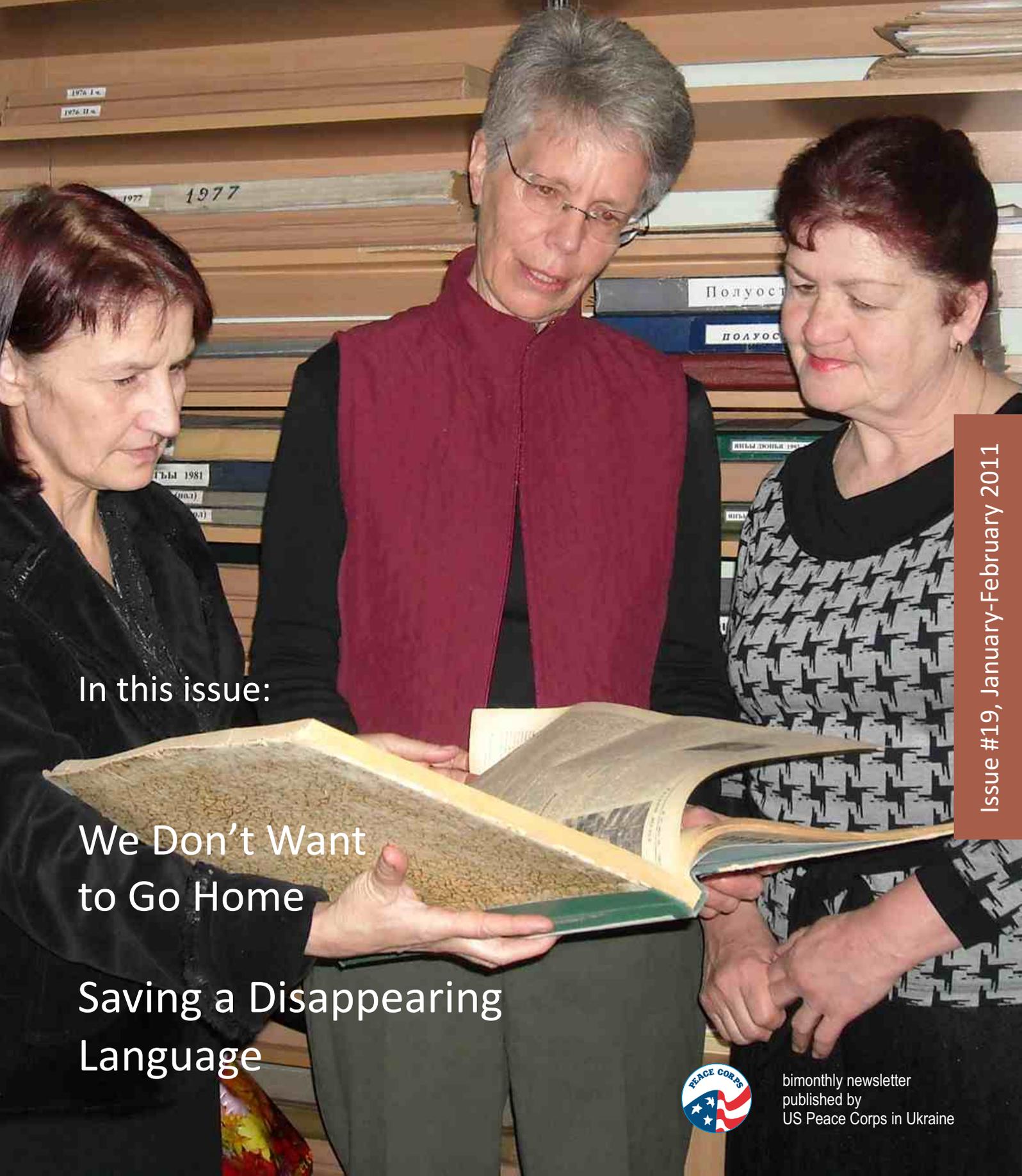


from the

FIELD



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Language

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Saving a Disappearing Language

Can you imagine how devastating it would be to be exiled from your homeland, returning after 50 years to find someone living in your house, your neighborhood dramatically altered, no jobs available, AND you have no legal rights? Could you keep your family together? Your community? Your culture?

On May 18, 1944 the entire Tatar population was forcibly removed from their homes in Crimea and deported to distant Soviet republics (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan). In State Defense Committee Decree No.5859ss, Stalin claimed these “special settlers” could only take clothing, household objects, and “up to 500 kilograms of food per family” that’s it! AND once settled they were forbidden to speak their own language. Stalin claimed the Crimean Tatars had colluded with the enemy during WWII. This charge of “mass treason” has since been well refuted by scholars and ultimately rescinded by the Soviet government in 1967.

Beginning in the early 1990s, thousands of Crimean Tatars returned to Ukraine. They have since struggled to rebuild their lives, push for a voice in the politics of independent Ukraine, and find ways to retain their values and traditions.

Today the Crimean Tatar community is at risk of losing those irreplaceable bits and pieces that hold any culture together: rituals, customs, stories, and language. PCV Barbara Wieser, based at the Crimean Tatar Library in the name of I.

Gasprinsky in Simferopol, discovered that the Crimean Tatar language is so threatened that UNESCO added it to its Red Book of disappearing languages.

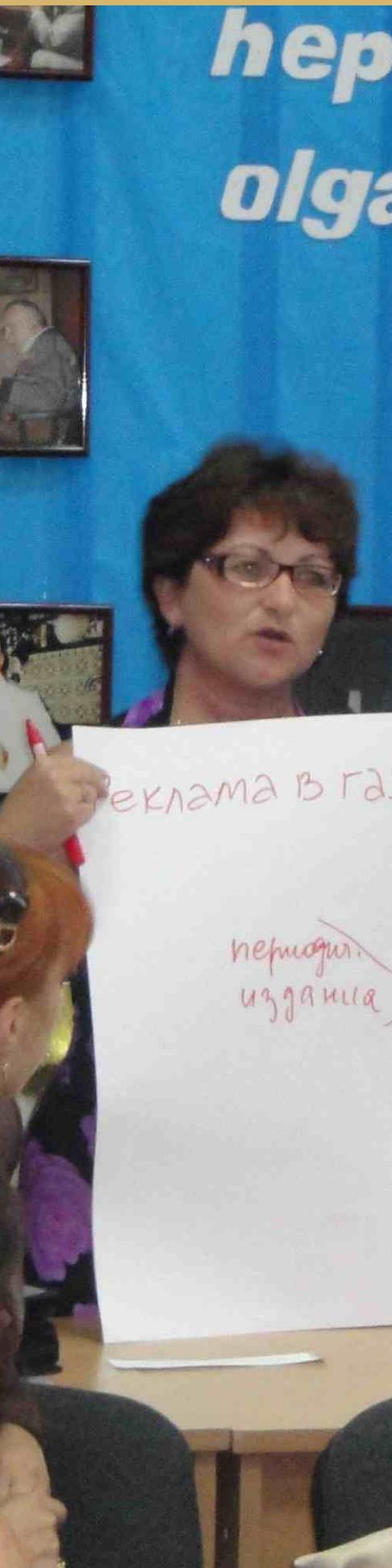
What role can the Peace Corps play? Barbara and counterpart Nadjie Yagya, the leading methodologist at the library, recognized that librarians could potentially play a pivotal role in saving the language, IF they had the tools AND the training. The two developed a seminar to do just that: teach skills in language preservation and in promoting tolerance and respect for ethnic

diversity. As Barbara expressed in her SPA grant application, “Not only is the revival and preservation of the Crimean Tatar language necessary for the survival of the Crimean Tatar people, it is also necessary for the dialogue between cultures that is so important in the multiethnic society of Crimea.”



Entryway of the Crimean Tatar Library in the name of I. Gasprinsky in Simferopol

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The first phase of their approach, a two-day seminar, was held in Simferopol in June 2010. It brought together historical, linguistic, and cultural experts and representatives of Crimea’s 23 centralized library systems.

Besides an overview of Crimean Tatar language, history, and literature, the librarians learned how they can:

- use their libraries to aid in the preservation of the language;
- utilize new technologies in their projects;
- promote tolerance and understanding amongst community members;
- and
- encourage volunteerism to better their communities.

Barbara felt that the participants left the seminar with “new and renewed energy” and that this training “added one more step in the long journey to ethnic tolerance on the Crimean peninsula”. Nadjie remarked that feedback from participants emphasized their readiness to “train their own colleagues within the library system and to provide regional and municipal workshops on the subject”.

The second phase included direct contact with librarians in their community setting. Gasprinsky library staff traveled to Crimean villages with a laptop for internet access, projector, and camera to assist librarians in giving presentations and answering concerns as they reached out to their own people.

Barbara and Nadjie’s library also plays a major role in preserving the Crimean Tatar language in its written form. The Gasprinsky library is striving to become the largest collection of documents not only in the Crimean Tatar language, but also documents by and about Crimean Tatars in other languages. Currently it is the state depository of such manuscripts and documents. The collection numbers over 32,000 books and 9,000 sets of magazines and newspapers plus other important works written in Turkish and other Turkic languages.

Additionally, the library staff is compiling a national bibliography and database of Crimean Tatar books and documents called “Memory of the People”. A potential future project is to digitize all these resources to offer wider access to the public and researchers -- another important step in the fight to save a disappearing language!

The Crimean Tatar Library in the name of I. Gasprinsky is located at 8 Samokisha Street in Simferopol. The library’s website is www.kitaphane.crimea.ua.

We Don't Want to Go Home

In September 2009, after the completion of a successful Peace Corps camp program, the English teachers at Nedryhailiv School began talking about plans for another camp. Together with Peace Corps Volunteer Christine Nold, they applied for a USAID Small Project Assistance (SPA) grant to develop a more sustainable program in their community. The proposed project involved weekly teacher trainings and curriculum development, a leadership and service-learning course for the ninth form, and a summer camp for the fourth form designed and implemented by members of the ninth form leadership course.

The first step in the process was completion of the SPA grant. "One of the best pieces of advice I received from Mary Teeter, one of our SPA coaches", Nold stated, "was to involve community members in the grant writing process. This project would not have been nearly as successful without involving our teachers from the beginning." The English teachers worked together to complete the budget, consider the goals and objectives of the project, and develop a strategic plan. "It [writing a grant] was the first time for us", Katarina Mykolayivna Voropay said. Maria Yosipivna Koval added, "It was something absolutely new for us, we had never done it, but we now understand how to do it. We were greatly interested in this work and we did our best to win it [SPA grant]." In November, the grant was approved and the teachers began meeting to develop the service-learning curriculum.

From November 2009 to June 2010 the English teachers met each Wednesday afternoon to discuss project plans, curriculum development, and adjust their strategic plan as necessary. In January 2010, the service-learning and leadership course began. When asked about the impact of the course on the ninth form, Maria Koval stated, "They gained a lot from the course. First of all they learned how to make a budget, how to make different projects, the most important thing is that they improved their language skills and enriched their general outlook on how to be a leader." She added that the students also learned, "how to work in groups" and that now they, "no longer reproduce something they learned or read, but they try to be creative and develop their imagination."

By early June 2010, the ninth form had completed the leadership course and were ready to begin work as volunteer camp counselors. Tatianna Ivanivna Buzova remarked, "They thought about the vocabulary, the topics, and they had a lot of lessons on leadership, so they knew how to organize the activities and how to do it so that it could be interesting for the younger students." She continued by stating that throughout the whole camp the students were "very serious, responsible, and reliable." Tatianna Victorina Dubink added that they "were like real teachers!"



Ninth form students lead a water balloon toss



Fourth form students are excited for the lesson

One of the most rewarding parts of the project for the English teachers was to see the reaction of the fourth form to the ninth form programming. Maria Koval commented that, "The fourth formers were greatly impressed with the camp, they even did not want to go home or stop work. When I went to classes to call the students to the sports ground, they did not want to leave." Tatianna Dubink noticed their reaction to the new games and activities, "There were many new games for them, they were very satisfied and happy with this camp."

For Christine Nold, the most exciting part of the project was witnessing a change in confidence and leadership ability in both the ninth formers and the English teachers with whom she was working, "At the end of the project, Maria [Koval] said that she was a more confident teacher now because of her participation and that she has a better understanding of how to develop and organize project plans. Also, Tatianna Victorina [Dubink] is already planning to repeat the curriculum with next year's ninth form and hopes to make it a school tradition." Nold continued to say, "I was so excited and so proud to be a part of such a wonderful project. I really believe that our students now understand the value of volunteering and mentorship."

In August, Nedryhailiv was hosting its second Peace Corps camp program for older students (Camp I Believe II) and in September they hosted a kickball tournament that included five other schools from the Oblast. It is evident that the projects in Nedryhailiv would not be possible without the support of the school director, vice directors, and wonderful English teaching staff. Nold stressed that she is, "so lucky to be a part of this community. Nedryhailiv is a truly special place."

The fourth formers were greatly impressed with the camp, they even did not want to go home or stop work



Lutsk, Ukraine

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ADDRESS: US Peace Corps in Ukraine
111 A Saksahanskoho St., Kyiv, 01032, Telephone: (044) 391 6620,
Fax: (044) 391 6621 E-mail: info@ua.peacecorps.gov

EDITOR: Olga Luchuk-Vysotska

CONTRIBUTORS: Christine Nold, Cheryl Pratt
PRODUCTION: Henry Shymonovych

Please submit your entries via e-mail to: hshymonovych@peacecorps.gov
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