

**Reminiscences  
of ex-Soviet Falconers (1971-1991)  
Ukrainian falconers**

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**The Falconry Heritage Trust**

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## **Boyarskiy Valeriy Anatolievich (born on 20.12.1965) (on himself)**

"The falcon rises high when it flies against the wind, not downwind" -

Winston Churchill, British statesman and

politician, military leader, journalist, author 1874 - 1965

A man never knows when and where his most important and decisive moments will happen to him. And one may be called lucky to be able to recognize such moments. Could I, an eight-year-old boy, have known that a chance encounter would turn my life upside down? One day, I think it was the end of August or the beginning of September 1973, I and a friend of mine were doing our usual chores in the yard of our house, and we met two guys with a bird on his arm. Imagine: surprise, delight, interest - all in a matter of seconds! Despite resistance from the unidentified young men, we followed them. There were railway tracks close to my house - a place we simply called "earthen wall". That's where we went, and we watched with gusto as the boys called for the bird. That day I saw a young female Goshawk for the first time in my life.



*From left to right: Sergei Prokopenko, Alexander Nechiporenko (1968-2006), Valeriy Boyarskiy*

It was then that my friend Alexander Nechiporenko and I met Sergei Prokopenko and Valeriy Kalachev. In order to observe the bird's training we waited every day for the guys to go to the earthen wall to call the hawk. That was probably the moment when I developed the desire to train my bird. But it didn't happen right away, of course. Then we learned that there are also people involved in falconry: Leonid Kosyi, Gennady Streltsov and Vladimir Neverov.

When school started, time became much less. I had to select it out in the most ordinary way - by skipping lessons. In the morning, leaving home for school, I asked my mother for a bigger sandwich, went to the neighbouring house where Sashka lived, left my school backbag, and together we drove to the forest to look for nests of hawks and small falcons (kestrels and hobbies). It was a special time of exploration and adventure. At the time, there was nothing in the literature about falconry and the book "Hunting with Catching Birds" by G. P. Dementiev (1898-1969) was almost a desk book.

Within a few years we literally combed through all the environs and with our eyes closed we could tell who and where was nesting. The circle of our new friends increased day by day, because it turned out that not all falconers were enthusiastic about falconry, however, not all of them became falconers.

My parents did not welcome my hobby of birds of prey very much. But I must give them credit for continuing falconry. I don't know how much stick-like biscuits we ate, how much tea we drank, sitting in the evenings at home of Sergei, looking through various photographs and listening to stories about hunting with birds of prey, their training, sewing gloves and hoods, and dreaming about large falcons.

My first bird was a female Hobby. I didn't hunt with her, of course, but I "trained" her regularly. Every day I would leave the house proudly holding the bird on my glove, release it, and in the evening I would call it on the roof of a 9-storey building, where it would fly away. Surprisingly, the bird would return to the glove every evening. This went on until the autumn migration, when one evening I came home alone. I returned to the roof all week, but to no avail. That's how my first bird flew free.

I have kept and trained many birds throughout my life. And I have realised very clearly that the bond with birds is an alliance based on equality and trust. The freedom of the bird is like the freedom of the human soul. I respect and cherish with reverence the memories of every bird in my life. It is important to me that a bird feels the freedom to communicate and interact with humans. Achieving this is a true art. Only having mastered it, one can realize all the charm of falconry.

I have especially fond memories of a young female Sparrowhawk. She appeared in winter, and winter was fierce and female was freezing, so I had to literally carry the bird on my back. The female got used to it and didn't fight back. Walking down the street, I would cover the scent, give the command, and the bird would attack the sparrows. If she caught one, I fed her and we went home. If it caught it, I called it up, took it in my hand and put it back in my pocket and we continued our hunt. I'm sure from the outside it was an amazing sight.

In 1991 my friends and I went to a competition in Kutaisi in Georgia. There I performed with a young female Peregrine Falcon. After returning home, the section of Kyiv Falconers "Kyivska Rus" was established, which still exists.

With my first bird, I developed another lifelong passion - sewing leather accessories for falconers. I loved sewing, and needless to say I still love to see a bird sitting in a beautiful hood on an expertly sewn glove. I have always believed that the ammunition complements the bird. That is why even now I sew all the accessories for my birds myself. It is a special

way of demonstrating my attitude towards the bird. For me, every item made for a bird is a special item, sewn with love and soul.

In the years of my youth, we were just starting out. So the first hoods and gloves were simple. We made our own patterns from pictures in magazines, refined them and created our own first sketches. Leather was almost impossible to get in the 1980s, so we used tops from boots. Believe me, the owner of such cuffs was a really cool person for us! Over time, of course, the situation has changed, and now we remember this with a smile.

Since my childhood, I have been most impressed by the loyalty and nobility of falcons in falconry. I am grateful that I was lucky to keep probably the proudest and most independent bird, a female Gyrfalcon named Rocky. With her I learned all the delights of falconry. I caught my first wild goose with her, and I have the best and dearest memories of her. She has lived with me for 18.5 years, and we have been hunting with her all her life.



*Successful hunting with Rocky*

Falconry has become a real passion of mine to which I devote every minute of my free time. It's not always easy, because despite the centuries-old history of this ancient form of hunting, not many people understand it today. But if "the falcon rises high when it flies against the wind", so does one achieve true happiness when one follows one's heart and not the accepted rules. I have been lucky to find my passion and my vocation. I am lucky that my family supports all my endeavours. Lucky to have falconry in my life.

### **Vernigorov Sergei Semenovich (on himself)**

I was born in 1956 in the Magadan Region of Russia, surrounded by taiga and hills and a huge number of birds, including raptors and animals. Maybe that is why I love animals and birds. I loved watching on TV the programme "In the Animal World", they often showed and told about birds of prey. Being young I moved from Russia to Ukraine and since 1981 I took up beekeeping and constantly watched how raptors diligently seek out prey to feed their young. This is when I wanted to take up falconry. In 1983, a pair of wolves came to our apiary and I passionately wanted to find their den and take a wolf cub. I could not find the wolf's den, but I found a nest of the Buzzard and took two chicks from it. I found no literature in the library on the education and training of birds of prey and the first result was disastrous.

Then, in 1989, the apiary was next to a swamp and I saw where the nest of the Marsh Harrier was located. I took two chicks from the nest and reared them. At home, I let them out and they flew for a day and returned in the evening. But they're migrants, so I let them go free. Next year I found a nest of a Goshawk and took two chicks. I also reared them and went pigeon-hunting with them; one by one they flew away from me. I learned to train birds self-taught, that is, by trial and error. Then I found some literature. And I was getting good at it. The only thing is that I never wrapped the birds in a straitjacket. For some reason, they'd get used to me right away. If I caught a Goshawk in the daytime, put it immediately on the legs and put it on my hand, then in the evening it would already start taking meat from my hand. The best variant was when I caught a young female of Goshawk in January and a week later went hunting with her.

The most memorable was a Peregrine Falcon. He flew away from someone and flew into someone else's house in winter, breaking a window. They gave him to me. I kept him in the field, practically untethered during the day, only at night. Hunting with him was splendid, but one very windy day he flew up very high (and I had fed him a little for love) and the wind

carried him far and far away. I searched the fields for a week but did not find it and it did not return to the apiary, though it always did. By the way, I never used a hood. The most faithful one I had was a male Goshawk named Chuck (named after popular American actor Chuck Norris in that time). He was hard to tame, a bird of character, but he lived with me for 3 years. He was a great hunter. If I put on a glove, he'd jump on it at once, he knew we were going hunting. He'd pull his head up and look where the prey was. He liked to chase owls, harriers and herons. We always returned from hunting with a prey. Other times I even let him fly away, thinking that he will fly on his own, and he will fly for a week and come back again. I felt sorry for him after three years, he is a handsome bird, he must breed a family, give birth to chicks. I sent him to the wild near Kaniv (Ukraine) [Kaniv is a city located in Cherkasy Region in central Ukraine], when I moved there the bees for feeding on the acacia. I kissed him in his beak and he gently pinched my lip with his beak, stroked his head, hissed at his ear to make him pose and let him go with God. He took off and flew away and never came back. I have had many such interesting experiences with raptors.

Once we were standing on an acacia tree with bees and there were Long-legged Buzzards flying and hunting over us all the time. It was a harsh winter, both in the fields and in the forests the mice died under a layer of ice and when we were standing with the apiary, the raptors were all the time whining and shouting, they had nothing to feed themselves and nothing to feed their chicks. I had no bird and my heart ached, so I went with my youngest son to the Long-legged Buzzard's nest. I had known this nest for a long time and there were always 4-5 chicks in it. I never took the chicks and guarded the nest so that no one would destroy it. People don't know which raptor is bad for their livestock and which is not. When I came to the nest, I looked through the binoculars and saw no chicks. When we came to the tree, there was some droppings on the ground, it meant that there was a chick. The nest was not high and my son climbed up to check it. There was one chick and one frozen egg in the nest. The chick was so hungry that it immediately grabbed its finger and was ready to swallow it, even though it was covered with feathers and the first 3-4 cm wing feathers. That the chick did not die of hunger, I took him out of the nest. Turned out to be a female. Named her "Devochka/Girl." I offered her a sparrow, and she took it and swallowed it whole - she was so hungry. I cut the second sparrow into pieces and fed it to her. There is a lot to write about the Girl. As a result, this Girl grew into a beautiful bird. Wherever I went, she accompanied me. Chasing my sheepdog, playing with her. She would catch up with it, lightly grab the tail or the croup, and then bounce aside and wait for the dog to do something. I did not keep her leashed up at the apiary and when we got home, I put her in an enclosure for the

first time, and then I let her out and she was sitting in old 100-year-old oaks. We've got woods on the other side of the street. I call, it flies down, eats, sits on the fence and looks at passers-by, and they walk and admire the bird. Where do you see such a thing? I was driving in my "Ford Granada" with my son from Tax Department, and the crossing was closed. I stopped close to the barrier and I saw the forest in a straight line, about 400 meters away from my house. A bird was sitting and resting on a tree. I took my hand out of the car window and waved a couple of times. The Girl saw me among the cars, and she knew our car, she was always resting on it in the apiary, flew down from the tree and flew to me at the railway crossing. There was a lot of noise! I had to pick it up and drive away, so that surprised drivers didn't beat up each other's cars. And in October she flew south. At first I saw her in a tree with a full crop, she didn't come down on my arm. There was a river floodplain not far from us (about 1 km) and it was full of hares. So, it looks like she got a hare. And the second day she flew in the morning with a full crop, sat on a tree, I called her - she didn't come down, shouted a couple of times, then flew up, circled above the house for about 10 minutes, whined "kaaa-kiaaa-kiaaa" and flew south. I never saw her again. And my soul sings - I didn't let the chick die of hunger.













*Pictured are my children with a young and already molted adult Chuck; photo of Girl at the apiary and my last bird where she is sitting and pinching my dad's ear, drinking water from my spoon, she liked it very much and liked to rest on the dining table.*

I will describe another interesting case of a female Goshawk. I found a Goshawk's nest, from which I later collected 'Chuck'. The nest was on an old poplar tree at a height of 6 m from the ground, in an old cemetery. The cemetery is small - 30m x 60m. No one was buried there anymore. Right on the border of the cemetery there were vegetable gardens and houses where people lived. Chickens and chicks grazed on the gardens, but Goshawk did not touch them. At first, I observed the nest and noticed that the male Goshawk was flying to the neighbouring village to hunt pigeons on the farm, while the female was guarding the nest and was catching mice for chicks on the graves, not paying attention to grazing hens 20-30 m away from her. The nest is old and the pair appears to have produced more than one offspring. I was keen to take the chick. I put on "claws" and a belt and climbed up the poplar tree in three girths. In the nest was 4 chicks: three females and one male. I chose the biggest female for myself, put her in my backbag and went down. Our apiary was 10 kilometers away from the nest. We lived in a collapsible fibreboard house with 2m x 2m living space (two

bunks at each side) and a 2m x 2m kitchen with a gas cooker and table. In the kitchen I put a box with straw in it and put a chick in it. We called her Masha. Little by little Masha grew up, fledged and started to fly. I slept in the hut with my youngest son, he was just on holiday. Masha loved my son Yura for some reason and played with him all the time. It's a pity we didn't have video cameras back then. I hadn't seen footage like that before. One morning Masha started playing in the house at dawn. She seizes some stick on the floor with her beak, tosses it up and while it falls to the ground, jumps up and grabs it with her claws in flight. So she was playing and playing, and she got tired of it. She flew up and sat down on the bed, on the blanket of my son Yuri. She woke him up, but he pretended to be asleep. Eventually Masha started to wake him up. At first she grabbed the blanket with her talons and took off. My son did not respond. Then she, seeing that she could not wake him up, went over to his head and began to pinch his ear lightly with her beak. Yura remains silent and pretends to be asleep. Then she gently pinches his nose with her beak, and he stays silent. His lip - he does not say a word. Then Masha gently takes him by an eyelid and begins to open his eye. Once, twice - silence. And then Masha, seeing that she cannot wake Yura, falls flat beside his head, stretches out her legs, covers his face with her wing, closes her eyes and pretends that she too is asleep. My son and I will never forget that picture. In fact, all summer long, Masha surprised us.

The year I took Masha the Goshawk out of the nest, there was a pond near the apiary and an old poplar grew near it. I noticed that a Long-legged Buzzard was constantly flying over the field and was always heading towards that poplar. I went there to investigate and found that a buzzard had built a nest at a low altitude and that there were 3 chicks in it. The locals are always mowing hay in the fields there. Knowing their attitude to raptors, I knew that they would destroy the nest. I climbed into the nest and took one chick. Two weeks later, the hay was already mowed there and the nest was destroyed, but I don't know what they did with the chicks. I used to stand in those fields with bees for years, but there were no barrows there. I ended up raising two birds, Masha and Malchik/Boy (Long-legged Buzzard). Masha was quick on the wing, but Boy was wild. They didn't quarrel with each other. Masha was free for days and always accompanied us on our walks. She especially liked to let us go a distance, then catch up with us, fly beside our heads, so that she could wing her way over our ears. We had a dog, a mixed sheepdog and a mongrel, and Masha liked to chase it. She would see that the dog appeared near us on the street, she would quickly swoop down on it from a tree and grab it with her claws on the croup. The dog goes under the bunkhouse. Masha comes down on the ground and walks to the house and under the bunk. She spreads her wings and attacks

the dog. She jumps out of the small house and into her kennel. Masha comes out of the house and starts looking for the dog. She flies to the kennel, comes down to the ground, approaches the kennel, makes sure the dog is in the kennel, turns around and flies to the dining table where we are sitting. Sits down on the table and then lies down and watches us drink tea.

The Boy also gets up on his wing and starts to fly. I fed him mice and when I called out to him, he always flew to my hand and got a mouse. One day, in very warm sunny weather, Boy went circling, climbed very high and flew away. Farmers were harvesting wheat nearby and said they allegedly saw him 12 km away from our camp. It flew away, so it flew away. I had to go home for a couple of days. I said to my father that if the boy flew away, you'd call him and give him a mouse, and then tie him up. And I took Masha with me. And there was no mobile phone service at the time. Three days later I came to the apiary, asked my father: "Has the boy arrived or not?" "He flew in the day before yesterday," says the father. He went on to say: "I took the mouse in my hand and started calling him, but he wouldn't fly to me. Then I put the mouse on the pole and the Boy came down, grabbed the mouse and flew away. And so until today." "Where is he?" "Gone somewhere." So I went to the mousetrap, luckily it had a freshly caught mouse in it. I took the mouse in my hand and called out for Boy. To my surprise Boy flew out of the wooded area and sat on my hand. He ate the mouse, I stroked it and tied it on a pole. My father stood there and wondered. I called him so much with the mouse and he did not even try to come down to my hand, but you came and took the mouse and he flew right to you. And that's when I realized that a bird of prey, like a dog, knows its master very well and will distinguish it from others in a crowd by both its appearance and its voice. At the beginning of September we moved the apiary home and there Boy lived freely in the old tall oaks. When I called him, he flew in to eat, then sat on the gate for a long time, delighting and surprising passers-by with his presence, and in the second half of October he flew south. And I was satisfied that at least one nestling was rescued from that nest. After all, this bird is useful and harmless, but people don't know it and don't understand it. It is a pity.

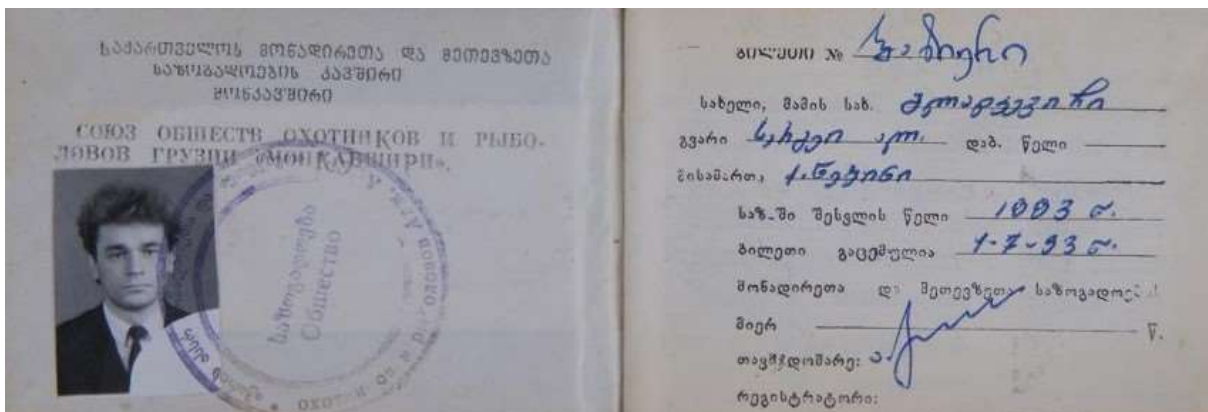
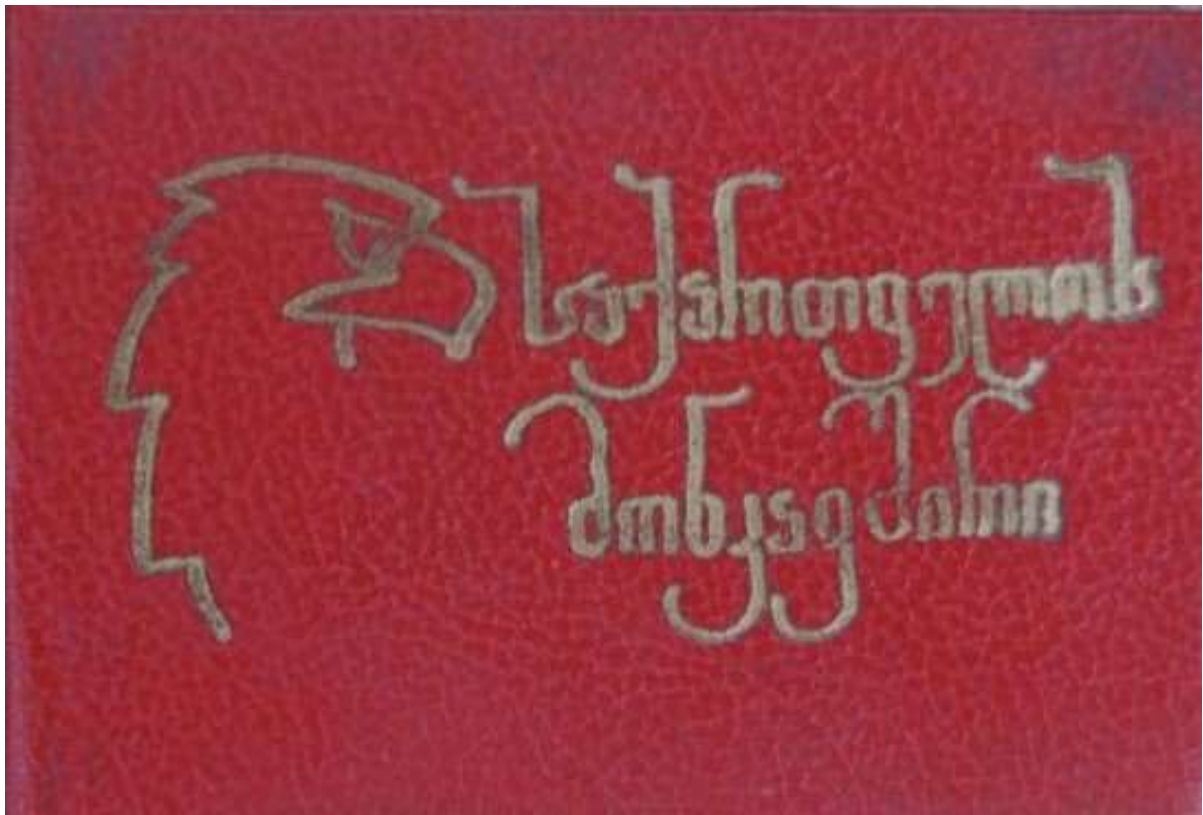
### **Gladkevich Sergei Alekseevich (on himself)**

I was born in 1966. My interest in bird-trapping came from Sergei Prokopenko. In 1984, when we were first-year students of Nezhin State Pedagogical Institute, we went to the autumn bird-watching trip, and Prokop (we all called him so) came there - that's how it all began... The first catching bird, also in 1984, was a male Goshawk, which we brought from pigeon farmers. He was a remarkable bird ... I have kept and flew various birds at different

times: Northern Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Short-toed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Saker Falcon. Almost all of them lived with me for no more than a year. My favourite bird was a Goshawk. The males are ochre with a flat head.

Sergey Prokopenko has become my biggest authority. I have never been unfaithful to wildlife - I became a professional wildlife photographer. For many years, I've been working as Deputy Director and Chief Nature Warden at Ichnya National Nature Park.

Married, two children.



БИЛЕТ № <u>СОКОЛЬНИК</u>	
ФАМИЛИЯ <u>ГЛАДКЕВИЧ</u>	
ИМЯ, ОТЧЕСТВО <u>БЕРГЕН АД</u>	
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НАРУШЕНИЕ ПРАВЕЛ И СТАТУТОВ ОХОТЫ И РЫБОЛОВСТВА, ОХОТ И РЫБОЛОВСТВО БЕЗ ЧЛЕНСКОГО БИЛЕТА ИЛИ С ПРОСРОЧЕННЫМ БИЛЕТОМ, БЕЗ РАЗРЕШЕНИЯ НА ПРАВО КРАТКОВРЕМЕННОГО ОРУЖИЯ КВАЛИФИЦИРУЕТСЯ КАК БРАКОНЬЕРСТВО.

*Membership card of falconer in the Union of Hunters and Fishermen of Georgia «Мон Kavshiri».*



*On the right S.A. Gladkevich, on left Natalja Barabanova, we together have been students of Biological department. She live already many years in London ... She with her girl-friend trained birds with us but they did not hunt...*





*With Pusya the Hobby in 1986.*



*Pusya..*



*Is this bird beautiful ? This is Pusya again.*



*Sake Falcon of S.A. Gladkevich in 1988.*



*These photographs have been taken already in the 1990s.*

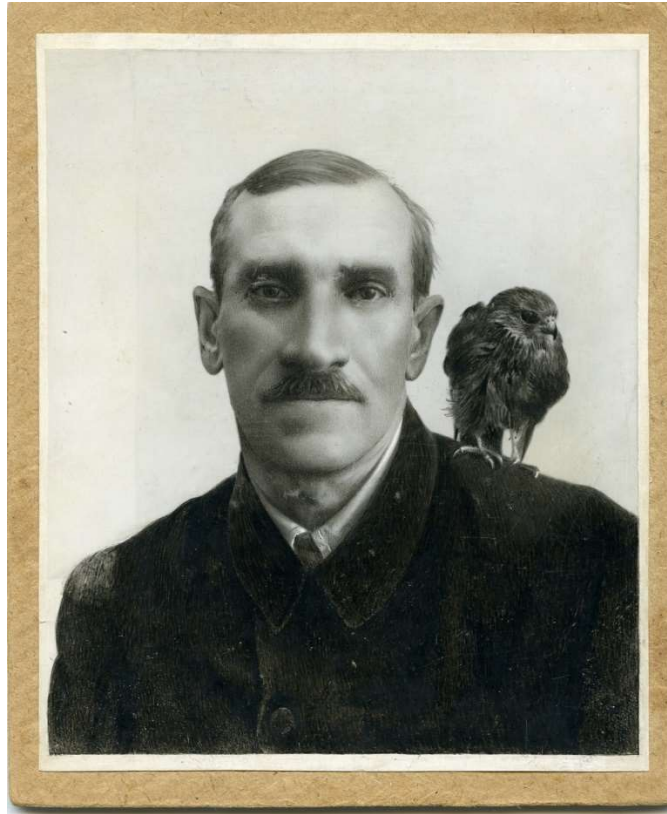
## **Bar-code of Sergei Prokopenko**



This bird feather was about the size of a boy's palm. Seven-year-old Sergei found it on the grounds of a kindergarten in Kiev's Shulyavka (name of district of Ukrainian capital) and was fascinated by the amazing mosaic pattern of warm hues. "You can admire a tree, a cobweb, a butterfly, and still feel: it is beautiful, but it is not my thing," says Sergei Prokopenko today, "and this feather struck me. The feeling was that there was a bar code encoded in its drawing, which fully matched some secret code of my own soul...".

Much later Sergei would learn that it was the feather of a Hobby. And at that time - in distant 1964 - it was, as the great romantic Alexander Grin (1880-1932) said, "that necessary word in a conversation between the soul and life, without which it is difficult to understand oneself".

Aleksandr Stepanovich Grin (Grinevsky was his real; surname) was a Russian writer, notable for his romantic novels and short stories, mostly set in an unnamed fantasy land with a European or Latin American flavor. Most of his writings deal with sea, adventures, and love.



*Alexander Stepanovich Grin (Grinevskiy) with beloved Gul. Photo from Archive of Irina Vadimovna Belyavskaya.*



*Wife of Alexander Stepanovich – Nina Nikolaevna Grin (nee Mironova) (1893-1970) with Gul. 1929. Photo from web-site:*

[http://www.bulvar.com.ua/arch/2010/34/4c763cdc09340/view\\_print/](http://www.bulvar.com.ua/arch/2010/34/4c763cdc09340/view_print/)

Neither Sergei's grandfather nor his father were hunters or falconers, but they knew and loved nature. His grandfather, once dispossessed and having served five years in the Solovki (name of infamous camp within GULAG system situated on Solovetskie Islands in the White

Sea in the extreme North) and another three in a Nazi concentration camp, returned to his native village of Malopolovetskoe and fully restored the farm. Horses, pigs, cows, rabbits, and poultry reappeared. Sergei, who spent all his holidays in Malopolovetsky, remembers well the eight beehives, the poplar tree in three girths behind the thatched, warm hut, and the first lessons of worldly wisdom he learned then. "Thank God," says Sergei Prokopenko, "that after the generation gap in our country, he saved my grandfather for me. And in general, in those years, when there were no computers, videos and televisions, people were much closer to nature. In my parents' house in Kiev, every fifth or sixth flat had a small birdcage with a Goldfinch or a Linnet. And on public holidays, people sang by themselves instead of watching TV. People sang!"

Noticing his grandson's predilection, my grandfather advised: "Try and catch the Merlin. It is the best bird". And he gave his grandson a trap. That's when the real chase for a dream began, which didn't bring any results for several long years. Neither Merlins, nor migrating Kestrels reacted to the captured toads, mice and sparrows. Trips to the forests and fields with a secret net in the company of like-minded friends from Kiev brought only Goldfinches and absentee records in the school diaries. One day, the entire company decided to move to the forest, closer to the birds, and dug holes ... Anyway, the first nest of the Hobby was found three years later, but there was not enough courage to climb the giant oak tree. At the age of eleven, the first great sorrow also happened. The hawk, bought at a huckleberry market for three rubles, had its wings and tail broken, and did not live five days.

The dream continued to tease. Sometimes by a grayish under-tail of a buzzard from the Kiev zoo then by a noble gray back and striped vest on the chest of a female Goshawk - the whole company stood for hours beside this aviary as if awake. Sometimes it was a scene of a pair of Hobbies hunting a swallow in the park in Hruska (there it is, the cherished feather!), or a swift dash of Sparrowhawk attack outside the school window.

When school wasn't skipping, it was the window Sergei stubbornly looked out for all six lessons in a row. "Prokopenko! You're counting crows again!" - The teacher, Maria Kuzminichna, rescheduled the "idler" to the first desk and had no idea how close to the truth she was. As luck would have it, the hawks could be spotted outside the window more often in spring, when one was so reluctant to study for exams and so eager to go to woods and valleys.

Meanwhile, the observations of birds of prey were piling up, their habits and life cycle gradually became clearer. The inevitable finally happened: they found a nest of Hobby on a pine tree in Sviatoshyno. Later, Sergei invented a ladder of his own design. But at that time

he borrowed crutches from some railway workers and climbed to the eighth floor by hammering them into the trunk. The occupants of the neighbouring houses froze below, and the parent birds attacked him from above, but Sergei came down victorious, with a pair of downy chicks of different gender. The same spring, his comrades-in-arms procured a chick of Kestrel and a Eurasian Hobby from another nest. The backyard raptor enthusiast group expanded. Nobody had the slightest idea about keeping, manning and training. The birds enjoyed complete freedom and flew to their feeders for another meal.

During the holidays in Malopolovetsky, the Hobbies were sometimes absent around for three or four days at a time, but they invariably came back and found their friend on their own. It was enough to show the sky a red rag or a pack of "Prima" (sort of cigarettes) and there they were, escorting him with an aerial escort. Not yet knowing what a lure was, Sergey had made one himself, tying a sparrow he killed with a slingshot to a fishing rod. The birds chased him with gusto.

When Sergei returned to Kiev, he hid his pets in a half-opened laundry cooking tank. And after school he was greeted by a parental ultimatum: no birds in the flat! My father's authority was unquestionable at the time... "I put the Hobbies in my father's basket, covered them with a cloth and took them to the Kiev zoo," recalls Sergei. - The zoo called in a specialist. I look at my birds - they are so well-groomed, feather to feather, so good and tame - and I think: maybe it will be better for them in the wild? I let them out, and they flew up to three hundred meters and circled and circled above me. I could not endure and showed them a piece of meat. They spun down. Just then a specialist arrived, and my Hobbies were left in the zoo.

The parting was hard, the loss enormous. But by that moment the strokes of my fate had already joined in two parallel lines of life. One - where everything is about the same as everyone else. The other, inextricably linked to the birds of prey.

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A landmark encounter took place in the Kiev zoo. A stately beauty - as it later turned out, the sportsman Vladimir Neverov - was praising the Goshawk near the aviary in the professional language: "Look, what a fake eye he has, what a large cape, what a feather...". It was from Neverov that the boys were the first to hear about harnesses and other ammunition, and they engaged themselves in the theory of falconry, devotedly reading Alfred Brehm, the magazine "Around the World" and falconry stories. An old female Goshawk, Zosya, lived on Volodya's balcony. This Zosya was taken up for manning by the boys with the whole crowd.

"Then I learned for the first time: the manning is finished, when the bird falls asleep on your hand, - Prokopenko says. - It means it already trusts you and is unlikely to fly away from you."

And then the fifteen-year-old falconers had a chance to enjoy themselves. Everyone got a bird. Most often they hunted near Shcherbitsky's dacha (summer-house). Volodymyr Vasylyovych Shcherbytsky[a] (1918-1990) was a Ukrainian Soviet politician. He was First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic from 1972 to 1989, thus he was the first and main person in Ukraine, strictly bodyguarded as a member of Politbureau of entire USSR. One day his old friend Gosha released his hawk at a pheasant that flew out of the dacha and tried to escape there too. He was flying over the fence, calling to his bird, out of the corner of his eye seeing some inconceivable beauty - well-groomed lanes, flowers, benches and arbours. The alarms howled and the guards swooped in. The parents and teachers of the technical college were worried and questioned, and the "intruder" was eventually released. The hawk also returned.

Even while serving in the army, Prokopenko, commander of the Shilka surface-to-air missile launcher, managed... to man a hunting hawk. Fed with great difficulty to obtain sparrows, the Sparrowhawk lived secretly in "Shilka", where, fortunately, senior officers did not peek. "A hawk in "Shilka" is like a cow in an aeroplane," laughs Sergei Pavlovich, "it's hard to maintain, you just have to clean up after it. Such an exclusive variant of "Four Tank-Men and a Dog" (the name of a famous in the ex-USSR Polish black and white TV series, based on the book by Janusz Przymanowski, made between 1966 and 1970 on events during WW2) - three soldiers and a hawk, because for air defence no better observer could be found. Sergei did end up in the brig when he fell behind the train, buying meat for his pet at the station. But the paternal commanders never found out about the hawk.



*The secretive inhabitant of surface-to-air missile launcher*

In the early eighties Sergei graduated from the Biochemistry Department of the Nizhyn Pedagogical Institute and soon began working at the Kiev Institute of Zoology of Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Expeditions to the North and the Far East followed, where Sergey became seriously interested in climatology, and the post of deputy director for science in the Oka Nature Reserve and work on the selection of breeding stock of birds of prey followed in sequence. He also cooperated with the Altai falcon breeding centre, the Moscow Zoo and Kiev Zoo. Only the latter has four pairs of raptors that were transferred there by Sergei.





After the Chernobyl disaster, there were also several expeditions to the Chernobyl zone, where Sergei hung birdhouses for Tits and Starlings. One of his hardest impressions of that time was the sightless eyes of downy chicks of hawks with star-shaped pupils unseen before or since. Soon after this incident, Sergei had a dream in his sleep about a grey-haired old man preaching hitherto unknown truths - upon waking, Sergei expounded them on ten pages. He woke up in the morning and found the picture of the elder in a Buddhist magazine, so he went to the Ivolginsky datsan to see him. "Why I - an Orthodox man - did it, I don't know," Prokopenko says. - But I learned a lot.



In 1996 Sergey and his family moved to Simferopol, the capital of the Crimea. In the meantime, a second, parallel line of life consisted of an endless succession of his own pets. All with different fates and unique personalities. Counting them never occurred to Sergei. For the longest time, eleven years, a pair of Goshawks has lived with him. One fierce and greedy female left a mark in the corner of his eye. The most favourite birds were two. Peregrine Falcon Malysh, a big hard worker and mischievous fellow, with whom they hunted for five years, was killed by a female who did not want to accept him. His other pet, a five-year-old Kaban the Gyrfalcon, still lives with Sergei along with two dozen birds, many of them hybrids. "Falcon amuses the heart, and Goshawk amuses the stomach," says Sergei Pavlovich, "but I do not want to hunt with Saker Falcons. This bird needs huge spaces and doesn't hasten to get the game. In my opinion, it suits better by nature for unhurried Muslims, whose hunting grounds include large treeless spaces. Which is confirmed by their love for it.

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Sergei Pavlovich considers Genghis Khan, Vladimir Monomakh and Yaroslav the Wise to be truly authoritative falconers. But what is falconry - a sport, an art, a special culture? Undoubtedly, but it is also a world heritage of our ancestors, for whom hunting with a bird was effective before the invention of weapons, specifies Prokopenko.

Could it be that this ancestral call is the secret of the special, subtle contact with a bird of prey, so different from contact with mammals? He agrees with that. But he doesn't rule out a mystical component: "If no one really knows what's going on in the world's oceans, how do we know what's going on in the ocean in the air? Maybe from the point of view of birds we look like some crabs, which they themselves have tamed to some extent? It's not for nothing that the ancient Egyptians deified animals. I think every man has a tuning fork in his soul that will only respond to HIS/HER beast or bird."

Unfortunately, nowadays, only one or two people out of ten who are keen on falconry keep their devotion to the art after a year or two.

What shall we advise to the beginners? I give the floor to Sergey Prokopenko:

- Do not consider falconry as an easy bread. This occupation requires much patience and time. We cannot speak about any "bread" in sense of abundance of game taken by birds.

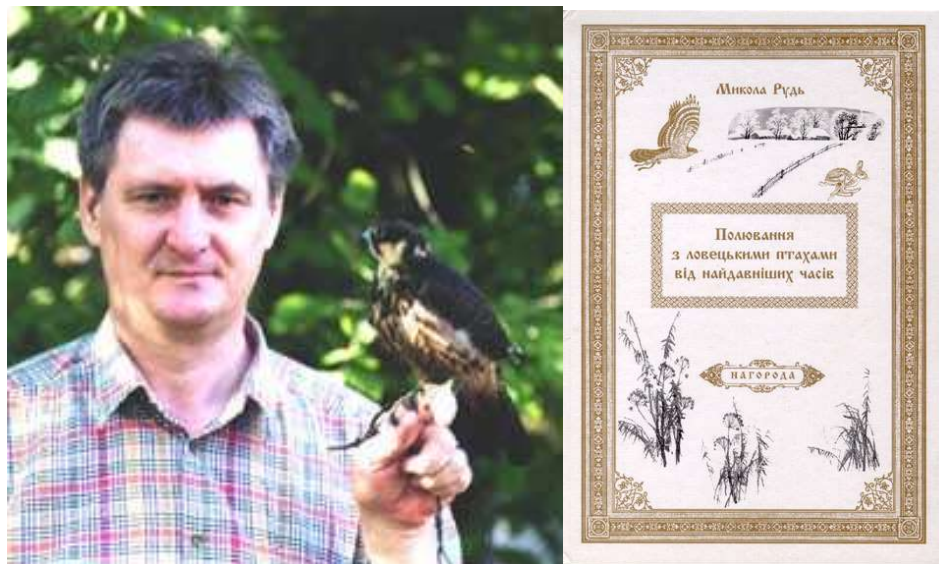
"Old bird is taboo", my grandfather used to say, and I am convinced of this. Don't take old birds out of nature! They've had time to work out what power poles are, what shotgun hunters and host pigeons are. They have learned to avoid them, they nest and breed. Take old birds and you'll soon have no one to hunt with. Take young birds. They are easier to learn, and one or two birds of prey out of ten survive their first winter in the wild.

- Be patient. In time you will learn to understand the bird's mood, consider the wind changes, predict the weather. Falconry is like a war game; you have to consider many circumstances to get the desired result. You will become a strategist and tactician no worse than any commander.

- If your intention to do this difficult hunting is not a caprice: get excited - get cold - give up, you will learn a lot and understand that if you can create the right conditions, the bird will definitely return your sympathy. And hunting will absorb you so much that at a certain moment you will not understand what is more important for you - your own or bird's ego. A falconer needs faith, hope and love. And everything will work out...

Alla Litvinskaya, Simferopol, the Crimea

### **Rud Mykola (Nikolai Pavlovich) (on himself)**





*Mykola Rud with Hobby. His book on falconry in Ukraine.  
From left to right: Dmitri Saksa, Mykola Rud, Rostislav Sorish.*

I spent my childhood in Kiev, on Podol, on Olehovka Street, an ancient mountain, up which one of the oldest streets of ancient Kiev zigzagged. Olehivska street, running to the top of Schekavitsy mountain, passes an intermediate elevation, which is called Gorka (in translation Hill or small Mountain).

Bird-trappers with nets used to come out here at the start of autumn to catch songbirds. One autumn morning, watching from afar a bird-trapper, I saw an unusual sight - a hawk was caught in the net, chasing a Goldfinch.

- Oh! I've got the Shulyak ! [Shulyak - local people's name for Goshawk]

Gloating shouted the master of the cache and resolutely moved towards the bird. The hawk was beating in the net, but could not free itself, and got even more entangled. It is well known what bird-catchers and pigeon-hunters do to the hawks - their heads are torn off in anger. They were accused of killing songbirds and even pigeons. Unfortunately - this is true. But is it the Goshawk's fault that he is born that way? It is destined by nature to be a sanitary worker, to cull the weak, the crippled, the sick, the wormed from the bird nation. Nature cannot allow these birds to give birth. They will not be viable. Only the strong and hardy will be allowed to continue their kind.

I felt pity for the hawk - it may be a raptor, it may be a chaser of birds, but it is not a human to decide who gets his head torn off, and who gets imprisoned, like in a cage ... ..only

to hear the wondrous songs of a voicey prisoner on a winter's morning. And who to sell in order to get money, as it was a custom of many families in the bird-trapping trade since their grandfather's great-grandfather.

Nobody wants to get a live hawk out of the net - it defends itself fiercely and can bite and claw painfully. That's why, in order to avoid fuss, heads were torn off and an immovable body was plucked from the net.

The bird-catcher almost approached the net to execute the sentence. Another minute and the bird would be finished with life. I ran out from behind the bushes and shouted:

- Uncle, don't kill the bird, give it to me!

- We know you, Nikola... you let him out like you let squirrels out, and now red-headed beggars are running around the Podol - they have nothing to eat, so they ask people for food. And the hedgehogs are climbing the mountains like ghosts at night, which have never been here before. That's how it's going to be with the hedgehog...

- Don't kill the bird - I'll buy it from you!

- You don't have any money!

- I've got it! I'm collecting for the aquarium. I've already got three rubles!

- Not enough!

- No one will give you more. No one's going to buy a shulyak from you. Three rubles is also money. For a ruble you sell a Siskin, and you still have to catch him.

Seeing that my words had no power, and that death was imminent for the shulyak, I ran desperately closer and shouted as loudly as I could:

- Don't kill him, or you'll never have any money!

The man, who had four children, stopped, looked at me dazedly and outraged, did not know what to say... but he had no desire to kill the shulyak...

- Oh, you little bogeyman! Go, you hatchling... ..get out... and I don't want your money!

- Thank you, uncle!

I went home with my hands bleeding, but happy. That's how I got my first hawk.

Unfortunately, he did not become a catcher. I was too young to train the bird myself, make it catchable and hunt with it. The hawk did not want to take food - neither big bugs, nor cut-up chickens, nor appetizing pieces of raw chicken. Uncle bird-trapper was right...

On the third day in the morning, I let the shulyak out. I realised that the bird would no longer take the feed, would weaken and die. I gave the hawk freedom to save it and went to the library. I asked many questions about where to read about training of hawks, but nobody could give me any clues. It was much later, after making many mistakes in attempts to tame

other hawks, that I found the first articles on falconry. Since then I have not stopped searching and always try to learn as much as possible about the wonderful art of training birds of prey.

### **Sorish Rostislav Viktorovich (on himself)**

Born on 6 July 1967. I developed an interest in birds of prey at a very early age. I started collecting clippings from newspapers and magazines with pictures of raptors from around the age of 6. My first bird of prey was the Little Owl in the autumn of 1978. Daytime raptors - Buzzard, a wounded bird, in the spring of 1979. First bird I hunted was a female Eurasian Kestrel named Diana in 1982. Most experience was with Goshawks, Saker Falcons and Hobbies. I treated and rehabilitated birds of prey and owls. Maximal duration of one bird was 6 years, this was a male Eurasian Kestrel named Volcano. The preferred species of birds of prey for a long time was Goshawk. Currently it is a Saker Falcon.





*From left to right: Rostislav with pets in 1984, 1987 and 1989.*

...Attitudes towards birds of prey are said to be genetically ingrained in humans. Perhaps it is. From an early age, I was very fond of big cats and birds of prey. But if the first fondness has not gone further than collecting of clippings from magazines during studying in a primary school, the second in due course has grown into a hobby and even a profession.

It was the summer of 1978, at the very end of August. The school holidays were coming to an end, and we, a group of school mates, got out on a camping trip. I cannot remember all the details. We may have played Indians, as we often did, or we went for a swim to the Forest Lakes. All I know is that we walked, though we usually rode bicycles. We walked across a vast grassy meadow...

Years and decades later, I asked myself how my life would have turned out if I had not lifted my head up in time. But I did, and I was the only one of the four boys who had seen the falcon attack from the beginning. I did not know at the time that it was a falcon; the word "Hobby" would not have conjured up any associations. But the picture of a bird of prey gliding on its wing and striking a swallow flying below with black lightning, which had fallen at our feet, was imprinted in my brain with a lot of details. So clearly that by the engraved red colouring of the falcon's under-tail, I was eventually able to pinpoint its species. The brief moment of the bird of prey's attack touched my soul deeply for some reason - it was unexpectedly so unusual. The sense of life in it became very different - time froze, became

long and drawn out, like a solidifying resin. The world was not just frozen, it had become three-dimensional, as if I were looking at it through a stereo tube with giant lenses. And in that world there was only me and the falcon, racing down a gentle slide of air, throwing its paws out, pounding... After that incident, my fascination with falconry became absolutely inevitable...

But it was more than four years before the first bird that could be considered a hunting bird. At that time, all available information about falconry was limited to small articles in periodicals. Therefore, one had to get to everything on his own, based on rare essays in the magazines "Around the World" and "Young Naturalist". I have got acquainted with a true falconry only when serving in the army. In 1986-87, the occasion threw me into Turkmenistan. That period of life was not the easiest one in my life, and falconry probably helped me to complete it decently, sometimes giving additional strength to live.

After my transfer to the reserve in autumn 1987 I returned to the city of Komsomolsk of Poltava Region, from where I was drafted. Together with his friends I organized one of the first falconry clubs in Ukraine in 1988. The club "Krechet" existed till 1997 and had more than ten active members (only practicing falconers were allowed) and up to fifty persons interested. The club ceased to exist because of changes in Ukrainian legislation on public organizations. In practice, this meant that, at a certain point, no one wanted to engage in administrative activities on a voluntary basis. To my mind, the most interesting initiative during the "Krechet/Gyrfalcon" activity was the organization of the winter championships in Goshawk hunting on crows in 1992-96. At that time Goshawks were very popular with Ukrainian falconers, and many interesting episodes in hawk hunting are recalled. Apart from the already mentioned, heron hunting was always very interesting...

...The low sun had already touched the indented wall of the forest on the horizon, and the air was full of the scents of grass and the colours of the coming autumn. Dozens of dragonflies hover over the pond, small birds flit in the shoreline bushes, and a heavenly wind carries the crystalline sounds of the Bee-eaters' voices. Suddenly the peace and quiet of the August evening is sharply shattered: warning, many-created bird's cry resounds in the distance, and, reflected in the smooth as glass and dark as agate water surface, an enormous heron reaches out with its long neck and is chased by a small but furious raptor. It is not the explosion itself, but the panic of anticipation. The explosion follows almost instantly, however, and the mirror-like surface of the lake is shattered into tiny shards. The hawk manages his body so perfectly that it seems almost unbelievable, the chaos of inertia is instantly overcome, taken under control, and used to maximum advantage. And again



everything is frozen: the hawk, spreading its wings, rests on the water, the ripples caused by its fall are silenced. But it is very different, uneasy silence consisting of entirely different distant sounds: frightened cries of bee-eaters fleeing away and swallows that appeared over the pond, rustles of little birds crowded in the thickets. And still the eternal sun shines, indifferent to the tragedies of living beings, and dragonflies, living on a different scale of existence, invariably scurry about in their insect business...

In the early 90s, with a letter from a friend to the magazine "Hunting and Hunting Farming", my long correspondence with falconers of the former Soviet Union began. The most memorable was communication with Nikolay Sanin, Yury Konovalenko, Mikhail Streltsov, Dmitriy Saksa, Dmitri Borodai and Dmitri Yasko. We also corresponded with falconers from St Petersburg, who were creating the country's first zoo-based show of birds of prey at that time. From Ukraine - with Maxim Derkach, Alexander Tkachenko and Stanislav Matveev. The exchange of views and ideas helped a lot in the work with raptors. But only in the late 1990s, I finally managed to get personally acquainted with many Ukrainian falconers and fanciers of birds of prey. At that time I took an active part in the work of the "Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Birds" (UTOP), so I visited the capital of Ukraine regularly. At that time, many amateurs took up breeding of large falcons, and falconers had a real opportunity to work with these birds as well...

...Catching crows and rooks with a good falcon is one of the most interesting in all falconry. Crows are fast, intelligent, very aggressive in a large flock, and afraid of only a worthy catcher, instinctively determining their data by the manner of flight. The Hooded Crows can attack an inexperienced falcon or hawk and, if not to wound, then to foul him, as they have a way of showing their hatred. Therefore, hunting on the crows is a clear indicator of the bird's high condition.

It starts with an attempt to get as close as possible to a flock of crow-rook feeding in the field. The falcon is already unhooked from its glove, but it is wearing a hood on its head, so it won't fly off beforehand. Here we are already half a hundred meters away from the coal-black and grey-black birds digging in the ground. One cannot come closer as in the city the crows let a man in close vicinity, in the field they are much more cautious. At last the hood has been removed. At the sight of a flying falcon, crows, screaming with anticipation, gather in a flock and try to go as high as possible. If there are young or weakened birds in the flock, the chase ends quite quickly. But, more often, the pursuit drags on, the nigger and falcon soaring higher and higher. My Saker is fast enough, it crashes into the thick of the flock already at a height of several tens of metres. Some of the Rooks do their best to advance, others like autumn

leaves glide to the ground, nestling in nearby trees or simply sit on the ground. It is impossible to foresee whom a falcon will attack. It may continue chasing its intended prey as it flies into the sky. It may dive and strike a bird that has landed on the ground. Rarely will falcon be seduced by a bird perched on a tree. But, on one occasion, falcon demonstrated such a blow, almost in the city centre, in front of astonished passers-by. Flying at an altitude of two hundred meters a Saker Falcon suddenly dived down on a young Rook sitting in the crone of a pyramidal poplar. The force of the blow was such, that the branch of the poplar on which the victim was sitting, five centimetres in diameter at the base, snapped off with a crack ! Two young lads walking nearby froze in amazement.

- Did you see the falcon strike! - one of them exclaimed in admiration, and that was the highest praise for the Saker. Usually, passersby call my birds of prey all sorts - hawks, eagles, owls. But only a falcon could strike like that, which was obvious to everyone...

Since 2002 I have started working almost exclusively with falcons, predominantly Saker Falcons...

...A hunting bird of prey, especially a Saker Falcon, cannot become an outstanding hunter if he perceives his game simply as a piece of meat. Such approach leads to simplified hunting tactics, to the selection of countable, primitive (though sometimes effective enough, one must admit), non-spectacular ways of catching. Raptor must awaken passion for the very process of catching, the pleasure of the rush of pursuit, the triumph of victory over a worthy adversary. Then it will inevitably unfold fully and can delight the falconer with almost unbelievable skill. Only if cooperation with a human goes beyond the framework of mutual dependence, it will bring a new degree of freedom for the falcon, freedom from humiliation through hunger and dependence on the vagaries of weather and various fears... Only then the falcon can reach the unreachable heights of hunting even for its fellows, who have no attachment to people. Falconry for me is about this, not about the primitive hunting of fowl. However, I have achieved my goal fully only with a few of my numerous falcons - in this case, besides our skills and cleverness, a favourable combination of many circumstances is necessary. The same luck, without which in many practical cases success is not guaranteed...

Been professionally involved in organising hunting and shows with hunting birds of prey for the last twenty years. I have been married since 1990 and have two children, a son born in 1990 and a daughter born in 1991.

I would like to say the following to anyone interested in falconry:

You have decided to get a falconry bird for yourself. That is commendable, but keep in mind that most of your predecessors stayed "one-optimal" falconers, i.e. once having

introduced a falconer and having got rid of him one way or another (most often because of bird death) they do not practice falconry any more. The reason for that is wrong motives, initially pushing people to do it.

If a human being has never kept any animals in his house before, at least cats and dogs, it does not make sense for him to raise a bird of prey. After all, his desire is not supported by a real love for animals, but rather is dictated by false illusions. Nowadays a falcon is not a symbol of chivalry and nobility of its owner, even if it is the whitest of gyrfalcons. Nor is it a way to attract the attention of philistines. Your fondness for birds of prey is more likely to draw ridicule than admiration from others. A bird of prey will not turn back history, and as an entourage for modern lovers of lats and swords it will cost too much, especially - in terms of time expenditure.

A hunter who wants to take a raptor simply because there are many hares in his area, which he can't shoot because they stick to very rough terrain, or for other "good" reasons, there is no point in having a hunting bird of prey as well. Any bird, be it hawk, falcon or eagle is not a hybrid of bullet and trap. Catching a game bird is just a minor detail on the difficulty of training it and keeping it on a daily basis. And the efficiency of the trap can be very frustrating for the prey hunter.

Does your heart sink at the sight of onrushing raptor, or even the mere sight of its silhouette in the sky? That is not a reason to carry a bird to your home. You can observe raptors in the wild and take photos of them. Or get acquainted with your nearest falconer, go hunting with him regularly, attend falconry events, and you will get more easily the dose of aesthetic pleasure your soul craves.

Acquiring your first falconry bird is no less an important step than, for example, getting married. Your life will inevitably change significantly. You'll have to spend a significant amount of your time with a nearby feathered creature. You will have to constantly and regularly work on the bird and on yourself. Without making any excuses for bad moods or feelings of well-being. No reference to being busy with anything else. So the only justifiable motive to buy a hunting bird of prey may be a strong conviction that you cannot live without falconry...

**Shtepa Alexander Ivanovich (on himself)**

Falconry! In these two seemingly simple words, the history of thousands of years is hidden and there is a deep code of connection between the earthly hunter (man) and the celestial hunter (bird of prey). We will never know the name of the first man who tamed the celestial hunter, it is difficult even to imagine what was the first bird and what was the world they lived in, but we, modern falconers, have a completely different life and are able to describe the path he walked with a bird of prey on his arm, continuing the glorious traditions of his predecessors. Thanks to fate, I am one of them.

I was born in the capital city of Kiev whose history is inseparably linked with the development of falconry in Kievan Rus. Like all the boys, I played football in summer, hockey in winter, took great interest in photography (due to this hobby my friends and I have preserved invaluable black and white photos of that time), went fishing too, of course, it was only a fanaticism. All summer long I fished from morning till night on the Ros River at my grandmother's and no one could take me away from there. A special role in my childhood, I think, as with many teenagers of that time, was assigned to animals and birds found in the vicinity (I will not enumerate them), which were certainly carried home. Naturally, it all affected my parents' nervous system and ended with a scandal and tears, followed by expulsion of the new "occupants" from the flat.

The changes in my life started in 1982, when my mother's sister moved from Baku to Kiev with her family and my cousin Askerov Fuad. Naturally he continued to study at school in Kiev, where he met Alexey Dashenko and they became friends. Alexey had an interest in birds of prey and this interest was passed on to Fuad. They began to go to the zoo and there appeared an urge for falconry. The leaders understood what the boys needed and, without thinking twice, recommended them Mr. Prokopenko, who was already seriously interested in hunting and keeping hunting birds. We often met and talked about hunting with hunting birds, but it was very difficult for me to imagine, how such a wary bird as a hawk, with its sharp sight, can be lured into a net, and then tame and hunt with it... frankly speaking, I did not really believe in this undertaking. The turning point for me came when I saw a female Sparrowhawk in our courtyard on Alexey's glove! This small striped raptor with crazy yellow eyes and long strong clawed feet, which was caught yesterday and today is already sitting on the man's glove and quietly takes the meat (!), broke all stereotypes for me and made such an impression, that it simply became a verdict in my future life. After that I forgot what I was doing up to that day, and I had completely different objectives: the study of the habits of birds

of prey, their identification (we bought up all the literature, which had something to do with it) and, of course, the desire to take the first bird of prey. At that time, we were already acquainted with the older falconers from Kiev, including V. A. Boyarsky, with whom we still share our hunting and life paths. We (the young ones) had the honour of being their guests, listening with open mouth to the stories of hunting with hunting birds and feeling ourselves a part of that society. We have to pay tribute to S. P. Prokopenko and his wife Natalia for their patience and care about us. We were ready to spend days and nights at their place, listening to their stories and gazing at their album with black and white photos of episodes of the hunt that we had not yet experienced. Despite the fact that they had a small child at the time, they never refused us an audience (!), which for a moment is worth a lot.

It is interesting that in those early days, we had no section, no club, no charter, but the order and discipline in our company were not worse than in the army, everyone knew his place in the team and no one argued about nothing. In contrast to today's youth, who immediately want to have a Goshawk or Saker Falcon, we had only one option - a small Kestrel Falcon, and only from their own found nest. This was called a probationary period to test the young for their stamina and attitude to their bird. I think this is the most ideal option for a novice falconer. Naturally, my first bird of prey was this falconer. It was a real fun for our whole yard. She knew very well the balcony on the 3rd floor where she grew up and always came back at the first call. But one day she got lost in the maze of the "stone jungle", so we had to go out in search of her all our yard, we still had no idea about telemetry. Even my father could not stand aside and with a packet of cigarettes "Prima" in his hand (it is red, imitation meat) tried to call her, by the way, she returned to him. He remembered the bitten fingers on his right hand by this little "monster" for a long time afterwards.



*With Dunya the Kestrel in Kiev in 1984 or 1985.*

The second bird I had was a male Hobby. He was a new and higher step in training. This falcon is already faster and more serious than Kestrel, and his character is better, we can say with certainty - a small Peregrine Falcon. With him all the contacts were already in the fly and I had to learn how to use and wield a lure in training.

The ornithological Bird-ringing Station at Kiev reservoir with its permanent head Dr Alexander M. Poluda played a huge role in our development, and we are very grateful to him for that. The beginning of installation of the Rybachy trap (in the first time invented and used at Rybachiy Bird Ringing Station at Courish Spit on the Baltic Sea) in late August was a holiday for us, as well as the next two months of bird studies and ringing. And the next catching bird for me was a Sparrowhawk taken on this trap in the autumn. This was the first bird with which I began to learn the basics of serious training, followed by manning (carrying on the glove both day and night) and training of a wild bird. Naturally, the endurance also took place at school, where even the teachers knew that I did falconry and were sympathetic to the hawk and my

sleepless nights. Subsequently, this process also touched my college and the research institute where I worked - so everywhere there was positivity and interest in my hobby.

The childish excitement of fishing has borne its fruit of patience and persistence and has been replaced by the excitement of searching for the nests of birds of prey. There was still snow outside the windows, and we, knowing that breeding games of hawks were in full swing, calculated on a map, in our opinion, the most interesting parts of forest in Kiev Region and armed with binoculars and sandwiches, with the first train or bus we tried to go in search of them. At the end of the 1980s my friend Alexey and I found up to 30 inhabited Goshawk nests every year, not counting the nests of other raptors, which, unfortunately, nowadays hardly anyone can boast of even a tenth of such findings.

In the summer of 1987 I took a female Goshawk from my nest. Thanks to the experience I had already gained and the advice of older mentors, she and I became a serious link in the chain of Kievan falconers.



*With Larisa, the Goshawk in Batumi in 1987.*



*From left to right: Dashenko Alexei, Askerov Fuad, Shtepa Alexander. Others on this photo are unknown. Batumi, «Dynamo» Stadium. 1987.*

The most striking event in the life of falconers of those times took place in October 1987. We received an invitation to the first All-Union Falconry Seminar, which was held in Batumi (Adjara, Georgia). It was an honour and duty for us and our pets to take part in it. Under keen guidance of our aksakal Vladimir Neverov, me, my brother Fuad and Alexey Dashenko went to Caucasus with our hawks.

It is pleasant to recall the emotions of the trip, when from the train window you can observe a lot of moments from the life of migratory birds, because in fact we travelled along the line of their autumn migration. Especially interesting was the tactics of Sparrowhawk hunting from under cover, which was the train itself.

The climax of emotions was in the epicentre of events at the Dynamo Stadium, where the competitions were held. It was everyone's dream to see so many falconers from the whole Soviet Union, and even with birds of prey. And, of course, we knew that probably the most famous falconer of that time, G. A. Dementchuk, an indisputable authority and expert in



falconry would come to the workshop. There was a real pilgrimage to his hotel room. Everybody longed to shake hands with him, about whom so much was said and written in books and magazines. We must pay tribute to Gennady Arkadievich, he was a very warm and open person, he did not refuse any falconer's attention and good advice. During the competitions we had the honour of repeatedly communicating with him and trying to grasp the subtleties and secrets that he shared with the hunters. Despite his advanced age he was so energetic, that he could challenge any young hunter in the field training with hunting birds.

Dr G.G.Chogovadze, A.G.Sorokin and A.V.Abuladze deserve special thanks for creating such a holiday of life for us. If they will read this book, a huge hello and wish them good health! They have made such an event in falconry 35 years ago which one can only dream of now. Nevertheless, after the competitions in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, there was also a workshop on birds of prey in Kiev, but for some reason I have never had such a feeling of festivity and organization as I had in Batumi.





The Batumi competition made falconers from all over our vast country get to know each other and make friends. I would especially like to mention my friendship with I.R. Enaleev, a falconer from Kazan. Who could have imagined that this impertinent boy would become a professor, but he did and his passion for falconry not only remained, but became even greater. It turns out that falconry is not a hobby but a way of life.

In spring 1988 I was summoned to the army and, as much as I felt sorry to part with my hawk, I had to let her go in the wild. I spent a few weeks watching her and her successful hunts for pigeons and crows, as the woods and the farm were not far from Kiev. Then followed a painful two-year suspension from falconry and service in the armed forces in the Southern Group of Troops (Hungary), the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a completely different page in the whole story.

That's it my friends, I have tried to describe briefly the beginning of my journey with a bird of prey in my hand, and a part of emotions I experienced in those distant times, which seem to be on the other planet. I would like to remember and to bow my head before those,

who were at the origin of falconry revival and to wish good luck, love and respect to those, who really want and will continue this glorious tradition of thousands of years...



*From left to right: me (Shtepa Alexander), Askerov Fuad, Boyarskiy Valeriy.*