

(AN)ARCHIVE

CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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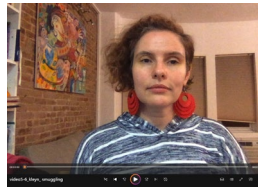
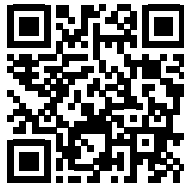
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Smuggling Jewelry¹

Tatyana Kleyn



‘Smuggling Jewelry’, a memory-story video by Tatyana Kleyn.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/644c3d3b>

It was a big day for her, just five years old at the time. She didn’t know it, but her life and her family would never be the same. It was a chilly February day in the Soviet Union as they arrived at the airport as one family unit. It was time to leave the cramped home that everyone had ever known in Riga and venture into the unknown with the new status of political refugee. She could sense that a major event was taking place, but she doesn’t recall anyone explaining the gravity of it to her: that her life as she knew it would become a distant memory among forgotten places and spaces. Under a homemade red wool sweater was a family heirloom of a yellow and burnt-orange amber necklace. The family hoped that her young age would permit her to act as the vessel to circumvent strict guidelines about what could and could not be taken out of the country by refugees leaving for greater freedoms and opportunities. She was given clear instructions by her mother not to say anything about the ‘contraband’ that hung from her body and which she was tasked with smuggling across the border.

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.

She was anxious about what was to come, but she kept her emotions hidden so as not to create more strain for her parents who she sensed were already undergoing tremendous stress. So, she simply followed the directives as they went through the in-depth screening process. In tow were also two animals, one living and another living in the girl's imagination. There was an unnamed but most special pink teddy bear in her arms. It had already seen a few good years and was a bit worn and dirty to show for it but, nevertheless, was her prized possession. Her mom warned her that airport security guards may cut it open, with the idea that they may suspect something hidden inside that the family was trying to smuggle out. Not overly phased, she responded that if that happened, they could just sew the bear back together, thereby bringing it back to life and to wholeness. Luckily, it stayed in one piece and the prized jewelry, albeit meager by some standards, made its way via a five-year-old vessel to Italy and eventually to their new home in the United States.

The other animal was Charley, a black Great Dane whose presence often brought strangers to ask if he was a small pony or a big dog. He was her grandparent's 'favourite child' who ate home-cooked meals (albeit dog food was not readily available in the Soviet Union), had numerous photo albums devoted to him, and won dozens of medals that were displayed for all to see from the dog shows he had entered. But Charley didn't have the same fortune as the teddy bear. Once the family arrived in Italy, they learned that dogs could not easily be brought to the United States. Given Charley's prominent status, one thing was clear: he would not be left behind. The family had to scramble to come up with a plan that resulted in her grandparents rerouting to Germany, where they had friends. Charley would, of course, go with them and the rest of the family would continue with their original plans to the United States. It was five years later they would all be reunited as a family.



Photograph of Tatyana with her family in her birth city of Riga in the Soviet Union, 1977. From Tatyana Kleyn's family archive.



Photograph of Tatyana, her aunt Doris, and Charley the Great Dane. Riga, 1977. From Tatyana Kleyn's family archive.