

conditions in those prison camps where the “enemies of the people” dragged out their gradually expiring existence, paying with their life for having dared to oppose Stalin’s heinous conduct. In the atmosphere of Stalin’s repressions, utterly innocent people, even staunch communists, fell victim to envy, to jealousy, to the grudge of a neighbor or a colleague who had informed on them and brought them a lifetime of incarceration and isolation from human society. In fact, beginning in the 1960s, former inmates of the infamous labor camps and prisons in the Soviet Union, those who had somehow survived and returned to their hometowns, penned their experiences without any hope of their writings being published. Some of those writings remained locked in drawers. Others saw the light of day and were published in censored form, of course. Still others were secretly passed on from reader to reader via *samizdat*.³

And those narratives portraying the morbid landscape of the prisons and labor camps struck me for the many themes they all had in common: the crowded lice- and rat-infested prisons; the spine-chilling death-truck or “Black Raven” used to transport the prisoners;

Camps). These prison labor camps began operating in 1918 and housed all kinds of inmates, from common criminals to political prisoners. Detainees worked in various fields such as construction, mining, logging and farming. During the Stalin era, the Gulag became the cruelest institution for the oppression of political opposition in the Soviet Union.

- 3 *Samizdat* or “self-publication” was a tool for dissident writers, a way for those who defied the official line to secretly reproduce and distribute their work. Some of their work found its way through the Iron Curtain and was published outside. Armenians too had their *samizdat*. Many memoirs and works of fiction and poetry on the Siberian experience, rejected for publication by Soviet Armenian officials, were secretly copied and distributed and even published in the Diaspora.