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The Triumph of Stalin's Victim – A Tribute to Esteban Volkov Bronstein.

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NOBILITY OF CHARACTER AND PERSERVERENCE HAS CONQUERED VILENESS AND INHUMANITY

Introduction

Cruelty and vileness are widely prevalent in the world. Mostly triumphant. That happens because these phenomena are, more often than not, reinforced by power and violence which are used indiscriminately, mercilessly and in a manner totally destructive of humanitas. Triumph is also assured because of the timidity and/or powerlessness and helplessness of the victim. That is how things have taken place over the ages – the powers of evil, injustice, oppression and exploitation have triumphed, but never completely, nor have all the victims remained supine all the time.

The history of human society is brilliantly lit by lampposts illuminating heroic, often superhuman attempts by human beings to fight against all odds for a better order of society. This occurs when the injustice inflicted becomes so intolerable that people are readily willing to lay down their lives in order to eradicate that injustice. One of the earliest instances in recorded history of the striving to remove an injustice was the revolt of the slaves under the leadership of Spartacus against the mighty Roman empire. Spartacus enjoyed a number of very spectacular successes against the Roman armies, but the liberated slaves were in the end defeated militarily. But in defeat there was success. Spartacus has come to symbolise the struggle for freedom. Whereas the Roman general, Crassus, who ultimately defeated the liberated slaves has been relegated to obscurity, the name of Spartacus has become immortalised. Over the centuries, freedom-loving people have come to revere his name and narrate with pride the story of Spartacus to the new generations.

Hence it will be seen that the success of resistance is not necessarily measured in terms of the degree of the overthrow or physical defeat. Often success is survival from an onslaught of evil and a tenacious refusal to sink into degradation despite every effort made to want that to happen.

The case of Esteban Volkov Bronstein is one such case – a highly illustrious case. Here was a human being who has had to endure such terrible tribulations during his childhood that the observer can only look on disbelievingly and in wonder that not only did his personality not disintegrate or become warped with seething anger, hatred and violence, he, on the contrary went on live a full and useful life and helped to nurture children, one of whom is an internationally acclaimed medical

scientist. We refer to Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse in the United States of America.

An account of this remarkable daughter and her even more remarkable father is to be found in the document annexed to this background and entitled “A Revolutionary Thinker”.

LEON TROTSKY CO-LEADER WITH LENIN OF THE 1917 RUSSIAN REVOLUTION.

Esteban Volkov Bronstein is the grandson of Leon Trotsky. The latter’s defeat at the hands of Joseph Stalin was a manifestation of the betrayal and defeat of the socialist revolution in USSR. Trotsky’s family members suffered all the cruelties attendant on the vicissitudes of his political fortunes.

We set out hereunder a summary of the events.

1. While in exile in Siberia as a young man, Trotsky married Alexandra Sokolovskaya, a Marxist revolutionary.
2. There were two children born of that marriage, both girls, Zinaida and Nina.
3. While the children were very young, Trotsky escaped from Siberia in 1902 and went to Europe and joined the other Russian revolutionaries there.
4. Trotsky records in his autobiography that he was urged to leave Siberia by his wife who, in doing this was merely performing her duty as a revolutionary without the slightest suggestion of melodrama. She took the responsibility of bringing up the children.
5. While abroad, Trotsky met Natalya Sedova whom he married and who became his wife until his death.
6. There were born two children from this relationship, both boys – Lyova or Leon Sedov and Sergei.

7. Zinaida was mother to two children. Aleksandra, a girl and Seva, a boy. Seva is Esteban Volkov.
8. Nina had two children.

COUNTER REVOLUTION AND PERSECUTION

Counter revolution in the Soviet Union was consolidating its position even while Lenin was alive but stricken with stroke. Under the pretence of protecting him from stress, Stalin had virtually isolated Lenin. Hence his coarse and vulgar outburst at Krupskaya¹ when she communicated a message from Lenin. Lenin's death was simply a catalyst for the Stalinists to swing into action. Krupskaya is alleged to have said in 1926 that had Lenin been alive at that time he would have been in one of Stalin's prisons.

The fruits of the Russian Revolution intended for the workers and peasants were usurped by the bureaucracy. In name only, the wealth of society, the means of production and the outcome of production belonged to society. In reality, all that was there, firstly for the use, benefit and enjoyment by the bureaucracy and what was left was assigned to the producers of wealth of that country.

Debates and discussions and recriminations pervaded the whole country during the mid and late 1920s. It was during one such debate in the Politburo, that Trotsky accused Stalin of having put forward his candidacy for the position of grave-digger of the revolution. Stalin left the meeting in rage.

Pyatakov², a member of the Politburo, who was present at the meeting, turned to Trotsky and remarked: **“He (Stalin) will never forgive you for this: neither you, nor your children, nor your grandchildren.”**

According to Isaac Deutscher, (famed biographer of Trotsky) either Zinoviev or Kamanev (Lenin's closest collaborators) gave Trotsky a similar warning, namely, that Stalin would revenge himself on him and his children and grandchildren **“until the third and fourth generation.”**³

¹ Lenin's comrade and devoted wife.

² Pyatakov was a member of the younger generation of Bolsheviks who showed great promise and who was described by Lenin in his Testament as “unquestionably a man of outstanding will and outstanding ability.”

³ Isaac Deutscher: “The Prophet Outcast” page 176

It is notorious that Stalin was a brutal and conscienceless mass killer. He caused the physical annihilation of the Bolshevik leadership and some one million Communists on trumped up charges; he caused the death of some 12 million people in his forced collectivisation and anti-kulak⁴ campaign.

What sends a chill down one's spine is the pleasure Stalin is alleged to have derived from the killing. According to Kamenev, Stalin had remarked on one occasion: ***"The greatest delight is to mark one's enemy, prepare everything, avenge oneself thoroughly, and then go to sleep."***

Here we have, not a human being but a monster out to indulge in his "greatest delight".

1. Trotsky was stripped of all state and political positions and was given a niggardly pittance to live on.
2. His daughters, Zinaida and Nina "lived in utter poverty" and contracted consumption, an affliction which visits the poor.
3. Nina's husband, Nevelson, a member of the Left Opposition⁵, was imprisoned and deported and she was left to fend for herself and her two children.
4. Nina's health broke and she died from her illness. She was then 26 years old.
5. Her two children were initially cared for by her mother, Alexandra Sokolovskaya, Trotsky's first wife. But when she was deported, the children were cared for by her sister, herself a sick person. There is no record as to the fate of Nina's children. All trace of them has vanished. They were either killed through lack of care or they had their identities changed and hopefully and mercifully, had melted into the population, out of the sight and clutches of the GPU, the predecessor of the KGB.

⁴ In truth, kulak means a middle peasant. In actual reality, the kulak label was pinned on all and sundry. Hence the very enormous number of people killed.

⁵ The Left Opposition was a faction within the ruling party in the Soviet Union led by Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks.

6. Zinaida's husband, Platon Volkov, the father of Esteban Volkov, was also a member of the Left Opposition. Like others he was imprisoned and deported.
7. Nevelson and Platon Volkov were in the end executed in the notorious labour camps. In one of his last letters, Platon Volkov expressed clear concern about his son Seva.
8. Zinaida, in the meantime, had also contracted consumption and was unable to accompany her father into exile in Turkey.
9. Adding greatly to the woes of the family was the nervous breakdown suffered by Zinaida.
10. After a struggle to be allowed to leave the country for treatment, Zinaida was given permission to leave the Soviet Union, *but only with her younger child*. She was compelled to leave behind her daughter, Aleksandra. This is the kind of conduct we refer to as vileness. A six year old child was held as hostage! Or was there a more fiendish intention? Being fully informed of Zinaida's mental and physical health, was the deliberate and heartless separation from her daughter designed by Stalin to push Zinaida into the chasm of a fatal depression? The probabilities are overwhelming!
11. The probabilities become a certainty when Stalin passed a decree depriving Trotsky of Soviet nationality. The decree included all his relatives who were with him in exile. The effect of the decree was to prohibit Trotsky and all his relatives who were with him in exile from **ever returning to the Soviet Union**. Zinaida was devastated! The decree cut her off forever from her daughter and her husband who were in the Soviet Union. This turn of events markedly exacerbated her nervous condition.
12. Seva remained with Trotsky and Natalya Sedova while Zinaida went to Germany for treatment. It was a wrong decision for Zinaida to have gone to Germany at that time. Germany's worst nightmare was beginning and already in the making.
13. On the advice of the psychologist attending to Zinaida, Seva was brought to his mother. By that time Zinaida's condition was beyond relief. She was sufficiently lucid to realise that she was in no position to take care of

the child. She left the child in care of a German woman and took the tragic route of ending her life. Seva must have been shattered. He spoke no German and therefore could not even communicate his grief in language.

Stalin must have slept well that night!

14. It was at this stage that Seva's uncle, Lyova, Zinaida's half brother, and his partner Jeanne Martin took custody of Seva. They were deeply attached to Seva. Yet one wonders just how much time were they able to spare for the child because of their own very busy political schedule.
15. The relationship between Seva, Lyova and Jeanne continued until the sudden and medically inexplicable death of Lyova on the 16th February 1938.⁶
16. For the sake of completeness, it is painful to record that Trotsky's younger son, Sergei, a scientist, who was non political (actually it was said by his mother that he had a "distaste" for politics) had also been arrested. Persons who met him in prison spoke highly of his character; his refusal to denounce his father, his courage in taking part in a three month hunger strike with others. It appears that in the end he, too, was executed. A non politico for a trumped up political crime!
17. Seva who was just 12 years old at the time of his uncle's death was not spared further trouble. He became the subject of a custody dispute between Trotsky and Jeanne Martin. According to Isaac Deutscher, the various Trotskyist groups got embroiled in the dispute which lasted a whole year. Seva was first hidden from his grandfather by Jeanne Martin. When Mrs. Rosmer, a revolutionary Marxist and a close friend of the Trotskys, finally traced his whereabouts and "wrested" him away, there was an attempt to abduct him by one of the anti-Trotsky factions.⁷

⁶ The suspicion is overwhelming that Lyova was assassinated by the GPU after he had a relatively minor surgical operation. Mark Zborowski, a GPU agent who had successfully wormed his way into the trust and confidence of Lyova, confessed years later that as soon the ambulance took Lyova to the clinic for the operation, he notified the GPU of this fact.

⁷ Some of the groups which called themselves Trotskyist had/have a deplorable reputation of finding quarrels and splits irresistible and waste a life time on "polemics" and when finally they reach death's door, they realise that there is no time left for the "socialist revolution!" The involvement in what was purely a family dispute is an example of what can happen in the absence of creative activity.

18. It was only in October 1939, that the child reached Mexico which held a promise for normality and stability.
19. But normality and stability would elude Seva for as long as Trotsky was alive.
20. On the 23rd May 1940, Trotsky's fortified home was breached by the leader of the Communist Party of Mexico and well known painter, David Siqueiros⁸ and some 20 killers. They had come to kill Trotsky – to carry out the death sentence imposed on him in those travesties of justice called the Moscow Trials.
21. Between 200 to 250 rounds of bullets were fired. Seva's room was also sprayed with bullets as was his grandfather's. Thanks to the overconfidence of the killers, those bullets did not inflict a single serious physical wound. Seva was the only one to be wounded – grazed by a bullet on his toe.
22. Trotsky relates how they heard a high-pitched voice cry: "Grandpa!" According to him the voice of the child remained "the most tragic recollection of the night."
23. May 23rd was the first attempt. On the 20th August 1940 there was the second and final attempt. Trotsky was fatally wounded by an assassin Jacson-Mornard.⁹ He died the next day.
24. How did the 14 year old boy take the news of yet another death? His grandfather was his last living relative known to him.
25. Mexico became Seva's home. Hence his adoption of the name Esteban. Natalya Sedova lived in that house for the next 20 years. One assumes that the orphan and the widow gave comfort, support and solace to one another. One also assumes that Natalya Sedova would have used her special qualities as a compassionate and caring revolutionary to help heal the boy of so many grievous wounds inflicted on him by Stalin for no

⁸ Isaac Deutscher states caustically : "In Siqueiros art, revolution and gangsterism were inseparable." Deutscher might have added "cold-blooded murder of children and unarmed elderly people."

⁹ In spite of the bare-faced lies about Jacson killing Trotsky because he was a disillusioned follower, Jacson's mother received the "Order of Lenin" for herself and for Jacson the "Hero of the Soviet Union" from Stalin. After serving his sentence of 20 years, Jacson went to the Soviet Union in 1960 and thereafter settled in Czechoslovakia, then a Soviet satellite.

reason other than he happened to be the grandson of Leon Trotsky and the son of Zinaida and Platon Volkov.

26. When General Sancho Salazar, chief of the Mexican Secret Police, saw the 14 year old on the morning of the assassination attempt, it struck him how much the boy looked like his grandfather. Forty nine years later and in 1989 when Esteban Volkov was interviewed by Russian journalist, Mikhail Belyat, the latter had occasion to remark that Esteban Volkov looked “very much like his grandfather.”
27. We can be forgiven for assuming that Esteban Volkov, carrying genes which made him resemble Trotsky physically also carried his grandfather’s genes which gave him strength of character designed to take heavy blows; gave him tenacity and the power to survive vicious adversity?
28. Esteban Volkov has remained in the house acquired by Trotsky in Coyoacan, Mexico City from the time he came to Mexico in 1939. He raised his family of four daughters in that house. Far from considering the house cursed because of the assassination, the Volkov family is proud to be associated with it.
29. The house had long been converted into a museum of which Esteban Volkov had always been in charge and until recently had to supplement the cost of maintaining it, the subsidy from the Mexican government being insufficient. Recently, however, the Mexican government has assumed full financial responsibility for the maintenance and existence of the Trotsky Museum.
30. It would not have been unreasonable for Esteban Volkov to have developed a “distaste” for politics after the hell he had been through because of the murderous vengefulness of Stalin towards his grandparents and parents. That did not happen. Although his political involvement was initially low-keyed, his commitment to the cause of socialism had never dimmed. In his own way, he persisted over the decades to help keep alive the memory of Leon Trotsky by being, in effect, the curator of the Trotsky Museum and by educating the visitors to that Museum about the political struggle that had engulfed the Soviet Union in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s and the role of Trotsky and the Left Opposition in that struggle.

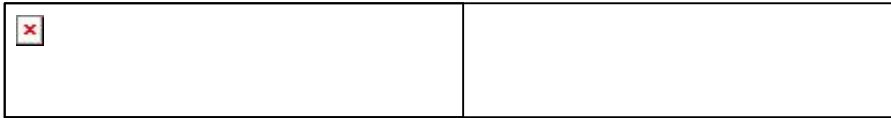
31. At a conference of the international Marxist tendency held in Spain in August 2004, the following message was sent by Esteban Volkov:

“From Mexico, 64 years after Leon Trotsky was struck down in the front line of the revolutionary struggle, I wish to convey to you the joy that I feel when I see that his ideas and principles are being taken up again with vigour and enthusiasm by the new generation.

Comrades militants! There is a road – the road of struggle – the road that was opened up by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and an innumerable multitude of revolutionary heroes who carried, and still carry, the banner of the fight for socialism, The vigorous, energetic and indomitable personality of the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his absolute confidence in the socialist future of humanity, which he retained until the last moments of his life, are an imperishable inspiration and example for those who are fighting for a world without violence oppression and exploitation: a world governed by justice and well-being for all.”

This stirring message expressing joy and spurring the younger generation to take “The road of struggle” comes from a 78 year old revolutionary who has had more than his fair share of thorns from life. He exudes struggle and an optimism in that struggle. He has defeated Stalinism by surviving and not succumbing to despair or capitulation. This is the meaning of the caption of this tribute:

**NOBILITY OF CHARACTER AND PERSERVERENCE
HAS CONQUERED VILENESS AND INHUMANITY**



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<http://www.stophedrugwar.org/>
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Revolutionary Thinker



Posted by [CN Staff](#) on August 20, 2003 at 20:25:15 PT
By Guy Gugliotta, Washington Post Staff Writer
Source: [Washington Post](#)

</news/list/NIDA.shtml/news/list/NIDA.shtml> Nora Volkow was born three years after Stalin died, and 16 years after the Soviet dictator sent a student with an ice ax to kill her great-grandfather. Her grandmother committed suicide, and her grandfather was shot to death in a Stalinist prison. She grew up in Mexico City knowing that her family was both steeped in greatness and marked by tragedy.

Today, Volkow is the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and one of the United States' leading experts on the science of drug addiction.

"I've studied alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, marijuana and more recently obesity. There's a pattern in compulsion," she says. "I've never come across a single person that was addicted that wanted to be addicted. Something has happened in their brains that has led to that process, and I want to know what it is."

By all accounts, Volkow is an inspired, and sometimes electrifying, thinker. Oh, and she also is the great-granddaughter of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky.

Being the descendant of somebody famous can be a blessing. Barry Bonds inherited father Bobby's baseball ability and surpassed him by an order of magnitude. Legions of Kennedys, not to mention the current President Bush, have had an entree into politics because of their lineage.

But Volkow went her own way. She graduated No. 1 in her class at Mexico City's immense National University, and over the course of two decades ran the life sciences department at Brookhaven National Laboratory, became a member of the National Academy of Sciences and wrote groundbreaking papers on brain imaging and addiction with hardly

a thought about what Leon Trotsky could or could not have done for her. "My father didn't like to speak of Trotsky, because I think he had been so traumatized, so he really kept us away from politics," she says. "He never told me any of those stories until I was grown up."

She acknowledges that the family history is "fascinating" but leaves the listener to fill in the political and spiritual blanks. Leon Trotsky, in death as in life, was an ideological lightning rod for an entire century. Even direct descendants know better than to tell posterity how to think about him.

A Doer and a Thinker

Nora Volkow now gives speeches, attends multiple meetings and schmoozes lawmakers on Capitol Hill. She talks to cops and counselors, moving from her beloved research to embrace the community side of the drug war. "My life is upside down!" she says with a laugh, but she doesn't regret it: "I like challenges."

"She just burns it up," said Al Brandenstein, chief scientist of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and a longtime admirer. "She's incapable of sitting still."

Three months after arriving at NIDA's Bethesda headquarters, Volkow clearly has not settled in. Her office is sunny, airy -- and almost empty. There are books and some nice furniture, but the validating staples of official Washington -- diplomas, framed thank-you letters and, most of all, grip-and-grin photos of the office occupant with other powerful people -- are nowhere in evidence.

Instead, Volkow has brought in paintings -- including a couple of her own -- which sit on the floor, propped against the wall, awaiting hammer and nails. Like Volkow herself -- an attractive woman with an elfish grin and dark eyes flashing with intelligence -- the pictures are bold, bright and disturbing. And they are transparently Mexican, the only things in her office that give away her background.

"That's my dog, my Rottweiler," she said, pointing to one painting. "She died when she was 14 years old. She liked to play that she was a fierce dog, but she was a very gentle creature." She paused. "I like to be a little bit playful."

But there's nothing playful about the painting, a large sepia canvas bearing the skeletal outline of a huge hound bent toward the ground as if scavenging a corpse.

Pressed further, Volkow explains that she paints not for relaxation or exorcism, but for elasticity of mind -- "to break my patterns of thinking," she says. "Does it make me think differently about science? I'd like to think it does, but I may be deceiving myself."

Volkow thinks about thinking. This is where it has led her:

- Using imaging technology to track the activities of the human brain, she was the first to suggest that prolonged treatment with therapeutic drugs blunted normal thought patterns and emotions in schizophrenics, even as the worst of their hallucinations subsided.
- She was the first to notice that cocaine addiction triggered tiny strokes - - that cocaine was toxic -- an idea so radical at the time that it took her three years before a journal agreed to publish it.
- And more recently she has suggested that the brains of drug addicts have less sensitive pleasure centers -- known as dopamine receptors -- leading them to take drugs for the sensory jolt that non-addicts may feel without stimulus.

"She knows how to look at data better than anyone I've ever seen," says Brookhaven chemist Joanna Fowler, Volkow's longtime collaborator. "When she was studying cocaine, everyone else was focusing on how rapidly it was getting to the brain, but she focused on how fast it was leaving the brain -- making the receptors crave another hit."

Volkow has published more papers -- about 275 -- than anyone else in her field. She had administrative experience as Brookhaven's associate director for life sciences and chairman of its medical department. She was a full professor of psychiatry at Long Island's Stony Brook University. Given her credentials, the choice of Volkow to head NIDA appears to have been almost a no-brainer.

And how she got there makes for an interesting story.

The Father

The hero of the piece is Esteban Volkow Bronstein, now 78, a retired chemical engineer. He moved from Turkey to Mexico City in 1940 to join his grandfather, Leon Trotsky, in the large, high-ceilinged house at Viena 45 in Coyoacan, a well-to-do neighborhood of distinctive homes.

By that time, most of the family was either dead or marked for death -- hounded into exile, pursued across continents or killed in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Esteban's grandmother -- Trotsky's first wife -- died in exile in Siberia. His father and uncle -- Trotsky's sons-in-law -- were imprisoned and shot.

His mother was able to take an ailing Esteban -- then called Sieva -- out of the Soviet Union to join her father in Turkey, but her citizenship was revoked before she could return for her daughter. She committed suicide. Her sister died of tuberculosis at age 26, and her niece disappeared.

One of Trotsky's sons by his second marriage died young in a Paris hospital. The second -- an apolitical engineer -- died in a Stalinist concentration camp.

"So my father has no family," recounts Nora Volkow. "My father ends up with Trotsky in Mexico because no one else was alive."

By 1940 Trotsky had been on the run for 11 years, since he lost a final power struggle to Joseph Stalin. Trotsky was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and served as the Soviet Union's first foreign minister and first war minister and was viewed as the second most powerful person in the Revolutionary government, until the death of Vladimir I. Lenin in 1924. Stalin sent him and his doctrine of "permanent revolution" into exile -- to Turkey, France, Norway and, finally, in 1937, to Mexico City. For two years, Trotsky and his second wife, Natalya, lived with the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and his wife, the artist Frida Kahlo, in Kahlo's Coyoacan home. The couples had a falling out -- probably because Trotsky was having an affair with Kahlo -- and the Trotskys moved to the Calle Viena house a few blocks away.

Stalin was actively hunting Trotsky by then, and Trotsky's followers built a wall around the Viena house and installed a sentry box. A band of Stalinist hirelings attacked the compound with machine guns one night, but the guards drove them off. Esteban was in the bedroom next to his grandparents when bullets splattered the walls.

A few weeks later, on Aug. 20, 1940, a Soviet agent using the name Ramon Mercader presented himself as an eager young Marxist acolyte, gained access to Trotsky's study and buried an ice ax in his head. Trotsky died the next day.

What Esteban Volkow felt can only be imagined. "I've asked him those questions, but he kept that life very separate, and I think it was hard for him to deal with it," his daughter says. "It took him a while."

Trotsky's House

Nora Volkow was born in the Calle Viena house on March 27, 1956, and lived there until she graduated from high school. It is perhaps a testament to Esteban Volkow's ability to hold his demons at bay that his daughter took obvious pleasure living in a house that for her was never haunted, but simply home.

"There were rooms that Trotsky used for visitors, and my father transformed those into the house where we lived," Volkow says. "He wanted us not to touch anything in the [museum portion of the] house -- not that we always followed the rules." She smiles. "Actually when I needed to study, I would go into Natalya's office, because I was not allowed to go into Trotsky's studio."

Esteban lived comfortably as a Mexican citizen, and though he maintained the Trotsky house as a private museum, he stayed away from politics, "sensitive not to jeopardize his own family in any way," Volkow

says. "What I learned about Trotsky, I learned by reading and interacting with family friends, and from living in the house, not from my father."

Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein of Jewish parents. Esteban Volkow uses Bronstein in his own name, but does not practice Judaism. Neither does his daughter, although she takes pride in a background that is half Jewish and half Roman Catholic from her Spanish-born mother.

"I have the two great religions," Volkow says, but she claims neither. "Trotsky was very sensitive to how identities segregate people, so he didn't identify himself as Jewish. He said he belonged to the human race, and I was never given any type of identification as belonging to the Jewish or the Christian."

Only once did history intrude on Nora Volkow's childhood. A star student who had been fully committed to science since she was 5 years old, she was offered a scholarship to study in Russia when she graduated from high school at the English-language Modern American School.

"I wanted to go," Volkow says. "My father was extremely disturbed, but being an adolescent, I was ignoring his advice. Then friends of the family said, 'Nora, you're putting yourself and your family at risk. You go to Russia and they can say how open the government is because they have Trotsky's great-granddaughter there,' " even though Trotsky was still officially a nonperson.

So instead she entered medical school at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM), Mexico's national university, a seemingly odd choice given her U.S.-style private education and fluent English.

"Yes, but I wanted to be a doctor, and the medical school at UNAM was very good," she says. And at UNAM she could get her MD in six years, with no pre-med undergraduate degree, required courses in irrelevant subjects or other distractions.

She graduated in 1981 as both UNAM's best student and the "outstanding medical student" of her 2,000-member medical school class, and was preparing to go to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a PhD fellowship in the fall.

But she got sidetracked. Reading a copy of Scientific American that summer, she learned about brain imaging -- studying the human brain in three dimensions by using scanners to detect radioactive tracers injected into a patient. Different tracers highlighted different brain activities that provided information on neurological disorders like stroke, epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease -- and drug addiction.

"You could actually image the human brain alive, and I went wild about it," Volkow says. The work was being done at New York University in

collaboration with Brookhaven, "so I said to my father, I'm going to NYU and see if I can volunteer. I didn't know anyone," she says. "I just got on a plane."

She showed up a few days later in the anteroom of Robert Cancro, chairman of the NYU School of Medicine's psychiatry department, who met with her and gave her a job. "Evidently he must have liked me," she says.

Evidently. "You had to be pretty stupid to miss it, actually," recalls Cancro, still the department chairman and a close friend of Volkow's. "It was clear she was bright, anxious, enthusiastic and you could see the drive. I mean, after all, I am a psychiatrist."

Volkow's first paper focused on the equipment -- how to use it to get information on cancerous brain tumors without resorting to surgery. "Suddenly I have this tool that measures biochemical transformations without opening up someone and removing a piece of tissue," she recalls, her voice still hinting at the wonder that these early experiments evoked.

Then she turned to schizophrenia -- what could brain imaging tell you about neurological disorders? She showed that medications interacted with the centers in the schizophrenic brain that governed the disease. She wanted to know if the interactions were what caused "poverty of thought," a crippling condition in which schizophrenics lose the ability to feel pleasure and excitement, and in which the whole thinking process slows down. Subsequent research has confirmed and extended her findings.

In 1984 she left NYU for an assistant professorship at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, expecting to continue her research. "They had a fantastic imaging center," Volkow recalls, but as it happened, "there wasn't a single schizophrenic in the university hospital." What the hospital did have was cocaine addicts, so Volkow adapted. "I was probably the first person to use these new technologies for the investigation of drugs of abuse," she says, but her work was ignored initially, especially her seminal paper documenting strokes in the brains of cocaine abusers.

"I started to present these data at meetings, and people didn't believe it, because there was no evidence that cocaine was toxic," she says. " 'That's fine,' I said. 'But this is what the data show.' "

She applied for a grant from NIDA to pursue her research and was turned down; it took three years before the British Journal of Psychiatry finally published her paper. "This is what happens to you when you come up with things before their time," Volkow says.

While in Texas, she married Stephen Adler, a high-energy physicist at

the University of Texas at Houston. They moved to Brookhaven, where both could continue their research.

Volkow was there when the NIDA search committee came knocking. Her predecessor at NIDA, Alan Leshner, now CEO of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, regarded her, "without exaggerating, as the ideal person," he says. "She has taught us a tremendous amount about the science of addiction, and we need strong leadership to move to the next level. If I had been able to pick my successor, it would have been her."

For Volkow, the biggest question was whether she could stand to curtail her own research, but in the end "there was no way to say no," she says. "I spent 25 years studying drug addiction, and this is really an opportunity to enforce change with much more impact -- an opportunity to mold the field and make a difference."

The Old Country

Volkow, a U.S. citizen since 1993, does not hold dual citizenship but she returns to Mexico "maybe once a year, now, since my mother died," she says. The Mexican government finally took over the Trotsky Museum, "a great relief" for her father, who no longer has to maintain it.

Esteban Volkow began to come out of his shell in the late 1980s with the advent of perestroika but maintained he would never return to Russia. Then, "I guess it was about 10 years ago," his daughter says, "he gets a call from a friend who says 'Esteban, we have found your sister.' Everybody thought she was dead."

So he went for a Moscow visit. His sister, Eva, was dying of cancer. She had heard no news of her family since her mother took Esteban to Turkey in 1930. "She never knew why she was left behind," Volkow says. "She felt abandoned." Eva died two months after her brother's visit, the last tragedy of the Trotsky diaspora.

But the world has changed.

Last year Nora Volkow and her husband went to St. Petersburg for a week's vacation. It was her first visit to the city she still calls Leningrad. She jogged along the Neva River and marveled at the spectacular palaces and the "megalomania" that created them.

Then she left, her sojourn unremarked and unrecorded in the old Russian capital. "I wanted to be completely, completely anonymous," she says.

And she was.

Note: Leon Trotsky's Great-Granddaughter Is Following Her Own Path to Greatness.

