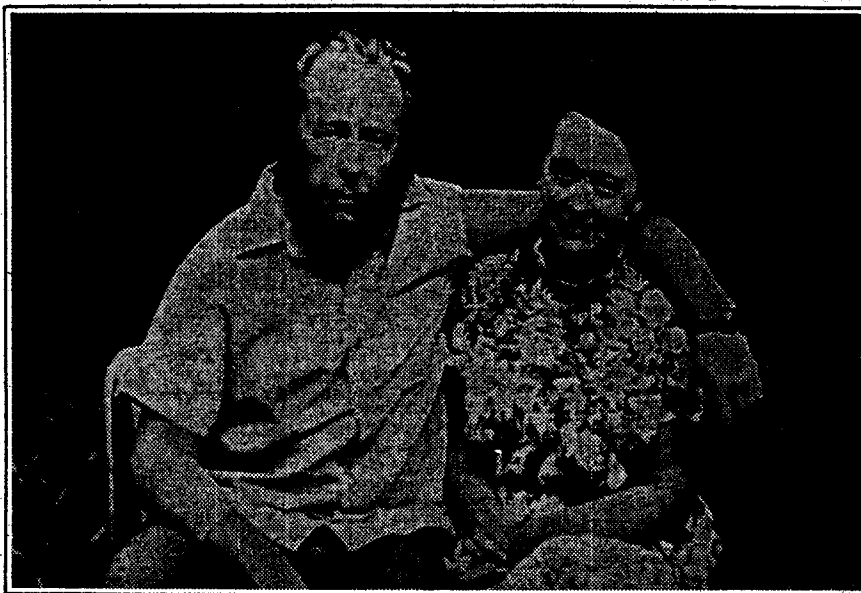


Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Natalya Reshetovskaya, his first wife, in a 1969 photo.



## Such Good Friends of Solzhenitsyn

By Natalya Reshetovskaya

MOSCOW—Now that Zhores Medvedev has poked, as a "good friend," in our family life in the columns of The New York Times, I feel obliged to step in, especially since Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn himself maintains an approving silence.

In his article "In defense of Solzhenitsyn," the gerontologist Medvedev displays a poor memory. An insignificant particular: He declares that our divorce case has been going on for three years, while in fact it is only a year and a half old. Now, now, Zhores Aleksandrovich, have you forgotten that on May 3, 1970, you brought some special variety of potatoes to our country house outside Narofominsk? Nothing appeared to foreshadow a family drama. What is more, only a week before your visit, my husband, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our marriage, raised a toast that we should "be together until grave." At the end of that year Natalya Svetlova gave birth to his child.

I do not at all feel like going into the particulars of the Semyon Vladimirov-Zhores Medvedev duel whether Solzhenitsyn is poor or rich. I will note only that my husband does have a sufficient supply of currency and can freely convert it into certificates

and Soviet rubles. Solzhenitsyn has money and if I were him I would not make statements about being badly off financially. You must admit that to hear that from the owner of more than a million dollars is rather funny.

"Leo Tolstoy probably did not live so comfortably," Medvedev makes a sarcastic note further in his article, in an attempt to question the known facts about Solzhenitsyn's flats and cars. But Leo Tolstoy did not have two families, Zhores Aleksandrovich! As soon as Solzhenitsyn started a second family, he naturally bought a second car, while a third was recently sold by him. Hence the two cars of "two Solzhenitsyn's Natalyas," as the Western press has come to call us. It stands to reason that even the \$78,000 Nobel Prize is enough to buy not only one car and not only two. . . .

There is also the small house in a beauty spot beside the River Istya whose existence Medvedev for some reason so irritably denies. As for stores which sell goods for foreign currency which, according to Medvedev's fancy, "since 1970 have been open only to foreigners." They are open for everyone with currency, including Solzhenitsyn and myself.

Medvedev's persecution mania makes itself especially felt when he draws the horrifying picture of my husband's

possible arrest in Svetlova's flat because, he says, Solzhenitsyn does not have a permit to reside in Moscow (*propiska*).

But Solzhenitsyn lived in a different place for years—and also without a permit! At Ryazan where Solzhenitsyn is officially residing, not only his home, but also his study are vacant. Clearly, any deliberations about an arrest and residential permit are just the author's tricks. Let it be known to the gerontologist Medvedev that both health and creative work demand calm atmosphere, fresh air and therefore the Moscow flat and the Ryazan flat do not suit Solzhenitsyn and he lives in the countryside.

But enough of that. I categorically object to those who try to substitute Solzhenitsyn's moral responsibility for his conduct with material responsibility in whatever figure it may be expressed—\$10,000 or half of his fortune. I take exception both to Medvedev and to Vladimirov, to all and sundry who believe that the family tragedy of Solzhenitsyn and Reshetov-

skaya, of Gleb and Nadya Nerzhin—as we are called in the novel “The First Circle”—can be solved by a commercial deal. No millions can compensate for loss of faith in a man. It has fallen to my bitter lot to learn through Solzhenitsyn himself what is lies and violence. And yet he proclaimed lies and violence the “greatest evil in the world” in his Nobel address.

Medvedev twice makes it plain that I am not the “real wife” of Solzhenitsyn. The real one, he thinks, is Svetlova whose acquaintance with my husband became known to me only three and a half months before the birth of their child. Now Solzhenitsyn’s pseudo-friends and indeed he himself are going against conscience in an attempt to bury in oblivion and to trample down our uneasy life together. A life a quarter of a century long which had in it The War, the dangers, where we lost and found each other, which had prison, rendezvous across the bars and finally a long period spent side by side, with everything in our family placed in the service of him and his work, with myself helping him in everything.

I did duty as his secretary, looked through the mail, interviewed people for his books and typed his manuscripts. I had become so absorbed in his work and had taken his interests so closely that in 1969 I gave up my assistant professorship at the institute—with Solzhenitsyn’s consent.

The way he appraised all that is evident from a four-hour interview with an American correspondent, in which he remembered grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, wife Natalya Dmitrievna Svetlova and the “fair-haired son Yermolai!” And our life, did it not exist? A quarter of a century was canceled at once.

One of the characters in “August 1914,” a certain Varso Nofiev, lectures: “We have been called into existence with the only purpose of improving our soul.” And what about improving the soul of the “August 1914” author himself? His is a truly yawning gap between the socio-literary mission of a truth-seeker and lies in personal life.

He calls publicity a condition for any healthy society and demands that I should keep silence in reply to the slanders and does not rebut them himself. He advocates the defense of the Russian Orthodox Church against the state but acts in a manner far from a Christian’s. He grieves that a person once in prison is forgotten, yet himself flings into the emptiness of a lone old age the person to whom he wrote: “You have saved my life and more than life.”

And when a week after his Nobel award I laid hands on myself and was

awakened only two days later, his friends, in an attempt to save his reputation, made the tragedy look like a comedy. Forty days ago, partly due to this incident, my mother died ahead of her time. Now I have to support my two old aunts—95 and 84 years old—those women who sent regular parcels to Solzhenitsyn during his hardest years of imprisonment.

In unison with the Western press Medvedev gives it to understand that the decision of the Russian Federation Supreme Court to decline Solzhenitsyn’s plea for divorce is some ruse of the authorities, an “unprecedented decision.” The truth, however, is that at the court I became a sort of respondent for his sins. I was resisting the legal coercion of a court divorce, to which my husband was adding slander against my name. After Solzhenitsyn applied personally to the Supreme Court, I too presented my arguments there. I think that the

Soviet court proved more humane than Solzhenitsyn who paraded his adultery at the trial. It is a fact that immoral conduct cannot alleviate the position of one who indulges in it, it only makes it worse.

One of the Soviet literary critics closed his review of “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich” with the words by the great Russian critic Belinsky: “In our time people will kneel only before that artist whose life is the best comment on his creation.” The same words are used as an epigraph to a collection of articles and documents on Solzhenitsyn, issued in the West in 1970. Alas, he does not live up to these words as a truth-loving author.

Solzhenitsyn has taken along, as Medvedev scrupulously remembers, a big old-fashioned writing table—a gift from one of his readers. But Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn is yet to begin to live and to write at this desk according to truth. For the time being his life is like a game of chess in which he is playing white and black at once.

The truth about our life together and about Solzhenitsyn is in my memoirs in response to fabrications in the Western press and by “good friends.” I will have to publish separate chapters in the near future.

*Natalya Reshetovskaya is the first wife of Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet novelist. The Novosti Press Agency said she approached the agency with this article after articles concerning her husband’s financial condition appeared in The New York Times.*