

A true story about a courageous young girl who was born in Siberia, Russia. Surviving rape from her older brother, being taken away from her alcoholic parents and put in the orphanage. She shares stories about her life in Russia. Despite of her circumstances she never lost hope for a better life and dreaming of coming to America.

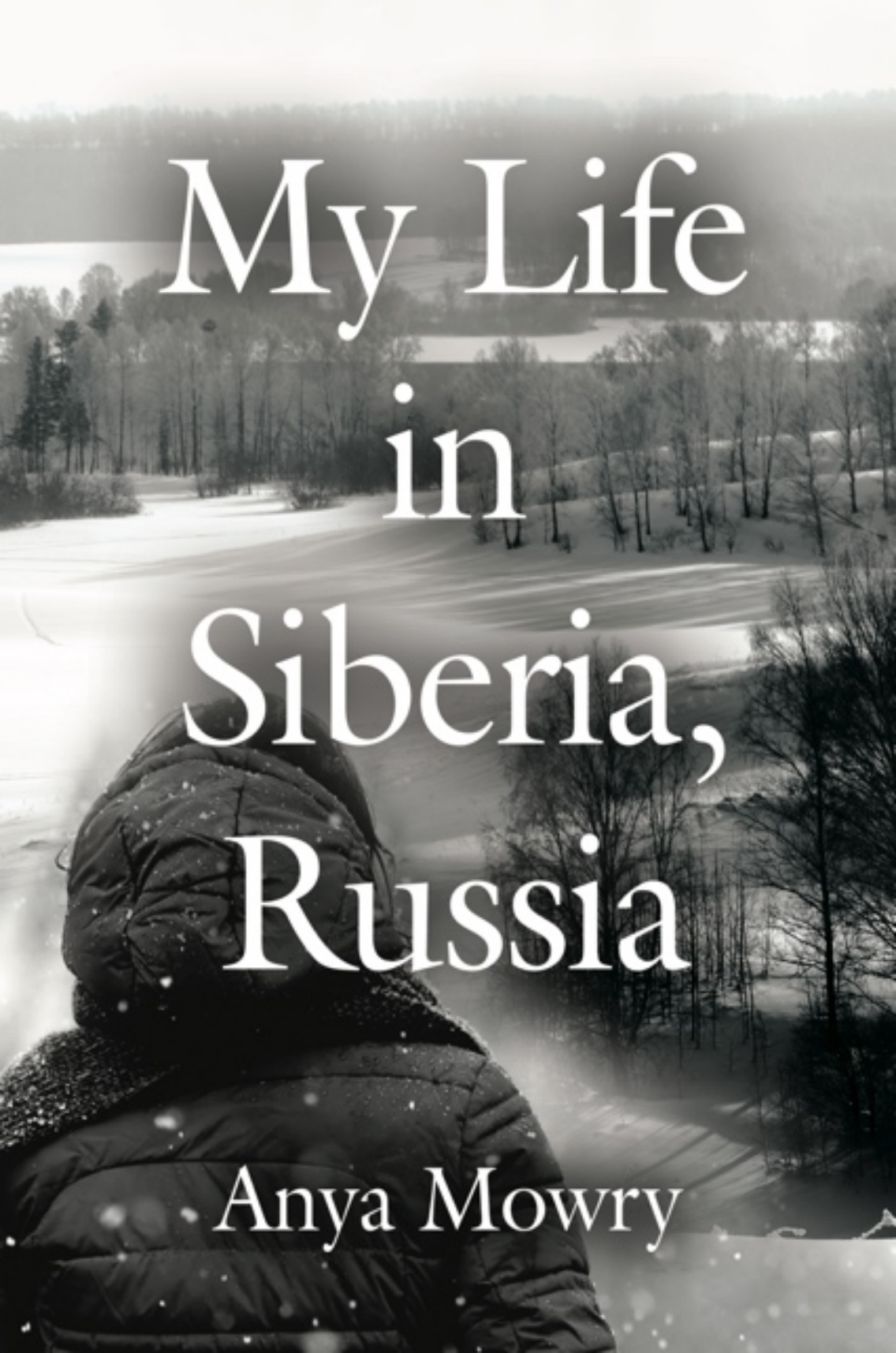
My Life in Siberia, Russia

by Anya Mowry

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Prologue

I woke up on the morning of my adoption, the same morning I would become legalized, and realized it was the scariest and happiest day of my life. The night before the court day, we got my dress ready. My mom French-braided my hair to give it a natural wave. I had tried to sleep that night, but it was just impossible. All I could think was: *What if something goes wrong and I'm not able to go to America?* After so many years spent watching movies about America and hearing about how great it was, just dreaming of living there one day, I was now getting that opportunity. *Finally*. What if this dream crashed down in front of me, on the very day the decision was to be made by a judge who didn't even know me? I kept thinking about everything and everyone in my life getting taken from me, just like that. Whether or not I made it to America was in the hands of someone else again, who at the last moment could decide not to let me go. I felt like the risks were too high to let them be made by a stranger in my life.

After many hours of rough sleep, I awoke to see that morning had finally arrived. I had so many emotions coursing through my body. I don't even remember the process of getting ready. I didn't want to eat or get my hopes up too high. My dreams had finally come true. I was so

excited and yet so terrified that it might all be crushed right in front of me. My stomach felt so tight.

On our way to court, my mom leaned in and asked, "Are you excited?" "Yes," I replied, "but I am also scared."

My mom gave me the biggest hug. "Everything is going to be okay," she assured me, "and you will be coming home with us to America, no matter what."

Her soothing words seemed to absorb my fears. My stomach pains and all my tightness melted away. I knew that if she said everything would be okay, it would be.

We were ushered into the courtroom, where my dream would be decided by a judge. My mom and dad had brought a box of chocolate candy to give to the judge, hoping to put a smile on her face. I held on to that candy box with dear life to make sure I left a great impression on the judge so she would have to say yes.

I'd never been in a courtroom before. So when the judge walked into the room, and I heard a voice say, "All rise," my heart jumped. It was hard to sit still, waiting in the courtroom with such joy and excitement, knowing and hoping the judge would approve all the papers and say yes to me coming to America with my new parents. It finally came time to ask my parents and me the questions to legalize the adoption.

Judge: Anya, do you understand what is happening here right now in this courtroom?

Me: Yes, I do.

Judge: Are you aware this is also your choice to say yes or no? Me: Yes, I am.

Judge: Well, then, my dear, do you want to be adopted by Brett and Sandy Mowry and be a part of their family?

Me: Yes, very much.

As the words, “*Yes, very much,*” came out of my mouth, my mind started to question whether I was making the right decision. I was about to leave Russia forever. What if I could never return? Would I be able to forgive myself? Would I be truly happy in America, as I had imagined for so long? Going to America was what I desired more than anything. I knew that deep in my heart. I’d dreamed about it most of my life. But I was scared to leave my friends and family behind, not knowing if I’d ever see them again.

As all these thoughts rumbled through my head, a little voice inside whispered, *Everything will be okay*, and, *This is the right decision*. My future would be better than my past. Since I was in my head so much, I don’t remember the questions the judge asked my parents. But she finished asking them...and then she approved the adoption. Just like that, I was released from my past of suffering, hurt, laughter, friendships, family, rape, fear of being alone and feeling unwanted. All these feelings, people, and experiences were being put behind me. I now had someone who wanted me and whom I knew I could grow to trust and love.

The day I was to leave Russia behind soon came. When we arrived at the airport, we boarded a two-story plane and headed to America. The ride there was so much fun! I had a TV all to myself on the plane and got to watch colored movies on it. The food was so delicious. It was like nothing I had tried before. This was my first flight, and what a great experience it was. I never again worried about my decision, because it was so clearly the right one. The journey took over fifteen hours, during which I slept, watched movies, ate, and played games with my mom. The time passed more quickly than expected.

When we landed in the United States of America, all I could think about was how lucky I was and how all my dreams had finally come true. My eyes wandered everywhere, absorbing and embracing this new environment, the people, and the fresh air I inhaled. The people seemed so happy, and every time I looked at a new person, they smiled at me without hesitation. That was new to me, because in Russia hardly anyone smiled. The air was fresh; everything just seemed better and bigger. The buildings were so tall and the cars so nice. There were so many of them. I couldn't wait to see my new home and meet my new siblings. I looked forward to learning English. Every time I heard my mom speak, though I understood none of it at the time, it gave me a kind of peace and comfort, because the words seemed so smooth and beautiful. It soothed me.

A letter from my mom

My experience at the courthouse when Anya was adopted was exciting! I was so happy that Brett and I were finally able to finalize her adoption. Anya was sweet, loving, and even more special than I could have imagined. I loved her more and more each day as we spent time together. Our friend, Dave

Walker, and his daughter, Myleah, had been with us during our entire time in Russia, and they translated our conversations with Anya. We also had hired a Russia friend of the Walker family to do the work of an adoption agency and all the work that entailed. While in the courtroom I remember the judge asking Anya if she was sure she wanted to be adopted into our family. She said she was certain and didn't have any questions or fears about being adopted. We actually liked the judge so much that we called her the "king judge." It was a very good experience, and we were left with fond memories. After the hearing we all celebrated at a nice restaurant. We had shishkabobs and fried vegetables. Anya loved the meal! She was very happy, as was everyone that celebrated with us. It was a wonderful day!

A letter from my dad

I remember that several Russian departments required what seemed mountains of paperwork and approvals that put your adoption in question throughout the whole adoption process. We had to constantly give it over to the Lord because Russian authorities said it wasn't going to happen. So there was fear in my heart. Many say that I had to fight with faith and trust that God had led us to adopt you and that he would make it happen. So finally, after over a month in Russia, we had a court date. As we arrived at the courthouse in Krasnoyarsk, all the emotions came to the surface. Walking through the courthouse halls, it was hard to believe we had prepared for almost a year to travel to Russia. Saving money, getting tons of papers done and translated, getting fees paid, and finally getting on the plane to meet the Walkers in Moscow.

Make the long train ride across the Asian continent then, get in a car, and drive hours and hours on bumpy dirt roads to get to the orphanage where you had been living and see you again. So when we finally stood in front of the judge on that final day before our Anya girl would become our

Anya Mowry

legal daughter, it was like an emotional labor of love coming to an end. I remember when the judge made the final declaration in Russian, as the translator said you were now ours, tears came to my eyes. It was like Mom and I were pregnant for over a year, and all the pain and “labor” and anticipation finally brought forth a new baby girl. Except she was eleven years old, but still our baby. You beamed in happiness and glowed with hope. We loved and still do all the kindness, sweetness, and love on your face, even though you didn’t speak a lick of English yet. It spoke a thousand words of hope for your future and some fear. We love you, Anya girl, and we always will. The Lord brought you into our family, and it was planned as such before the foundations of the world. Thanks, Lord. Love, Dad.

Chapter One

The town I lived in as a child was very poor, and there wasn't much to do or see.

Most of the homes in the neighborhood were in varying states of disrepair, with paint peeling and broken windows as far as the eye could see. The occupants of the town spent their nights throwing parties and getting wasted. During the day, the husbands were away working, and the wives sat around in their circle of friends eating sunflower seeds, gossiping about one another. We were still trying to survive the communist history of Russia; some families went days without food because work was hard to come by. They made their own vodka to drink their pain and miseries away. They might not have had much to offer, but they did know how to party and have a good time.

The wives would tell stories about each other and about the new generation of young people growing up together in the neighborhood. I, of course, was one such young person. According to my mother, I had started walking at just seven months old and speaking at nine months. Apparently, when I was young, I was very direct and said exactly what was on my mind. Today, I am less upfront and more of a listener. When I do speak or have something on my mind, I am careful about how I

approach the topic, especially if it has something to do with another person's feelings. I was raised to show love and respect toward other people.

As a child, I often remembered the words my mom's girlfriends taught me, and for some reason they were always the kind that a child my age shouldn't have known. My mom told me a story once about an incident that occurred when I was two years old. I went into the *banya* (sauna) with my parents. My dad had no idea that I knew the correct name for a man's private parts. So, as always, he got undressed in front of me, not thinking anything of it. I decided to speak about all the body parts I had learned about from my mom's friends earlier on. "You have a big penis, Daddy!" I told him. His face turned as red as a tomato. He quickly turned his back toward me as he tried to regain some dignity, to which I responded, "Wow, Daddy. What a big butt you have!" My poor dad ran out of that *banya* naked! He never bathed with me again.

My dad worked as a lumberjack, and the jobs he could find weren't stable. He had to work in locations in different area codes to keep the bills paid. So we had to move a lot. By the time I was four years old we had lived in six different houses. My dad either had to relocate for his current job, or we no longer could pay rent because he'd lost his job. We always seemed to be on the move to find our next home. Each time we moved to a new place in Chunoyar, the city where I was born, which is located about 700 miles from Mongolia. The town sits right on the banks of the river, Reka Chuna. It meanders as it joins several other rivers and eventually feeds into the Kara Sea. My parents had five children together: my older sister, Zhanna, my two older brothers, Vitya and Kolya, myself, and my younger brother, Misha. Zhanna and Vitya were never home, instead spending all their time out with their friends. Kolya stayed home to help around the house or help with

Misha and I. Whenever we moved, it wasn't that far from our previous home. The town was small, and we couldn't afford to go far. Each house we moved to, I remember my mom trying to make the best of it; she worked hard to make the upheaval fun for Misha and me. She always gave us something to look forward to at each house and would tell us how much fun my little brother and I would have with all our new friends.

We had recently had to move again. When we finally found house number six, we were able to settle there. The rent was more affordable, and my dad found a great job in the area, which he was able to keep until he was taken to jail. I would never see him again after that. In the meantime, this house was perfect for all of us. My mom showed us our large backyard and spoke about all the vegetables we could grow and the cattle we could raise. I became friends with all the kids in the neighborhood. We built forts and played tag and kitchen games all day long until the moon came out and it was time to go inside.

It was in this house that everything changed for me. My childhood innocence was taken by someone I loved and trusted to keep me safe. My ten-year-old brother, Kolya, began playing tag and kitchen with my friends and me. All of my friends enjoyed having him play with us and chase us during tag. He was always fun and made our games that much more interesting. That was why what started to happen next between him and me seemed so confusing and a bit strange. Instead of tag he taught my friends and me how to play house. He had me be the wife and him the husband. We'd put "our" pretend kids to bed, and he and I would head out further into the woods. He'd tell the other children that no kids were allowed in "our" room. We'd lay down on the ground like we were about to go to sleep. The first few times he only hugged me as we pretended to be sleeping. The more we played, the further into the

woods and away from my friends he had us go. He made us stay away longer each time. Now, instead of just hugging me, he started to kiss me on my lips and put his tongue in my mouth. He'd tell me things like, "This is what husbands and wives do. It's okay." Kolya always found a way to spend more time playing when it was just him and me, rather than with all of my friends. He started to have us play house at home too, where it was only the two of us playing.

He would give me longer hugs and kisses on the lips when no one was around. I remember him taking me to our veranda the first time and feeling scared inside that something wasn't right. He sat me on the bed, told me to first take off my shirt, then my pants and underwear. As soon as I took my underwear off, he started to touch my body, asking me, "Do you like that?" I knew what we were doing wasn't normal, but I was too scared to stop. I didn't want to upset him for not wanting to play husband and wife. As I took off all of my clothes, standing there naked in front of him, my entire body was frozen and shaking, my eyes wanting to tear up but couldn't. I watched my brother as he sat on the bed looking at me while touching and kissing my body. I kept thinking how I wanted to scream for help, but all I could do was scream on the inside, wanting all of this to be over. I wanted to curl up in a ball and not let anyone touch me. But instead, with hesitation in my voice, I replied, "Yes." *Did I say the right thing?* I asked myself. Next thing I knew he was inside me. It felt like a sharp knife cutting everything inside my stomach. I screamed out loud and begged him to stop. But he didn't. He kept doing what he was doing. Making weird noises, saying how good it felt and to hang on a little longer, as it would be over soon. While the torture continued, I contemplated running away. I started imagining where I would run to and who I could tell. If I did, would anyone believe me? As soon as he finished, he sat next to me, looked me in my eyes, and said, "You can never tell anyone about this. If you

do, I will be taken away forever and will not be there to take care of you and Misha.” As Kolya tried to allay my fears, he said to not be afraid. This was our special secret that only he and I could know about, because others wouldn’t understand. I just had to keep quiet to protect our younger brother, because he was too little to understand.

From that moment on those visits between him and I became a regular thing. I was no longer playing kitchen, tag, or house with my friends. It was only Kolya and I playing house. He’d wait for my parents and my other two older siblings to leave before he did anything. Each time my parents had to go somewhere, Kolya would offer to babysit Misha and me. As I would watch my mom and dad leave the house, I remember thinking how badly I wanted to go with them or beg them to stay a little longer. I feared staying home alone with him. My stomach would hurt, and I’d feel sick. My heart would beat quickly as my anxiety grew. I’d run in the room with Misha to play with him, but as soon as we were home alone, he’d put Misha to sleep in our room and close the door behind him so he wouldn’t wake up. Then, he would take my hand gently and walk me to the veranda. I didn’t understand why he was hurting me this way. He was my brother, my protector. Once I realized that he wasn’t going to stop and the abuse would continue, no matter how much I begged, I found a way to make my mind take me away from all of that, from what was happening on the veranda, from my brother. Allowing me to block out all the pain and betrayal I felt. It was like another world, all created inside my mind. I would be outside in a large field, playing with angels, dancing, singing, and running through the long grass. As time passed, I remained too afraid to tell anyone about the abuse. This needed to be our secret, he kept telling me, and no one could ever find out.

So, I kept the secret and never told a soul for years.

Months passed, and my parents, who cared more about partying than what was going on in their own home, continued to get drunk often. Misha, Kolya, and I were pretty much left to fend for ourselves. Kolya was always the one who cared for us when we were sick and fed us when we were hungry. Every time we grew ill, he would bring us pain medicine, fresh water, and whatever food we had left in the house to our bed. He checked on us every day and made sure we stayed in bed the whole time we were sick. I have many good memories of Kolya, despite all the hurt he caused me. He took care of Misha and me when there was no one else to do it. I still remember the bedtime stories he told us and the games he made up for us to play. He looked after us as well as he could.

It's crazy to think that the same person who caused me so much pain may also have saved our lives.

At the age of five, I remember a van pulling up in front of our house. Three men and one woman exited the vehicle. I thought, *They don't look like my parents' friends*. I remember them walking up to my mom to speak to her and her starting to cry. Mom begged them, saying things like, "I will do better, I promise. Please don't take my kids from me."

One of the women came up to me and introduced herself. She asked where my little brother Misha was. While one of the men went to visit with Misha, the woman asked me to show her around the house and our backyard. When she and I were outside I saw my mom run out of the house toward me, yelling, "I will do better. Please don't take them." I quickly let go of the woman's hand and ran to my mom. I held on tightly to her waist as she clung to me. I was afraid, wondering what was going on and why one of the men was chasing my mom. Both men

and the woman approached my mom and me. The woman started to grab my arms to detach me from my mother. The man grabbed my mom to pull her away from me. Mom hesitated, and so did I. The woman started yanking me harder, and so did my mom. She was crying and screaming for them to let go, but they didn't. As the woman managed to take me from my mom, the man kept holding on to my mother as she kicked and screamed. "Please don't take my babies!" I was kicking and screaming too, trying to get away from the lady so I could run to my mom, but I wasn't strong enough. The woman holding me back was much bigger and stronger than me.

They put Misha in one van and me in the other. I had no idea what was going on or why these people were taking me away. Once we were in the van, the woman held me tightly on her lap to calm me down. I looked outside and saw my mom on her knees on the dirty ground. With tears in her eyes, she stretched her arms toward us, screaming something I could not hear from inside the van. The vehicles took off quickly, and all I could think was that I was being taken from my home and family. I eventually calmed down on the woman's lap. She whispered in my ear, telling me they had to take me and my little brother away from my parents because they were alcoholics. Someone from the neighborhood had called them to report that bad things were happening to me in our home. Misha didn't go with me; they tried to find an orphanage for him to stay at but had no success. They ended up bringing him back home with Mom because he was disabled and couldn't walk on his own. At that time they didn't have any orphanages that would take him in, so he was left behind. When my mom was pregnant with Misha, my dad beat her in the stomach so hard that it caused permanent damage to the baby. It wasn't until he was born that the doctors knew the extent of his injuries and the effect they would

have on him. To this day, I don't understand why my mom stayed with our dad.

They brought me to an orphanage in a town called Gheophezke. This town was too far away for me to walk back home but close enough to take the bus or a car there. The drive itself was about one hour, so I knew I wouldn't be seeing my siblings any time soon. There must have been around seventy other kids housed at the orphanage, all of whom had been in situations similar to mine. They had been taken from their families too, or had no family left to care for them. When I first arrived at the orphanage I was terrified. All the kids kept looking at me, not saying a word. After Social Services dropped me off, I was led to a room where I had to sit and wait for someone to come and show me where I was going to sleep and stay. While I was waiting, one lady brought me a pillow, toothbrush and toothpaste, pj's, soap, and an extra pair of underwear and one set of clothes. After that, three girls in my age group came by and directed me to the room I would be staying in. One of those girls became my best friend; her name was Sneezhana. At first, I spent most of my time playing with just her and her friends, until I made friends of my own, and then we'd all play together. My new room was full of thirty beds lined up in rows of three, with ten beds in each row. The beds were all made neat and tidy. My bed was in the third row, fourth bed down, right by the door. This room had only beds and a closet that was used for all the girls' clothes, which were all shared between us. An extra room was provided next to our bedroom, in which we played and interacted often.

We were not allowed in our bedroom unless we were taking our daily nap or it was bedtime. If we went in there without permission, we got a time-out in the corner. The orphanage housed different age groups; each group had their own schedule. My group was comprised

of children aged five through nine. We had a set time for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The boys in our age group had the same schedule. At mealtimes we had to make sure our hands were washed and our bedroom and playing room were clean. Then, we'd line up and head down to the dining room to eat. We had forty-five minutes to finish our food. Once done eating, we had a place to throw our food away and another place to put the dishes away. Every day different kids in each age group were assigned to clean the kitchen by wiping tables, sweeping floors, washing dishes, and then assisting the cooks with food preparation for the next meal of the day. Each child was given daily chores, whether it was to pick up the room, clean the bathroom, mop the floors on our hands and knees, or wash the clothes by hand. They always kept us busy. We went to a public school, which was only walking distance away. We were always made to walk to our destination; rarely did we take the bus. If we did, it was to a special event of some sort or on every Saturday during the summers, when we were taken to a public bathroom to take showers. I became used to the daily routine quickly. The orphanage wasn't so scary once I made new friends. I came to grips with the fact that this was going to be my home until my mom came to get me. I always worried about Misha, though, and wondered if he was okay and being taken care of. I missed Kolya because he was my brother, but I didn't miss the rape. The orphanage was a relief from all of that. Plus, I was being kept busy in the orphanage with chores and by interacting with the other children.

I stayed in the orphanage until I was about six. Once my mom proved she was sober, she was able to take me back home. Unfortunately, my parents' sobriety didn't last long, but while it did we were happy, and she gave us so much love and attention. She started cooking and sewing. I can still smell the Chebureki she baked for us. Chebureki, a Russian pastry that is fried on the outside and filled with

ground meat on the inside, tastes and looks kind of like the fried pie we got here. It was our favorite food. Misha and I always ate so many that our little bellies hurt. We were a family again.

My dad now kept pigs for meat and chickens for eggs, so we always had food on the table. I remember waking up bright and early in the morning and going outside with my dad to collect eggs and put them in a bucket. I used to look forward to waking up early to spend that time with my dad. I watched him slaughter the pigs for meat and behead the chickens for our dinners. I loved knowing where our food came from. One time, I helped him behead a chicken, but evidently, she didn't want to die, because she ran around headless in circles for about five minutes. Well, maybe not that long, but it felt like it. When she finally stopped, we put her in a warm pot of water, then plucked her feathers off to prepare her for our dinner that night. My dad would butcher the pigs, and we would make what's called Sala: smoked pig's fat that tastes kind of like crispy American bacon, except instead of frying it, we smoked it.

I spent a lot of time with my dad then. He would take me to work with him, and I always had fun there. Because his lumberjack job was dangerous, I was only allowed to be in the employee area. However, the room had a large window, through which I was able to watch my father cut the wood in different shapes. On his breaks, I remember that he would hold me on his shoulders, singing to me and spinning me until I was dizzy. He laughed so hard when he put me on the ground and I couldn't walk a straight line. Those were the moments with my parents I make sure to remember. Life wasn't always perfect, but moments like those were. They will be with me for the rest of my life.

Chapter Two

It hadn't even been a year since I had returned to my parents before the problems began again. Mom and Dad went back to drinking and throwing large parties at our house. I don't know why. The only reason I can think of was because life in Siberia was rough, and my parents were addicts and couldn't stay sober. Some days were fun for us kids. There was lots of dancing and singing, but it started to get worse and worse. It was as if my parents and their friends couldn't go a day without throwing parties and getting drunk. They would drink from one morning right through to dawn the next day. People started to stay overnight all the time. Some got so drunk they would stumble on us or sleep in our beds, and some went as far as to take a number two in our living room in front of us. It wasn't long before Social Services came to take Misha and me back to the orphanage. However, they again intended to take Misha to a different place. The home I went to still didn't take in disabled kids. It was heartbreaking for the two of us to be separated without knowing if we would ever see each other again. Social Services spent three days searching for an orphanage for Misha but had no luck, so he ended up at my orphanage. I took care of him as much as I could by bathing him, helping him put on his clothes, and protecting him from the other kids, but I was too young to take care of him properly. I'd been there before; I knew how it worked and the

routines. Now, I also needed to look after my little brother as best I could.

After my mom went through rehabilitation and made improvements in our home, she was able to come and visit us in the orphanage. It took a while, though, before they let us go live with her again. When the time came, and she'd proved herself to the authorities again, they only let her take Misha home and not me, because of his situation. So, once again, we were separated from each other. I was left in the orphanage with seventy or more other children who ranged from two to eighteen years of age. We learned one thing very quickly: to protect ourselves from each other or find a group of close friends to defend each other when bullied by older kids.

I had friends there already, and this time I made a new close friend named Dasha. She arrived at the orphanage after I left home the last time. Once we became friends, we grew inseparable and did everything together. My friend Sneezhana was still in the orphanage as well, and at times the three of us played together. Sometimes Sneezhana became hard to play with, because she always wanted things her way and would cry and whine otherwise. My friend Dasha and I couldn't deal with that, so when she started acting up, we would leave to play by ourselves. Dasha was two years older than me, so when she spent time with the older kids or went to visit her "witchy, drunk grandma," as she called her, for the weekend, that's when Sneezhana and I would play. Sometimes Dasha would drag me along to see her drunk grandma.

On the weekends, we were allowed to leave the orphanage with permission. We'd take the bus to Boguchane, a small town only about a fifteen-minute drive away. If we missed the bus, we would hitchhike. One time we missed the bus and had to walk there.

Along the way we passed a morgue full of dead people. Being the brave and not-very-smart kids we were, we wanted to go see inside, but the door was locked. We went to every window to see if we could find one we could peak through. We found one that was open and ran quickly to it. As we grabbed onto it with our hands to pull up our little bodies, we saw this naked, frozen lady standing straight up, holding a broom.

Terrified, Dasha and I jumped off the window as fast as we could and ran away. Later on, we laughed about how scared we were and how awkward it was to have seen that.

Since I was still in the five-through-nine age group, my chores and daily routines were the same as last time. Each child had plenty of chores to do - for instance, clean our room, wash our clothes, mop the floors, and clean the bathrooms - in return for the food they provided and the roof over our heads. I stayed in the orphanage for about a year, although it felt longer. The time finally came for the government officials to let my mom take me back home. I remember it being winter when she picked me up. The winters in Siberia would drop to a bone-chilling negative 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The day my mom picked me up was cold, but the sun was out, which made it better. I was sent home with a fur coat and the wool boots the orphanage had given me. The coat was heavy but kept me very warm. The boots were hard to walk in because they went up to my knees and didn't bend, but they kept out the cold, and I managed to play in them. When we left the orphanage, we went sledding in our neighborhood and spent all day outside. We didn't care how cold it was; the subzero temperatures didn't bother us. We had such a good time together. I'd almost forgotten what having fun felt like. My mom maybe didn't enjoy it as much, but I know us kids had a blast with the cold air freezing up our eyelashes and nose

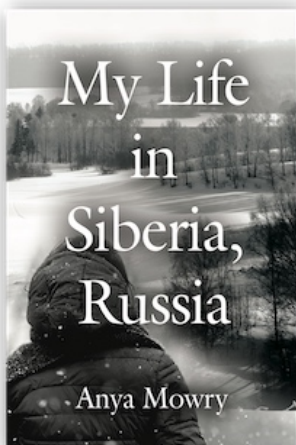
hairs. Days, weeks, and months went by, and I continued to live with my parents. This time only my dad went back to drinking. My mom seemed to realize the importance of staying sober this time.

I remember him coming home one night drunk, loud, and very mean. I had never seen my dad like that before. But it soon became a normal thing in our household. One night I remember specifically. He came home screaming my name. My mom quickly hid Misha and I behind the front door to protect us. As he entered the house yelling for us, my mom tried to hold him back but wasn't strong enough. He reached behind the door and grabbed me. I was about four feet tall and around seventy-five pounds. He caught me by my shirt and threw me across the hallway. My head hit the ground, and my body tumbled before I was able to sit up. As I sat there in shock, with my eyes tearing up and my body shaking, I wondered what had happened to my dad. Where was the nice daddy that I knew? As he started stumbling drunk toward me, my mom tried to pull him away. She stood only five feet tall, very petite and skinny, while my dad was six feet and stocky. He was so much bigger and stronger. After each time he would throw her to the ground, she'd hurry back over to grab either a piece of his clothing or his hand, trying with everything she had to keep him from me.

The next thing I saw was my dad dragging Mom by her hair to our fireplace in the room. Luckily, the fire had just gone out, and only hot coal was left. As my mom struggled while my dad shoved her head in the fireplace, she yelled to Misha and me, "Run and hide!" I had Misha jump on my back, and I ran out the door. I ran as far away as I could, stumbling over the thick bushes, crying and scared for our lives, while hoping our mom would be okay and my dad hadn't killed her. Misha and I found some woods where we could hide and ventured deep into

the overgrown woodland until we felt certain that nobody would find us. I hugged my brother tightly as he cried, the sobs wracking his tiny body.

“Everything is going to be okay,” I told him. “We are both going to be all right.” I pulled him in tight against me, hoping to make him feel safe. What felt like hours passed, and the night began to close in. We finally started to head back home, because it was getting dark, and we were both cold and scared. As we turned the corner into the street where we lived, we saw bright red and blue lights in front of our house. We sped up to see what was going on. Men and women stood there in uniform, one of whom saw Misha and me. She approached immediately and wrapped us in a blanket, then guided us to our mom. I watched as one of the policemen put my dad in handcuffs in the back of the police car. When the car my dad was in started to move, I watched my dad mug eye my mom for calling the police on him. My mom hugged us both, assuring us that we wouldn't have to worry about our dad hurting us anymore. He was going away for a very long time. Mom kneeled down and, through her tears, told me that my dad had intended to rape me. She was able to protect me but not my older sister, Zhanna. My dad raped her instead of me that night. Zhanna had been in the TV room while the chaos was happening behind the door. Between my parents' arguments and their loud parties, we had learned to ignore noise growing up. She must have thought my parents were in the midst of another argument or enjoying another loud party and hadn't thought anything of it; so, she turned up the TV volume to tune the noise out. My drunk dad went into the room and took advantage of her.



A true story about a courageous young girl who was born in Siberia, Russia. Surviving rape from her older brother, being taken away from her alcoholic parents and put in the orphanage. She shares stories about her life in Russia. Despite of her circumstances she never lost hope for a better life and dreaming of coming to America.

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