24, 1953.

Both Peter and Katie were forced to work extremely hard. Guards accompanied the prisoners everywhere. They had to pack train cars full of sand, wood, or coal, or empty them of supplies sent from the south. With simple shovels, they dug foundations for future factories in the frozen earth. They worked in factories, processing coal and wood, and did many other things as well.

The work was not only hard, but relentless too. Each workday was 10-12 hours, sometimes even longer. There were no days off. If people didn't meet their daily quota, their ration was reduced, and each person's ration was inadequate already. The prisoners grew weaker and weaker, and began to die of malnutrition. Some prisoners were so hungry that they sought food in the mill waste. Those who did so died of infection or poisoning. Peter, starving though he was, did not eat the mill waste.

He became so weak, though, that he could not



Peter met Katie in Berezniki, and they married in 1949. They had two daughters: Anna in 1951 and Irina in 1953. Photo taken in Nordural Stadt, Berezniki, Dec. 1953.

work anymore. Believing that he would soon die from starvation, Peter pounded his thumbs with a hammer, intentionally injuring himself so severely that he had to be treated in the hospital. With the rest and additional food he received there, his body regained strength, and he lived.

Under Joseph Stalin, about 2.5 to 3 million people were imprisoned in the Gulag, being worked to death as political prisoners for their ethnicity, alleged crimes, or criticism of the government.

Facing death from overwork and exhaustion, Peter used a hammer to injure his hands so severely that he ended up in the hospital. With rest and food, he was able to survive.



Gulag prisoners using hammers.

