



by Vladimir Vertlib  
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Fiction

## The Journey Home

### *Die Heimreise*

#### review

'The Journey Home' is an absorbing work of historical fiction, based on stories told by the author's mother and relatives and telling the tale of a young Jewish woman's arduous journey home from Kazakhstan to Leningrad.

Whilst spending her summer break from university working on a collective farm in Kazakhstan, Lina, a young Jewish maths student from Leningrad, receives a telegram from her mother saying her father is very ill and she must return home. Travelling by lorry, car, boat, and train across four time zones, she meets an array of fellow travellers, the most important of whom is a young German-Kyrgyz woman called Greta. Greta is on the run from an exclusion zone following a nuclear incident which is being kept secret by the authorities. She is using a stolen ID document and has caught the attention of the Soviet police, who are now looking for her. Travelling together towards Moscow, they share stories about their lives thus far, and a friendship tentatively blossoms. We learn that Lina has survived the war, the Leningrad blockade, and Stalin's persecution of the Jews. These experiences have made her a pragmatic and logical young woman, but also someone who is very uncomfortable with physical contact.

Upon finally arriving home in Leningrad, Lina is told by her mother that her father actually died before the telegram was sent. At various stages during her journey, Lina had called home to ask how her

father was but no one would tell her. Her mother says this was because they thought she would be too logical to make the journey otherwise, perhaps thinking that seeing out her remaining few weeks in Kazakhstan would make no difference. By the end of the book, however, we glimpse the effect the journey – and her friendship with Greta – has had on Lina. In the final scene, we see how she has become more welcoming of closeness with others as she stands in the cemetery where her father is buried, holding hands with her brother and cousin.

This well-paced tale has elements of an adventure story, and appealingly for the genre, a female protagonist who does not let fear hold her back. With an engrossing mix of character-driven storytelling and historical detail, its theme of women living under Communist rule recalls Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*.

Find out more here:

<https://www.residenzverlag.com/en/buch/the-journey-home>

## press quotes

*I could scarcely put this book down. Accompanying Lina on her journey from Kazakhstan to her dying father in Leningrad was a real adventure. [...] Wonderful and definitely worth reading!*

Sabine Fehr-Ogiermann, Lehmanns bookshop, Heidelberg

## about the author



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Vladimir Vertlib was born in Leningrad in 1966. His family emigrated to Israel in 1971, then successively moved to Italy, Holland and the US before settling in Austria in 1981. Vertlib studied Economics and has lived in Salzburg and Vienna since 1993, working as an author. His works includes novels, short stories, essays and articles. In 2001, he was awarded the Adelbert von Chamisso Fellowship Grant and the Anton Wildgans Prize. Vertlib's works include the

novel Lucia Binar und die russische Seele ('Lunar Binar and the Russian Soul'), which was longlisted for the German Book Prize in 2015. His novel Zebra im Krieg ('Zebra in the War') was published in February 2022.

Previous works: *Zebra im Krieg*, Residenz Verlag, 2022.

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