

PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19116

April 20, 1993

Mr. Brian Lamb
CSPAN (TV cable network)
Washington, D.C. 20001

002594 APR 22 93

Dear Mr. Lamb:

I am a fan of yours and a regular listener to CSPAN. Enclosed is some information on a book called Soul to Soul dealing with a journalist from Russia who is black and has a Jewish background. She is a dynamic speaker both in Russian and English. She would be an excellent guest for your show. Thanks very much.

Sincerely yours,

Vice Principal

Home
Office

SOUL TO SOUL

The Story of a Black Russian American Family 1865-1992



As the Soviet Union crumbled in early 1991 a young Russian woman, in search of her past, found her way to Mississippi, to the rich cotton land where her great-grandfather, a former slave, had become the largest black landowner in Yazoo County. In this extraordinary book, we share the life and family legacy of Yelena Khanga, granddaughter of two American communists—one black, one white—who settled in the Soviet Union in 1931.

Unfolding over four generations and three continents—from the bloody racial oppressions of nineteenth-century Mississippi to immigrant Jewish New York in the 1920s, from a Soviet Union crushed under Stalin's heel to the end of colonialism in Africa, from the long stagnation of the Cold War to today's democratic Russia—here is a family saga as dramatic and inspiring as any in fiction. It is a story as only Yelena Khanga can tell it, *dusha y dusha*, soul to soul.



YELENA KHANGA

is available for lectures. For more information, or to place orders for her book, call: (800) 223-2584

Ask for Carol Vieira (212) 790-4336 or Gloria Weiner (212) 790-4350

W. W. Norton & Company
500 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10110

Contact Person

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES
October 11, 1992

Grandmother and mother to author Yelena Khanga: Bertha Bialek Golden and her daughter Lily, 5, in Tashkent about 1930.



From Russia With Love—And History

Soul to Soul

A Black Russian American Family, 1865-1992. By Yelena Khanga with Susan Jacoby. Norton. \$22.95.

By Ralph Wiley

Like everyone else, Yelena Khanga had four biological grandparents. One was a comely Polish Jew from Warsaw. One was a handsome black agronomist from the Mississippi River Delta. Two others were from old Zanzibar, now part of Tanzania, in southeastern Africa.

Born on May Day in 1962, Yelena grew up as a Russian in Uzbekistan, a southerly province of what was then called the Soviet Union. She was schooled in Tashkent, then at Moscow State University. She'd played a fair game of tennis before working her way down to budding journalist at the Moscow News.

She wove in and out of love, came to America as part of a cultural and professional exchange, and watched as the USSR fell asunder. She knew Russian literature and music, and how to ferret out a hard news story, yet she had never seen a tampon, or figured out her own hair.

Yelena Khanga found parts of herself in far-flung places, within disparate histories and unique experiences. She reconciled most of them and has come to tell her story very well.

The title of this poem to glasnost, familial longing and love, *Soul to Soul*, is taken from an old Russian saying, *dusha v dushu*, not from an old Negro spiritual or band's name. The story is drawn straight from a human heart mounting a tide of feeling into these pages.



Anyone who has a heart might feel a kinship to Yelena Khanga.

Her story needs scant embellishment. Her maternal grandmother, Bertha Bialek, emigrated from Warsaw to New York with her family in 1920, where she was introduced to the theories of communism and socialism by her dashing and much-beloved older brother, Jack. Oliver Golden was a Tuskegee graduate, a world traveler born and raised in Yazoo County, Miss., the son of a land-owning former slave.



From far-flung roots came Yelena Khanga (above), granddaughter of a Polish Jew and a black American (Oliver Golden, at left). Her other grandparents were Tanzanians.

Bertha and Oliver met in 1927. As a consequence of her relationship with Oliver, Bertha was rejected by her family, including her beloved Jack.

With a group of 14 other Tuskegee graduates and their families, and with the recommendation of George Washington Carver, Bertha and Oliver left America on a steamship called the Deutschland and came to Russia in 1931 to work for decent pay under Amtorg, the Soviet agency hiring foreign workers and managing foreign trade. They came to help develop

and grow, among other things, a hardy strain of that most agreeable of all plant fibers cotton—although one of them, George Tynes, a former football star at Wilberforce University, was an expert at breeding water fowl, specifically Peking duck (you won't get this kind of stuff in a history class).

When the time came five years later to choose between returning to the United States or revoking their citizenship, Bialek and Golden decided to stay. By then they had a daughter named Lily, whom they didn't wish to expose to bitter racism, American style. Lily grew up and was married to an African patriot, Abdullah Khanga. They are Yelena Khanga's mother and father.

So it happened that Yelena was raised in Russia by her mother and her grandmother. Both men who should have been in her life: her black African father and black American grandfather, died young—one of many subtle, instructive facts within the book.

The book is not a translation but a collaboration written in English, Yelena's second language. Hence a collaborator, Susan Jacoby, a former reporter. The symmetry of the melding of black and Jew spins down to the creative process itself.

The result is fascinating. There is a spartan quality to this book, a dry lightning thrust unlike the literature of Chekhov and Tolstoy that Yelena loves so very much. Perhaps if she had written the book in Russian, she would have embellished, lingered over moments, probed her senses more deeply for detail—and lost the book's engine. This engine is the drive of time and history, which waits for no man, woman, language, ideology or bigotry—and never for enervating detail. Things happen, time changes them, no matter what people think during their brief life-spans.

Yelena's first love, Mishka, says it well in talking to another friend: "Of course I know the children will be colored, but remember what happens when you put a black together with a Russian. Greatness! Genius! Beauty! You get Pushkin . . ." You get America, whether anyone likes it or not.

Furthermore, the fact that the book was written in English shows that people in America were interested in publishing her story before people in Russia were. Yelena gives many examples of governmental strictures, paranoia, and suppressions under communism. Now she publishes her first book in America, in English, where her mother Lily is considered a U.S. citizen.

But in a capitalistic state, theory is not always reality, either. Fear comes not so much from secret police, but from lawyers who would order possessions taken away if one is sued successfully for libel. So many names are changed in the book that it becomes an absolute annoyance. Even poor Mishka's name was changed. What kind of suppression is this?

Other than the false names, this book contains not one false note. The chords of Yelena's life are fresh, new in many ways, like Bartokian music. Her book is a vividly realized memoir rooted on a key of love; a sonata on the real way of the world and the peoples in it; a distinct work of art, no matter that it makes no obvious pretensions in these directions. All the better.

Ralph Wiley is the author of *Why Black People Tend to Shout: Cold Facts and Wry Views from a Black Man's World* and other books.

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SOUL TO SOUL

A Black American Russian

Family 1865-1992

By Yelena Khanga with Susan Jacoby

Norton. 317 pp. \$ 22.95

THE contemporary characters who straddle the mighty distance between Russia and America are a colorful and eclectic group, but none of them has a saga more poignant than Yelena Khanga. Her life as a black Russian makes for a story at once more heartwrenching than Edmund Stevens's and more delightfully implausible than Svetlana Alliluyeva's. (The former was the American journalist who went to Moscow to write a few dispatches and stayed six decades, the latter the daughter of dictator Joseph Stalin, who emigrated to the United States in 1966, only to reemigrate to Russia and finally to return and settle in Arizona.)

Born and raised in Moscow, Khanga is the offspring of American communist grandparents who left the bohemia of New York in the 1930s to live in the Soviet Union. Their daughter Lily, Khanga's mother, is Soviet-born and educated but maintains a penchant for jazz and blues and other aspects of Americana that would make her at home in any Chicago living room.

A few other facts make Khanga's biography even more extraordinary. Her maternal grandfather was an African-American from the South, her father an African from Zanzibar. Unable to accept the unfairnesses of capitalism, both found separate paths to communist-ruled Russia in search of a more just existence. Khanga knew neither man, but apparently inherited some important things from both, not least of all the coffee color of her skin and the cultural heritage that comes along with it.

Khanga has Jewish blood, too: Her maternal grandmother was an emigre from Poland whose own father had been a rabbi in Warsaw.

With the support of the New York-based Rockefeller Foundation, Khanga undertook extensive research into her family history. It took her from an emotional meeting with her father's mother in Zanzibar to a reunion of her

Jewish-American cousins in Chicago and a sojourn to the site of the Mississippi plantation that her African-American great-grandfather called home. *Soul to Soul* is the result: a rich tale of Khanga's far-flung roots and her observations about life as a black in Russia and as a black Russian in the United States.

If Khanga's heritage is unique and exotic, her own life is also compelling. She is a product of one of the most tumultuous periods of Soviet history, including childhood during the Nikita Khrushchev thaw, student life in Leonid Brezhnev's period of stagnation and an early career as a journalist in Mikhail Gorbachev's era of glasnost and perestroika. Making the best of the Soviet system, she eventually gained a coveted position at the weekly *Moscow News*.

Given Khanga's background and upbringing, it is hard not to have great expectations of her insights into contemporary Russia. As an African American who has devoted much of his academic and professional life to the study of Russia, and who met Khanga in Moscow when she was a cub reporter and I was a Moscow correspondent for *The Washington Post*, I had particular expectations for her views of the plight of people of color in the former Soviet Union.

While *Soul to Soul* is not the definitive tale of race relations in Russia, I was not disappointed. It is one of the richest and most emotional personal stories to come out of Russia in the last few years. It is richly authentic, full of anecdotes that only someone with Khanga's perspective could tell: of discovering in grade school that she as a black had a different rhythm and appreciation for music than her other Russian classmates, of entertaining the likes of Gus Hall, Angela Davis and the other communists who tromped through her mother's Moscow apartment, of bringing home her schoolmates's anti-Semitic slang, only to have her Jewish grandmother give her a good thrashing. Famous African-Americans with ties to Russia, like Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson, make cameo appearances too.

Khanga also relates the harshnesses that people of color are subject to in Russia, such as the story of a black Russian woman in Leningrad who was consistently harassed and beaten up by her countrymen.

Yet, in general, Khanga is defensive of Russian attitudes towards people of color. Russians are not racist at heart, she says. When she was a baby and her mother's milk ran dry, a neighbor offered to breast feed her, she explains, as if to say that no one in a fundamentally racist society would be so magnanimous. At the same time, Khanga is quick to characterize America as racist. She illustrates her point with examples, mainly of racially charged comments that American strangers made to her.

Both observations are simplistic, however, and seem inconsistent with the deep well of racial experiences Khanga has to draw from.

KHANGA's conclusions about racial attitudes in Russia are particularly perplexing considering the clashes she had there, such as being rejected by her first true love, a white Russian soldier, who cut off their relationship abruptly rather than risk the possibility of hampering advancement in his military career.

The ultimate value of this book does not rest on the author's observations about race, however, but on her narrative of how she -- and her mother and grandparents before her -- juggled their existences on the vast and often

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wobbly bridge between the Russian and American continents and emerged from the experience successfully. At a time when East and West are groping for a common language, there is an important message here for readers of any nationality or race.

Gary Lee is a reporter on the National Staff of The Washington Post.

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school of the week

A special place

By Robyn L. Baylor
Tribune Correspondent

Standing outside in the sunlight is little Yulya Kreyskop. Her back is to the brick wall of the [redacted] Public School in Northeast Philadelphia. The shy little fourth-grader peers into the camera lens, as the picture is snapped. Her brother David, a third-grader, stands on the steps observing the activity.

With us is the man who has made [redacted] run smoothly for the last five years — John Gallagher. Before that, he was vice principal of Sulzberger Junior High for seven years.

Also present is [redacted], the administrative assistant. Earlier, [redacted] said something in Russian to Yulya. The word "journaliste" is recognized. But, evidently overwhelmed at meeting a reporter, Yulya forgets to answer in her native tongue.

From that one little scene, one begins to realize just how special [redacted] is.

Walking through the school, you tend to think that the building is empty. But, it's not. Little faces stare at you in silence, after you've opened the door. So quiet. Unbelievable.

[redacted] 940 students (pre-kindergarten to



Administrative assistant [redacted] (from left) and Principal John Gallagher work hard to maintain [redacted] well-rounded environment. — Robyn Baylor photo

fifth grade) come from various lands, including Russia, Asia, Ethiopia, India, and other European and Latin countries. Children with special needs such as the physically and mentally challenged and those suffering from autism are taught by well trained special education teachers.

Since about 130 of the students 130 are learn-

ing English as a second language, they attend the ESOL program. [redacted] teaches English once a week, and is a

Built in 1967, [redacted] is one of the newer schools in the city, and one of the best in terms of academics. In addition to following the

'We work hard, but we have a lot of fun.'

Yulya Kreyskop

'Art is creative writing with many colors that express your thoughts.'

Stephanie Feldman

bigger help to the students, since he speaks French and Japanese. (He is also a saxophone player.)

During an English class, [redacted] shows a Tribune "Learning Key" to the students, and begins to verbally quiz them on poet Alexander Pushkin. The answers given by the students were all correct.

regular curriculum, 100 students are a part of "The Pull-Out Program (POP)." This state-mandated program provides classwork for gifted children with I.Q.'s of 130 and over. They are excused from one day of regular classes, although they are still responsible for ALL regular and POP classwork. By the end of the program,

(Continued on Page 3D)



Ms. Horoschak's art students have won many city-wide art contests. To the far left is [redacted] (left), administrative assistant joins the class along with Principal John Gallagher (far right).

— Robyn Baylor photo

About [redacted]

Address: [redacted]
Phone: [redacted]
Hours: 8:45 A.M. — 3:00 P.M.
Capacity: 1,284
Grade Organization: pre-Kindergarten — 5th
Principal: John P. Gallagher
Avg. Daily Attendance: 92 percent
Programs: Adopt-A-School, P.A.T.H.S./P.R.I.S.M.

Special place

(Continued from Page 2D)

they are able to write an exceptional research paper.

After graduating from [redacted] most students go on to Baldi Middle School.

The extracurricular programs at [redacted] are really something to be proud of.

In the music program, three part-time instructors come in to teach on three basic instruments. Students participate in two plays each year for the holidays and in the spring. (During the holiday program, they dress in traditional ethnic garments.)

"Art is creative writing with many colors that express your thoughts." —

Stephanie Feldman, eight, in third grade.

This quote is posted in the hallway in front of the main office at [redacted]. Art is important here. Hundreds of drawings, paintings, and cut-outs are displayed throughout the school (even in the main office). Credit is given to Lynne Horoschak, an art specialist. The talent level is so high, her students have been entering and winning city-wide contests.

Before school starts, a gymnastics program is offered, from 7:30 to 8:45 A.M., attracting 150 participants.

Besides academics and activities, [redacted] offers the Home and School Association — a program for parental cooperation from full attendance at Parents' Night to volunteer classroom mothers, and to raise money for special purposes, and a desegregation program in which students are bused in from as far as West Philadelphia.

[redacted] celebrates its 25th anniversary this school year. As part of the celebration, alumni will speak to students and help them plant 25 trees as an environmental project for the future.

[redacted] 940 students (pre-kindergarten to fifth grade) come from various lands, including Russia, Ethiopia, India, and Latin countries. Children with special needs such as the physically and mentally challenged and those suffering from autism are taught by well trained special education teachers.



Loesche meets the challenges of children with special needs.



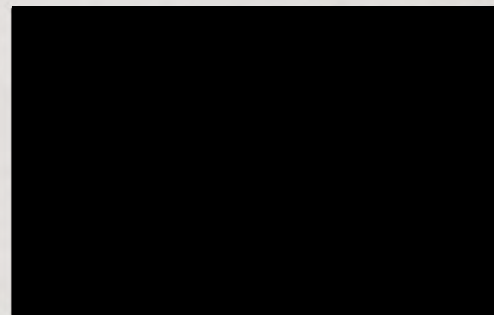
Fourth-grader Yulya Kreyskop thought enough of her school to submit an inquiry for 'School of the Week.' — Robyn Baylor photo

'We work hard, but we have a lot of fun.'

Yulya Kreyskop, student

'Art is creative writing with many colors that express your thoughts.'

Stephanie Feldman, student



**SCHOOL
OF THE
WEEK**

Every Tuesday

In the Learning Key

Learning Key coordinator: Leonte Dunbar. Send all submissions to: Learning Key
c/o The Philadelphia Tribune * 520 South 16th Street * Philadelphia, PA 19146.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

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THE PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
"EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL"