

The American Who Married The Russian Defector

By Richard Whittle
Special to The Washington Star

Elaine Bissell Jackson Shevchenko has been helping her husband write his book. It will be published sometime this year, and it will be a very long book. But what, she asks, did you expect? "Have you ever heard of a Russian who could write a short one?"

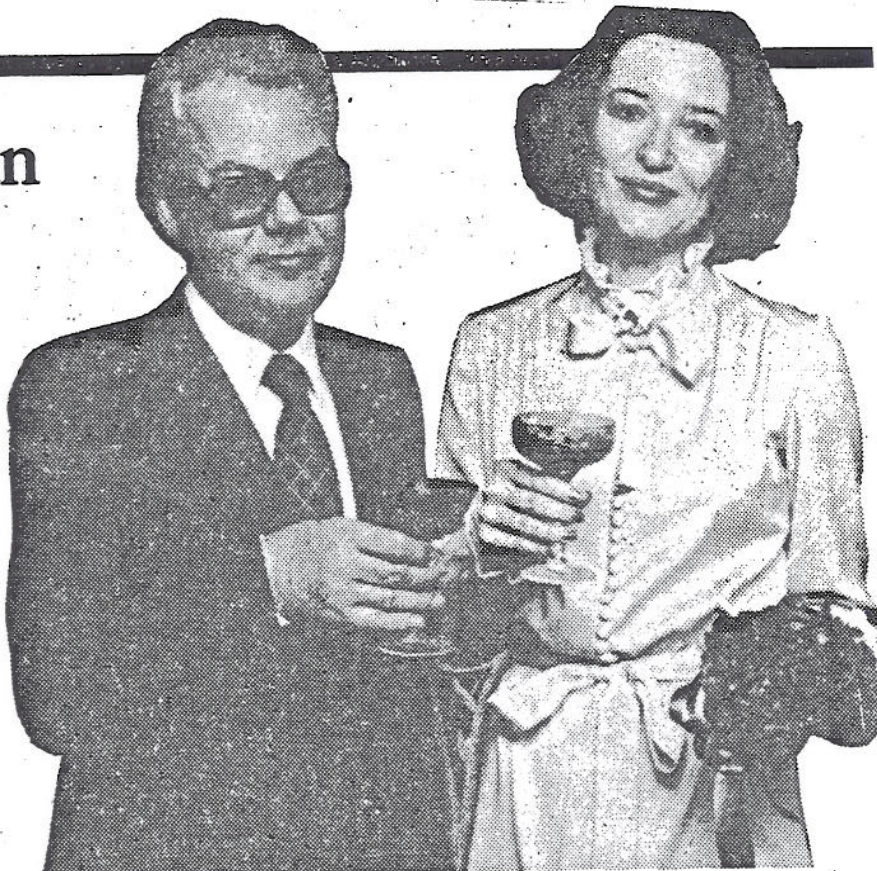
Besides being Russian, her husband has a lot to tell. He is Arkady Shevchenko, a 49-year-old son of the Ukraine who rose through the Soviet ranks to become one of his nation's top diplomats. He was undersecretary at the United Nations in New York until April 1978, making \$76,000 a year and said to be enjoying very much the better things in life. Then he was ordered back to Moscow and instead came to Washington, becoming the most senior Soviet official known to have defected to the West.

Here Shevchenko met his wife, a timid woman with wispy red hair and pale blue eyes, who would prefer it if that were all you knew about her.

Elaine Shevchenko doesn't like to answer questions about herself, and she most definitely will not be writing her own book when she and Shevchenko finish his. "I'm much too private," she says.

She will tell you that she was born on a farm in western North Carolina, near Jacob's Fork River between Newton and Conover, 38 years ago. Her parents, William and June Bissell, had no other children, she says, and when she was 5 the family moved to Arlington, where she was educated in the public schools. Her mother still lives in Arlington, but she would rather not discuss her father. There was a divorce.

She will tell you she has an undergraduate degree in art from George Washington University, and that she finished a master of fine arts degree at American University in 1972. She also will confess that her marriage to Shevchenko is not her first. There was a Mr. Jackson, but she would



Arkady and Elaine Shevchenko on their wedding day.

rather not tell his first name. Again, there was a divorce.

Elaine Shevchenko answers some questions vaguely and others not at all. While she always valued her privacy, now she must husband it. Defectors and their wives can afford to get comfortable but not careless.

She acknowledges that Shevchenko enjoyed CIA protection and financial support after he defected. Asked whether that is still the case, she says only, "I feel secure. He has adequate protection."

She confirms that she and Shevchenko lived in Arlington for the first six months they were married, and that they bought a house in the District in July. But she will not say where the house is.

Still, she reasons that the threat of a KGB reprisal isn't so great now because "the time that they could have prevented Arkady from telling us his information is past. The cat's out of the bag." Moreover, she adds, "The more he is a public figure, the less the danger will be. If something happens to him, it'll come back to the Soviets. I think they know that."

Shevchenko went public of his own accord for the first time Jan. 25, testifying to a House Intelligence subcommittee that an Olympics boycott would be taken seriously indeed by the Soviet people. Following her husband's example, Elaine Shevchenko poked publicly for the first

time in an interview a few days later.

She appeared by herself at the office of her husband's lawyer, William W. Geimer, looking much as she had when the public first glimpsed her at that House hearing. She wore a royal blue blouse and a short, black skirt, and she smoked mentholated cigarettes one after the other. She was skittish at first, perched on a couch like some bird that might fly away. But after a while she regained her pluck and told how she fell in love with her defector "almost at first sight."

"He was attractive to me instantly," says Mrs. Shevchenko, no hint of her Southern beginnings betrayed by her accent. "He has beautiful manners. He's a gentleman from his head to his toes." Such men, she allowed, are "hard to find."

They met in November 1978 at Geimer's home. Geimer and his wife had invited Shevchenko, Elaine and another couple for a Saturday evening dinner, and Geimer confides that one purpose of the get-together was to introduce Shevchenko and Elaine, who Geimer had met when both worked at the Cost of Living Council in 1974.

Before the evening ended, Shevchenko and Elaine had a date for Monday night, dinner for two at Maison Blanche. The following Sunday, he took her to the Zoo. The next

See LIFE, C-4