"the General and the Peace Maiden," find their stars rising together, but Emil's military past haunts their relationship.

The novel's narrator, Green Party member Manfred Schwartz, is Petra's ex-lover. Through his eyes, readers witness her burgeoning career and her erratic home life. Schwartz also serves as an eloquent mouthpiece for the Greens' ecological anguish: "I wake up in the morning and think first off, Something is wrong, something is bad, and then I remember: we are experiencing the death of a species, a malaise that is altering the planet itself, a human-made sickness that is turning rainforests to deserts, causing birds to stop singing in the branches, frogs to wither, snakes to stand up and beg for water. I am appalled daily. It hurts to think about it. Despite all we tried to do as Greens, this is our generation's lasting legacy."

Petra's environmental reckoning is close to Lambert's own heart — an activist herself, she has twice been arrested for protesting the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. Eco-feminist protagonists appear in her story collections *Oh, My Darling* (2013) and *The Falling Woman* (2002), and her 2007 novel, *Radiance*, tells the story of a scarred Hiroshima survivor.

While these are weighty themes, what distinguishes Lambert's writing is her compassion for her characters. At its core, *Petra* is a very human story about love and betrayal. As the Green movement dissolves into acrimony and tragedy, the novel demonstrates the risk of linking the noble goals of peace and sustainability to one charismatic yet fallible figure.



Vera Maloff's great-grandfather Nick Maloff and his daughter Helen in Castlegar, B.C., in 1927.

MEMOIR

'Thou Shalt Not Kill'

The granddaughter of a Doukhobor peace activist traces her family's history of protest

BY **ALBINA RETYUNSKIKH**
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OUR BACKS WARMED BY THE SUN: MEMORIES OF A DOUKHOBOR LIFE
by Vera Maloff
Caitlin Press

VERA MALOFF remembers a painting from her childhood: men throw guns into a raging bonfire ringed by community members singing prayers. The scene commemorates a day in June 1895 when the Russian Doukhobors burned their weapons, renouncing war and compulsory service in the czar's army. Persecuted by the Russian government for their devout pacifism, over 8,000 Doukhobors migrated from Russia to Canada in 1899, settling in what is now known as Saskatchewan. They hoped Canada would be a safe haven for them; for many, it was not.

It didn't take long for the majority of Doukhobors to lose their land in Saskatchewan. They wanted to live communally, but the Canadian government insisted on individual ownership of homesteads. When it cancelled their land rights in 1907, thousands moved west to British Columbia, and this is where Maloff grew up, on the sunny side of the Kootenay River in Thrums, B.C.

In *Our Backs Warmed by the Sun: Memories of a Doukhobor Life*, Maloff explores her family's history, focusing especially on her grandfather Peter ("Pete") Maloff, who was active in the peace movement. Through manuscripts, newspaper articles and interviews with loved ones, she retraces her grandfather's life, showing readers what it felt like to stand up for your values when

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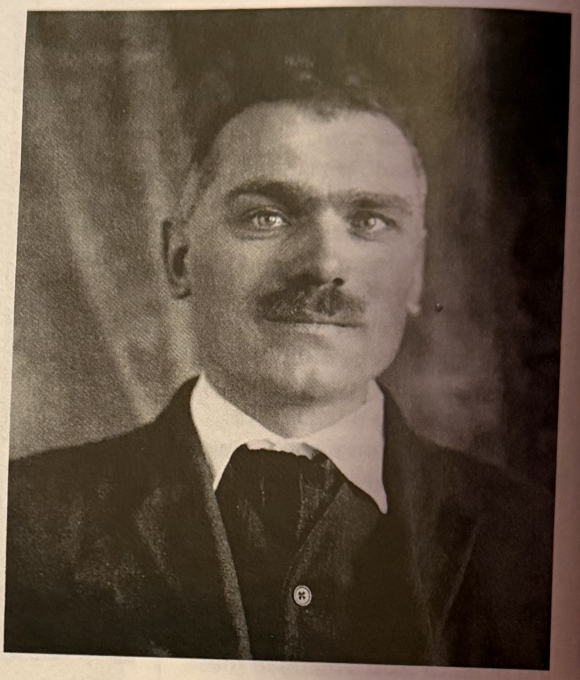
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it was the least convenient thing to do.

Pete Maloff fiercely believed that all people were created equal, regardless of race or status. Like many Doukhobors, he protested against funding wars with taxpayers' money, abstained from alcohol and drugs, and was a vegetarian. Doukhobors also embraced the belief that God lives within each one of us, rejecting the institutional church and clergy.

Initially, Pete was sympathetic to the Sons of Freedom, a radical Doukhobor sect known for nude protests. "If you will take everything from us, and do not let us live by our beliefs, then take our clothes also," they argued. (When he later objected to their campaign of bombings and burnings, he became the victim of arson himself.)



Peter Maloff in 1928, a year before he was imprisoned for leading an unauthorized protest march.

In 1929 and again in 1932, Pete was sent to Oakalla Prison near Burnaby, B.C., for leading protests. His wife and her parents were sentenced to three years for public indecency in 1932 and imprisoned in Piers Island, B.C.

Pete's children also faced repercussions. The author's elderly mother, Leeza (a loving Russian nickname for Elizabeth), recalls with poignant details the pain and loneliness she felt at the B.C. Industrial School for Girls in Vancouver in 1932 while her parents were in prison. She was one of 350 Doukhobor children who were displaced in orphanages, institutions and foster homes for a year. (Another wave of family separations happened in the 1950s, when the children of the Sons of Freedom were forced to attend residential school in New Denver, B.C.)

In 1940, Pete Maloff did more jail time for refusing to register for the Second World War. The penalty for non-registration was three months in prison, but he was sentenced to several terms; after a release, he'd be out for a week before police would arrest and jail him again. He was beaten by a warden. Finally, he was sent to Blewett, B.C., on house arrest for three years, far from his family and community.

Despite imprisonment, Pete Maloff never failed to honour his pacifist beliefs. Addressing the Rotary Club in Trail, B.C., during the global volatility of 1968, he asked: "Do we think to overcome this worldwide crisis by using the same old outworn methods: bigger armies, navies, air force, hydrogen bombs, poison gases and all our other confused values? I myself doubt it. I stand for creative intelligence which is distinctly distilled in the unchanging truth of that one cosmic law: 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.'"

Vera Maloff is proud of her grandfather's legacy in Canada. "Perhaps here, as Doukhobor peace seekers, we have contributed toward our communities," she writes. "Pete Maloff strove to make a difference." Her memoir will inspire hope for a world where we can all choose peace.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF VERA MALOFF