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Beet Salad from Russia has 19th-century roots

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CLEORA HUGHES• St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• March 2, 2005• Section: Let's Eat | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Edition: Five Star Late Lift• Page 9 |
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Name: Lina Melamed

Home: The Gladys and Henry **Crown Center for Senior Living**, University City

Occupation: Melamed, 70, was a designer and engineer for 38 years for a textile manufacturing business in Kiev, Russia. She immigrated to the United States 13 years ago.

Family: Husband, deceased; two sons and twin grandsons

In time of war: Lina was 7 years old when Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, in World War II. With her mother and sister, she fled Kiev for another city on the Volga River. Eventually, the family had to move farther east, trying to flee the bombings and death that were all around them.

"After a year of going from village to village, we reached an old peasant house in the Urals where we took refuge in the winter of 1942," she says.

"Temperatures were 20 to 25 degrees below zero. We ate cold soup with beans, if we were lucky. Often we starved. No bread, no soup. I had to walk to a school across a big snowy field while wolves roared at me. I was always terrified. We

were weak and sick and didn't know anything about my father, who had been sent to the front to fight.

"But at least we had escaped the Holocaust at Babi Yar, where 100,000 Jews died. Many of my relatives perished there, including aunts, uncles and cousins."

After the war: "I had a very nice life in Kiev surrounded by my family and our remaining relatives. I completed my education and continued working as an engineer after I married.

"We had a good life, and I was able to enjoy music, art, concerts and cultural events because everything was so affordable.

"I fulfilled the traditional role of a wife and mother by cooking all the meals; this was more of a responsibility than something I loved to do.

"Even after the war, there were limited choices of the kinds of foods we could eat. Our main dishes were fish, meat and salads. I did, however, enjoy cooking for the family and for religious celebrations such as birthdays and Jewish holidays. I worked hard, trading with friends and relatives, to get the special foods needed for these celebrations."

In my spare time: "I play in the Crown Center bell choir, take a computer class, knit, crochet, embroider and take many sightseeing trips to local museums and the Missouri Botanical Garden.

"I've traveled to Chicago, Cahokia, Las Vegas and New Orleans. Last year, I went back to Kiev to see friends and stopped in London, Holland and Austria during my three-week trip."

"For the last eight years, I have volunteered at the food pantry for the Jewish Family and Children's Services. I also translate the monthly calendar of events to post for other Russian residents."

All-American girl: Each week, Melamed takes a class to master the English language. For the last 13 years, she has done a lot of studying on her own and did well enough to become a U.S. citizen in January 1997. It was one of her proudest moments. Not long ago, she won second prize in a geographical contest focusing on the United States.

Old-country favorite: "The beet salad probably originated in the 19th century, around the time of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. It is similar to a vinaigrette beet salad popular in France. Since then, it has been a traditional Russian dish.

"I use a round metal pot about 3 inches deep to cook the

beets. A 9-inch-by-9-inch pan will suffice for baking in the oven." If you cook the beets on the stove, use a 4-quart pot.

PHOT* BY STEPHANIE S. CORDLE - Lina Melamed's Beet Salad is a traditional Russian dish.

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