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AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 62

A Day In The Life of Ivan Denisovich - A Book Review with Dr. Liz Woodworth and Lt Col Charles Gartland

Hosts: Major Erin Davis and Captain Charlton Hedden

Guests: Dr. Liz Woodworth and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland

In this episode we review *A Day In The Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a novella by Nobel laureate Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. Set in a Soviet labor camp in the 1950s, the visceral one-day account of that life was one of the first widely available portraits of life in the Gulag. As such, we review it for what we can learn about our great power competitor Russia by examining this part of that nation's history and culture.

[Music: Band playing a section of the Air Force song]

Introductions

Major Erin Davis:

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to another episode of The Air Force JAG School Podcast. We are joined today again by myself and Charlie Hedden. Charlie, say "hello".

Captain Charlton Hedden:

Good morning.

Maj Davis:

Apparently, we've startled a few people when Charlie suddenly chimes in on a couple of episodes. [laughter] So he's here in the studio with us. And today, we are again joined by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland, who's basically a third podcast host at this point.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland:

I believe so, and hey, thanks so much. I'm happy to be here.

Maj Davis:

And we are very lucky to have with us today, Dr. Liz Woodworth, who is one of the instructors over at Air War College. Ma'am could you please introduce yourself.

Dr. Liz Woodworth:

Hi. I am Liz Woodworth. I teach creative thinking and classical rhetoric at the Air War College, and I'm the Director of Research and Electives. I'm thrilled to be invited to talk today.

Maj Davis:

And we're so excited to have you.

So today we are doing another book review, and this one is a little bit more relevant in today's world. We are recording this in March, about a month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. So today we are going to take a look at Alexander Solzhenitsyn's book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Maj Davis:

We will disclaimer at the top if you did not already pick up on it. We don't speak Russian. I certainly do not.

Lt Col Gartland:

We will butcher names throughout this entire podcast.

Capt Hedden:

We're going to give it the old college try.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh, and change pronunciations from one minute to the next.

Maj Davis:

Yes

Dr. Woodworth:

That's fine.

Lt Col Gartland:

We will even pronounce "Solzhenitsyn" a couple different ways.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughter]

Maj Davis:

Yes. So please bear with us and know if you decide to read this book for yourself. **First spoilers ahead.** So if you were planning to read this book and you didn't want to know what happens, we're probably going to spoil that for you. And also, just a note, different translations called some of the characters slightly different names. We're trying to be as consistent as we can to make sure that everyone understands who we're talking about. But if you read the book yourself, a character may be referred to by a different name, and they may not line up with what we call them here.

So—okay—I thought we'd start with a little bit of an introduction to the author Solzhenitsyn, who was born in December 1918 in Russia. He was an outspoken critic of communism and through this book and others, he helped to raise global awareness of the political repressions of the USSR. He himself while serving as a captain in the Red Army during World War Two, was arrested and sentenced to eight years in the Gulag, which is labor camp up in Siberian, north of Russia. And then he received a sentence of eternal exile for criticizing Joseph Stalin in a private letter. And *One Day in the Life* was actually written based on his experiences of being in one of these labor camps for eight years. He was eventually released and exonerated after the Khrushchev Thaw. During Khrushchev's term, he received approval from Khrushchev himself to print his writings about the repressions of the Soviet Union and his experiences.

However, that did not last long. And after Khrushchev was removed, the Soviet authorities tried to discourage him from continuing to write, and he then published

The Gulag Archipelago in 1973, and they did not like that. And he lost his Soviet citizenship and was *flown* to West Germany, is how it was described. I think he was deposited.

Capt Hedden:

We called it deported. [laughter by all]

Maj Davis:

Deported, deported to West Germany. And then he ended up coming here with his family to live in the U.S. for a while. And then eventually in 1990, he got his citizenship back. He moved back to Russia where he finished out the rest of his life. He died in 2008. He was the winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize in Literature for *The Gulag Archipelago*, “for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature”—which is so Russian.

Lt Col Gartland:

Indeed. Let me just, a brief comment on that. For those of you who would like to take a stab at Russian literature but do not have the endurance or commitment required for *Gulag Archipelago*, [pronounces it a couple of different ways]—however you want to pronounce it. I don’t know. That’s another one. I guess even on some of our English [laughter by all], we could probably give a disclaimer. That, the abridged version—just sitting on the desk in my office—I want to say runs to close to a thousand pages unabridged.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh.

Maj Davis:

That’s the abridged?

Lt Col Gartland:

That’s the abridged. The unabridged is over that. It’s actually hard to find a copy [laughter] of the unabridged version if you go online. So, this I think based on what I’ve read out there, this is a nice little condensed version of that. So

Maj Davis:

It’s only one day.

Lt Col Gartland:

It’s only, it’s only, literally by title. It is one day in the life of a zek [a slang term for an inmate] in the Gulag, and it runs to, in this version a 100 and I think it’s 160 something pages here. So

Dr. Woodworth:

And you could read it in one day. Absolutely.

Lt Col Gartland:

And you could read it in one day, absolutely.

Maj Davis:

A beach read.

Capt Hedden:

It’s about 5 hours on Audible.

Lt Col Gartland:

Thanks, Charlie. Yeah, that’s good to know. Yeah. Yeah. So, a road trip down to Pensacola and back here.

Capt Hedden:

I’m just so proud that I read the right book this time. [laughter by all]

Maj Davis:

We’re all so proud of you.

Capt Hedden:

I’m just going to bask in that.

The Book

Maj Davis:

So Colonel Gartland do you want to tell us a little bit more about the book? Anything interesting?

Lt Col Gartland:

Yeah, there’s, of course with all of these, all the books that we’ve had on our podcasts, there’s so much more

to it. And one of the temptations in this podcast is to try and cover *everything*, especially in a book like this that's so condensed.

Let me start making a comparison that probably might seem a bit *strange*, because I believe all of us here have read it, but there is—this book did remind me in some ways of *The Old Man and the Sea*. So different, obviously, different genre, different authors, but *Old Man and the Sea* also looking out at a tight, confined period of time. I don't remember if it was just one day in *Old Man and the Sea*, but it was pretty close. It was pretty close to that. And yet *so much* is packed into so many themes, so much going on.

And we have the same thing here in one day in the life of Shukhov, a prisoner at the Gulag, as with most of his companions, he isn't actually a *criminal* in the criminal law sense of the term. That's yet another theme that you see in this book. He's a political dissident. He's been given ten years. He actually had a military tie in, as I recall. He had been taken prisoner.

Maj Davis:

Yes sir. He was a P.O.W. and he, they were released, and his crime was having been a P.O.W.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes. So there were many others there who were political dissidents. Actually, he was just in the Red Army, and his crime was being captured and having the audacity to come back. Very true. That actually happened to tons of Red Army soldiers.

Maj Davis:

And I believe they actually had him sit down and write a false confession to being a traitor or a traitor.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

After much beating.

Maj Davis:

Yes, yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

Beating and abuse.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Maj Davis:

Coerced, as we say in the legal world.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes. [laughter]

Lt Col Gartland:

So one of the ironies—so continuing this criminal law theme of the book, is that the prisoners are placed in the position of having to be prison criminals and constantly break the rules, break their criminal code in order to survive, even though most of them aren't actually criminals. But they almost get forced into this criminal style lifestyle in order to be able to endure their time.

So the book basically follows Shukhov throughout his day, and it is literally the full day. The bell clang rings at 0500. They have this period where they're preparing to go for their breakfast. They march over to breakfast and then they're sent out to their day camp. In this case, they're building—I forget what it was.

Maj Davis:

The power plant, I think.

Lt Col Gartland:

That's right, a power plant, and Shukhov happens to be a mason, I guess an improvised mason. He had learned it before he was in the camp, but wound up becoming, it seems like from the description a fairly proficient mason during his time there. All of the back and forth that takes place when they're laying the bricks, having to try and negotiate with the authorities there and get through the day, the march back to the prison camp dinner and all

of the shenanigans that go on. And it takes it up to their bed time and yet another count of the individuals of the time they're in. They had multiple of those which is basically just intended to harass the prisoners. So that's the day in the life.

Characters

Maj Davis:

Dr. Woodworth, you want to walk us through some of the characters?

Dr. Woodworth:

I can. **Shukhov**, of course, is the main character. He is what we would call a protagonist and I would say a hero, as well. And I'll say why in just a minute. But he's in prison for ten years for having confessed to being a spy, because he had, as you said, the audacity to escape from being a German P.O.W. And in fact, there's only one spy actually in the prison—a Moldavian.

Another character is **Alyoshka**, a Baptist. He is imprisoned because he is a Baptist.

Gopchik is a younger member of the squad, and he's imprisoned in the Gulag for taking food to Ukrainian nationalists, which I think is particularly relevant ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Quite apropos.

Dr. Woodworth:

... for our current time. If that is the case, I think many of us would be in a Gulag.

Then **Tyurin** is the foreman of the squad, and he'd been in the camp for 19 years, and if I recall correctly, his sentence was not 19 years, but at some point, you just *lived* there.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

And your sentence just continues to go on.

And in fact, we see through the day new prisoners arrive, and they've all been sentenced to 25 years—because that's the *new* sentence.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. It's all so arbitrary.

Dr. Woodworth:

It's just, you steal bread, 25 years. You assassinate, 25 years. You jaywalk, 25 years. And so, it's the absurdity ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

... of the entire system, is a particular point I want to touch on later.

But another character, **Fetyukov** is—we talked about right before we started recording, he's a bowl licker and he is the lowest of the low. He waits at the end of the meal to see if any prisoners turn in bowls that have tiny little scraps of food in them. And he shamelessly licks whatever's left out of the bowls. And he looks for tiny bits of tobacco on the ground. He is definitely scrounger, and in the hierarchy of the camp he is among the lowest of the low.

Maj Davis:

He almost seems like, he's almost described like a stray dog.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Maj Davis:

Like he will come up and just stare at people hoping they'll give him something to eat.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughing] Yep.

Maj Davis:

And then he'll wait and he'll like, lick their bowls after they take them over. And he's definitely the, in the hierarchy of their little group—their, what's the name of their little work group?

Dr. Woodworth:

Hundred and fourth.

Maj Davis:

The 104th work group that they're in, he's definitely at the bottom.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah. The human dignity that Shukhov retains, Fetyukov has lost.

Maj Davis:

Yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

Absolutely.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes. Liz, before you go on. Just one, just one thought that came to mind as you were reciting all these characters and I hadn't thought of this before, is that the book is, in a way, a psychological case study on how people deal with oppression.

Dr. Woodworth:

Absolutely.

Lt Col Gartland:

And as you as you mentioned each of these individuals and how they dealt with them—and you're about to get to some more.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

Well, so we'll see that as we discuss the characters throughout the discussion. Go ahead.

Dr. Woodworth:

Absolutely. There's also **Tsezar or Caesar** [pronounced two different ways]. He is an inmate who works in the camp office. And that's a cushy job, because you don't necessarily freeze. And we should mention for sure that it is in Siberia and it is very cold.

Lt Col Gartland:

[laughter] Cold is a theme in this book. It's very cold.

Dr. Woodworth:

Very cold. In fact, there's a scene where they check the temperature and the other prisoners tell the one prisoner who's climbing up the wall to wipe the frost off the thermometer to see what temperature is. "Don't breathe on it. Don't breath on it". [Lt Col Gartland laughs] Because the colder it is, there might be a point when it's below 40 or ...

Maj Davis:

It was below forty-two.

Lt Col Gartland:

It was below 40 something

Dr. Woodworth:

Then they don't have to go out and work. But it was only 31 below that day. On our particular day.

Lt Col Gartland:

Comparatively.

Capt Hedden:

Believe there was some skepticism as to how accurate they kept the thermometers too. [laughter by all]

Dr. Woodworth:

Exactly.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes, yes. That was another illustration of the *ultimate lie* that all of them lived, that not even the thermostat—that they couldn't even rely on that. They couldn't rely on what their actual sentence would be. They couldn't rely on the thermostat for what the temperature was.

Dr. Woodworth:

And do you guys remember at one point someone says, "Oh, at noon, we're going to take this break. And that's when the sun's highest in the sky." And someone says, "No, no, the Soviets have determined that 1 p.m. is now" ...

Lt Col Gartland:

High noon [laughing].

Dr. Woodworth:

"High noon."

Lt Col Gartland:

High noon is 1300. It immediately brought me back when I read that, I made a note of it. I thought of 1984.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

And one plus, was it "one plus one is three" or "two plus two is five"?

Dr. Woodworth:

Two plus two is five.

Lt Col Gartland:

Two plus two is five. Why is two plus two five? Because the regime says so.

Dr. Woodworth:

Because they said, yeah.

And Caesar works in the camp. He has a civilian fur hat which marks him as pretty high up. He's a film

director. He represents, I think, the kind of oppression of culture that occurred during the Soviet reign. And he's intelligent and he participates in quite an interesting conversation. And clearly he came from an educated class. At some point he gets pretty terrific food parcels. Just how they got food parcels from home is another absurd process.

Another character, fairly new, **Buynovsky** is a former naval captain who is imprisoned because he was given a Christmas present from a British officer. [laughter]

Lt Col Gartland:

Right, right.

Dr. Woodworth:

And so ...

Lt Col Gartland:

He was supposed to be there.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah

Maj Davis:

Yeah, he was assigned there.

Dr. Woodworth:

He was a liaison for the British navy.

Maj Davis:

And it just goes to show how arbitrary it is, because Shukhov is there because he had been a German P.O.W., and the captain is there because he had been working with the British navy. So, it's pretty much if you're any sort of foreign affiliation, regardless of if they were allies or enemies during the war, that's enough.

Lt Col Gartland:

And that was exactly the philosophy ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

... that you had been tainted, even if the government had, in fact, directed you to be tainted.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

The idea was that you've been tainted now by this exposure. We can't trust you.

Capt Hedden:

Well, yeah, I think that to me, brings up a theme that's throughout it, and that's the utter paranoia ...

Maj Davis:

Yes.

Capt Hedden:

... that leads to this absolute control where we can't even risk the exposure to other ideas here.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Capt Hedden:

We we're not going to interview you and find out what you really think about how the Brits, how the Brits do things.

We now know, if you got this present, you are persona non grata [Latin: "person not welcome"]. You are irredeemable. You are sent to the Gulag.

And it's the same with searching for any scraps of food or any books or any personal items. I mean, they're constantly subject to these paranoid accountability measures, because the party needs complete and utter control.

Maj Davis:

I think the real irony is, and I was going to bring this up later too when we got really more into the themes

of the book, but that these men are all very almost religiously communist, and they have really absorbed and, you know, they really believe in the lifestyle and the mindset. It's really interesting, when I was reading about the book before we came in, there was a note that I guess Solzhenitsyn was in his prison camp when Stalin died. And the men—the prisoners of the prison camp wept at his death. They were devastated by his death.

And I think that goes a lot toward understanding this book and the characters in this book, the idea that even though they're living this totally arbitrary and outrageous punishment, they still really buy into the system that put them there. And I think a lot of them kind of believe that they're supposed to be they're like, "Well, this is what they think I need."

Dr. Woodworth:

That is the cult of the autocrat.

Maj Davis:

Yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

Absolutely.

Maj Davis:

Yeah.

Dr. Woodworth:

And so, you know, sad captain.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes!

Dr. Woodworth:

Loses his fabulous job in the navy. And he's fairly new in the prison. And he still exhibits some of his leadership abilities. He tries to ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

... but he finds out that that doesn't really work.

Lt Col Gartland:

He is being, he's being broken down.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

And Erin, to your point about the ideological integrity if you will, of the characters, it's the, I'm just going to call him "the captain".

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

Not going to even try. [laughter] So just going to say the captain calls out someone—I don't remember the circumstance in the book, but he says, "Hey, you're not being a good"—did he say "You're not being a good Soviet or a good communist"?

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

I forgot exactly how he put it. As in no, no, no. This isn't the way that it's supposed to play out here.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

And yet it's *not* playing out that way, as you can see it. That's one I think one of the themes of this book is the breakdown of Marxism, because in this, in this prison camp, they're all prisoners. So they should really all, even more so than in regular society, they should all be the same.

And yet what happens?

Dr. Woodworth:

Hierarchy.

Lt Col Gartland:

There actually is a hierarchy. [Dr. Woodworth laughs]

There is a caste system at the prison, and you mentioned Liz, as you were going through the characters.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yep.

Lt Col Gartland:

And the captain is not expecting that. But we have people who are on different tiers of existence amongst the prisoners.

And so, what happens is that they actually wind up—they're all supposed to be there theoretically for the service of the state.

Dr. Woodworth:

State, right.

Lt Col Gartland:

And yet what happens—they all start turning on one another in a way. Although that can be contrasted actually with many times ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

... where they don't.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah

Lt Col Gartland:

But you do have that breakdown. Go ahead.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah. And here we are in Air University, training people to be incredible leaders. And the captain is an example of that. And Shukhov speculates he may not make it, because if he speaks up too often, they're going to put him in the hut.

Lt Col Gartland:

Solitary.

Dr. Woodworth:

Solitary, and the walls are ice. And you go for ten days, you—might—possibly survive, but your body will be broken. And the suggestion in the book is that maybe you live a couple of years after that.

Maj Davis:

But there's no real recovery.

Dr. Woodworth:

You can't recover from that sort of edge of hypothermia, maybe pulled back, you lose some things. Even Shukhov had scurvy at one of his previous camps, and he speaks with a lisp because he lost some of his teeth. [laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

As a result of it.

Dr. Woodworth:

He got scurvy in Siberia.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. And

Dr. Woodworth:

Of course. Of course.

Lt Col Gartland:

And the book ends with the captain going off ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... to solitary. So we are left hanging ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... on whether he was going to survive that. And certainly to break him down physically ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... and to break down any trace of the previous life.

Dr. Woodworth:

Well, and he's got a lesson. He's a lesson for the others as well.

Okay. So there is also **Pavlo** who is a Ukrainian who served as the deputy foreman in the 104th. He sort of acted when Tyurin was absent.

And there is a leading worker, a Latvian that works with Shukhov and his name is Ivan **Kilgas**?

Lt Col Gartland:

Kilgas, yeah, think so.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yep, it could be that. Yeah, but we know him because he's the Latvian. [laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

That's right. [laughing]

Dr. Woodworth:

And then **Senka**, who is also works with Shukhov when they're out on their work detail as a colleague in bricklaying. And he's deaf.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

He's deaf. And so the idea that there are all these kinds of human *physical* breakdowns that happen in the Gulag and there's no help for it.

In fact, if you are ill and you go to the hospital, the dispensary, the orderly is a university student who *lied* about knowing medicine in order to get the cushy job. In fact, he is a student of literature. [all laugh]

Lt Col Gartland:

Say to have one of us basically attending, attending to your scurvy wracked body.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Maj Davis:

I think that's very cunning.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes. Yes, it was, it was, good job. Yeah.

And so, he is administering shots and taking—he doesn't know what he's doing. And when Shukhov goes to the dispensary to see if he can get—in the morning, he tries to get off work duty because he feels an ache everywhere. He doesn't feel good. He sits down and the orderly asks him, "Why didn't you try to do this last night? Try to do it. You know by this time of the morning, we've already had, we've already allowed our two sick people off for the day and that's it."

And he's watching the orderly writing and he is clearly writing a poem.

Lt Col Gartland:

That's right. I've totally forgotten about this.

Dr. Woodworth:

Not anything with medical records.

Lt Col Gartland:

Exactly.

It's All in the Details

Dr. Woodworth:

And so the absurdity is packed in every moment.

And I think the genius Solzhenitsyn in telling the story through one day, is that these tiny things are revealed rather than *big*, sweeping, epic Tolstoy, you know, Napoleonic Russian War with hundreds of thousands of people. It is this tiny group, and it's a small group of people who are named, and every little precise detail is given to us.

So, if we want to talk about some of those details ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Sure.

Dr. Woodworth:

... those are really the main characters.

Lt Col Gartland:

It's the inverse of Tolstoy.

Maj Davis:

Yes. [laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

In the page length ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... and the lack of sweeping narratives. You are absolutely right ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

... it's all in the details. And there are a couple instances in the book, for instance, where he's being, Shukhov, is being incredibly meticulous, both in his actions and in his description, especially when it comes to food.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh, he's food obsessed.

Food

Lt Col Gartland:

Which is entirely right, entirely understandable because they're all freezing and they're starving. And he talks about saving the end—if you think of a loaf of French bread, the bread, the hardened bread crust ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Right. [laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

... at the end of the loaf and how he saved it in his mattress. He had sewn a specific little pocket compartment in it so that when the bed mattresses are inspected, and shaken out, it won't fall out and they won't discover it. And he uses the end of that bread crust as a spoon, not just because for its utilitarian value, because it's an effective way of actually getting all the soup, but it absorbs it as well.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

And so nothing would be more perfectly suited to absorbing every last drop of their putrid ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Ugh.

Lt Col Gartland:

... in any case, substanceless—right, *substance less*—soup than the end of a bread crust.

And there are a couple of explanations in the book just talking about how it was that he scraped out the bowl.

Dr. Woodworth:

In detail!

Lt Col Gartland:

His reputation for it.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah, the curve of the crust matched the curve of the bowl. He was so thrilled by that. And remember he had a little fake pocket in his jacket ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Also—another one.

Dr. Woodworth:

To put away some little scraps of food ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

... because if you happen to do someone a favor, they might give you an extra portion of bread, but you didn't want to eat it all at once because then that's—wasteful.

Lt Col Gartland:

Exactly.

Dr. Woodworth:

You might want it later. You might need it later. And yeah, he has a needle—which is an unusual *weapon* in the prison.

So that he sews for others to get favors. And he also uses it to squirrel away his bread.

And one of the things when he talks about the soup, I think is an incredible moment when we first find him eating—well, he's eating throughout the whole book, he's desperate every moment for food—but when he's having soup, he comes to the meal a little late and we find that the prisoners will kindly and generous—for favors later—save you a bowl.

So, he has a bowl saved. It's cold when he gets there, but he still has a spoon that he fashioned that he wears in his boot. He takes it out. He takes his hat off, because that's what you do when you eat, and he eats the soup and he talks about it wasn't the worst. It wasn't the best. It wasn't just the scum on the top and broth only. But there was a little, there were some fish bones and so he would take each bone and suck it ...

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes!

Dr. Woodworth:

... to get as much out of it. He would eat tails, and he would eat heads, and he would eat fins.

Lt Col Gartland:

But not—I remember this.

Maj Davis:

Not their eyes.

Dr. Woodworth:

But if the eyeball was in the head, it was fine. But if it was floating free in the soup. No.

Lt Col Gartland:

And, and they'd make fun of him.

Dr. Woodworth:

And they'd make fun of him because he wouldn't eat the free eyeball. And so ...

Capt Hedden:

That's a lot of nutrients you're leaving there. [laughter by all]

Lt Col Gartland:

That's true.

Dr. Woodworth:

And he talks about

Lt Col Gartland:

Point of principle.

Dr. Woodworth:

Another part of the meal, that at that same time, so he got a little soup and he got a little like, it made me think of polenta, a creamy, mushy kind of thing that had no flavor, but it had frozen solid. So, [laughing] he had to, like, pick off a bit, eat it, pick off a bit and eat it.

And so the food, it's horrific. He dreams about maybe being sick, but not that sick, and being able to spend three weeks in the hospital where he could have clear beef broth.

Lt Col Gartland:

And do nothing.

Dr. Woodworth:

And do nothing. And he said, but I don't want to be so sick that I die. And that tells us a lot about who he is.

Lt Col Gartland:

For sure. Great, great point, by the way that obviously food is a, food is a concern—the theme, motif throughout the book—but one thing I hadn't thought of is how he's talking about it. You said he's talking about it *all* the time, and yet he seems obsessed with food and yet it's pretty much *nothing* that he's talking about.

[Dr. Woodworth laughs]

I mean, he's not really not talking about much food at all.

Dr. Woodworth:

No, he isn't.

Lt Col Gartland:

I mean, it's practically nothing. It's just empty broth on a couple of occasions.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

But somehow he manages to talk about it for basically the entire book.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughing] It's every moment.

And when they'd have lunch. Okay, so they are at the power plant and they're doing their masonry work, but they don't, one of the absurd things about the prison is that they're there to be punished and they have to do work to give back to the Soviet state, but they don't always get to do the work in a timely way—because the wheelbarrows are broken, or the way to lift the bricks up to the second floor has been damaged, and they don't have anyone to fix it.

And if you want to really do a good job, you have to hide a tool in the wall like he does. And it's, it's *insane* that they sit around for *a while*. They get up at five—they don't really start working till 10 or 11.

Work

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. And in the work, and I see you're poised here for a comment [Dr. Woodworth laughs], I'll just, before we forget, this is one, another one of these instances in the book—because there's so much that you can say or you can't say everything. But I'll just highlighted this part here in the book—about a quarter of the way through

where Shukhov says more depended on the *work report* than on the work itself.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

There is constant, this constant form over function that I think is an aspect of the breakdown of Marxism that Solzhenitsyn's getting at here.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

Because on multiple occasions, it's actually they're not performing, in fact that particular, [Dr. Woodworth laughs] the day that is being discussed here was a pretty good day in terms of the work performance and how much of the wall they were able to, they were able to build. But he remarks, and this is just one instance of it, that it really isn't even so much of the work sometimes, but rather the fact that they're being put through the ritualistic motions of what they have to do.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

Not so much the actual work product itself.

Dr. Woodworth:

He values a clever squad leader, he says. I had highlighted something very similar, "A clever squad leader will prove that work which hadn't been done, had been done to turn jobs that were rated low into ones that were rated high." It's crazy. And while they're building the wall, it's very satisfying. And in fact, I don't know if you guys felt this, but when they're building the wall, I'd read this before, but I'd forgotten about the wall.

Lt Col Gartland:

Same here.

Dr. Woodworth:

As they're building the wall, I'm thinking, "Oh, please don't let something bad happen. Please let them work on the wall. Please don't let anybody get hurt. Don't let the deaf guy fall off the wall. Please let the sides meet up."

I was so wrapped up in the work, and I think that's another genius of Solzhenitsyn. They're building a wall at a power plant that can't even be used, in a part of the world where the guards are as miserable as the prisoners. And the mortar freezes.

Lt Col Gartland:

By the time they get it.

Dr. Woodworth:

By the time they get it.

Lt Col Gartland:

By the time they get it to the bricks.

Dr. Woodworth:

And yet you want them, you want them to have the satisfaction. It's a, it's a horrific thing that Solzhenitsyn does to the reader.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

He makes you want something to be okay.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. And for Shukhov, it's really not so much the wall itself, again, it's not really the end product. It's the work itself.

Dr. Woodworth:

The rhythm.

Lt Col Gartland:

In fact, there's even the ritual of going through it. And this is another one we talk about those detailed descriptions in the book and food.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

There are many detailed descriptions also of work. And there's one passage in particular where it's discussing how he lays—I feel like I almost became like an apprentice masonry.

Dr. Woodworth:

Did you want to go out and lay some bricks?

Lt Col Gartland:

Actually, one thing that I really thought is that I'd really be a horrible mason [laughter by the group] because I don't think I have any aptitude for this whatsoever, because he's talking about how you had to constantly check the level of the brick and you had to be careful to not put too much or too little mortar. You had to level it out. And you're trying to do this under freezing conditions because the mortar is literally setting as you're as you're laying down each block. But he has this passage where he discusses the *process* of it, and he even, Shukhov even said before they headed out to the work site that, "the *real punishment* was not being *allowed to work*".

Dr. Woodworth:

Going out to dig in the frozen tundra—which you cannot dig.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. Right. To not be able to take that. So to be in solitary confinement, to *not* go out in work, because when you're working, the time goes by. And in fact, the racing against the clock at the end of the day to actually to actually finish up everything and get the tools turned in. So work is another one of these recurring themes

throughout the book. And the value of work is how they derive some of their meaning because they really don't have any other source of it.

Maj Davis:

Shukhov takes a lot of pride. He feels like he, in the hierarchy, he kind of talks about itself as being somewhere in the middle. He's not a high guy. He's not a low guy. He's not the, you know, scrap eater. But then when they're on the work site, he's like the top dog. He's skilled enough that everyone listens to him. He has a little trowel that he hides that's his trowel.

Dr. Woodworth:

I loves that he hides his own tool.

Maj Davis:

Because he wants to do a good job.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Maj Davis:

And even at one point when they're laying the brick, he's sort of, while they're waiting for the mortar and the bricks to come up to the second floor, because he has to, they're throwing the bricks up for other guys to catch because the mechanism to get the bricks upstairs is broken.

Lt Col Gartland:

Is broken, like so much else.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Devotion

Maj Davis:

And he's taking a look at the wall. He takes a look at the guys who are going to be on the teams to build the wall. And he's concerned because he knows if people are there who don't do a good job. He's going to have to fix it tomorrow. He's not going to just they're not just

slapping bricks down to call it a day. He takes a lot of pride in what this wall looks like. And he knows that if it's not done properly, that he's going to have to try to fix it.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right. And he and he definitely cares, as you were saying Erin, there's kind of a range of attitudes that you see in the characters throughout the book.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

In terms of their devotion. And Shukhov really seems to stand for the principle that if you're going to make it through this, you can't care too much and you can't care too little. You have to care. You have to care to some degree. But he's really a, if I had to pin him down, I'd say that he's really a *pragmatist*?

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah. And I think, if you look, okay, so there's fur civilian hat wearing dude, and then there is bowl licker dude. And this one, very much taking advantage of others, in the civilian fur hat and really just milking the situation for all he can. And then the bowl licker who is so desperate, he's lost all his humanity and dignity. And then Shukhov who takes pride in the work that he's doing. And as he explains to us, the rules of the prison, he also talks about the captain may not get it, Gopchik might be okay, he might be able to survive. So he positions himself somewhat as a mentor-teacher that he has, he understands he still has value.

Like Any Other Day

Maj Davis:

Well, and I think at one point too they're sitting and talking because Shukhov is, they kind of think of him almost like the "old man" because he's been in for eight years out of his ten already. And he kind of talks about how he doesn't even allow himself to think about the possibility of release because (a) he doesn't actually think he's going to be released.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Maj Davis:

Because no one ever really is.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right, yeah.

Maj Davis:

But even if he is—exile follows—and he just becomes one of the people who work, they live and work right *outside* of the camp, but they're not allowed to return home. So, I think it's almost, it's pragmatism and maybe also just sort of he's not really defeated by it, but I think he's very realistic about the fact that this is kind of it.

So, I think that's the whole point of making it one day is that this is, and all this minute details, because this is all there is for his life.

Lt Col Gartland:

This is like any other day.

Maj Davis:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

This is the life. This one day is their life.

Maj Davis:

This minute by minute.

Dr. Woodworth:

Day after day.

Maj Davis:

Bowl of gruel by bowl of gruel. This is his life now, forever. And he doesn't allow himself to think about the possibility of release and he doesn't allow himself really to think about home. He doesn't want letters anymore from his family. He tells his wife, "Stop writing. Don't try to send me things."

Dr. Woodworth:

Right. He doesn't remember what she looks like.

Lt Col Gartland:

We could we could explore that one for a while or two.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh my gosh, yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

I don't know if we really want to. Charlie go ahead.

Capt Hedden:

To Erin's point, one of the things that I noticed in here is his outlook. He doesn't break away often and just kind of editorialize what's going on, what he's thinking about, what's going on. But a couple of places jumped out at me and one of those is he's laying there, he's miserable. He's trying to decide, early in the book, whether he's going to go to the infirmary or not. And he says—let's see—"he couldn't manage to keep warm that night in his sleep. He felt very sick. And then again a little better. All the time he dreaded the morning". And then the standalone paragraph sentence, "but the morning came as it always did". And it's like a phrase that's so often used in a *hopeful* term. And his is not exactly misery, but it's certainly not hopeful. It's the morning it's going to come again. This day is going to repeat itself tomorrow. This year is going to repeat itself next year. And

Lt Col Gartland:

It's resignation and endurance.

Capt Hedden:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

So, I think you ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

... you've all captured it. He's not—you can't be an idealist, and you can't be a total sloth, either. And he has a lot of practical value that he presents to people with all of the little additional jobs that he does.

Playing the Game

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh, he offers to wait in line for a guy he thinks is going to get maybe a package of food from home. So, if he does that, then his reward is a little bit of that food.

And I love the lunch scene. Do you remember that where he's like juggling the bowls and trying to make sure that his squad gets in line to get the food. And then he puts the bowls down and they count the bowls and he makes sure there's room for everybody. And they can barely eat. They're so squished together and it is a, it's a dance almost the way they describe it.

Lt Col Gartland:

It is. He's playing the game. Almost as you were saying that Liz, I was almost thinking to myself, I wonder if this isn't a great guidebook for life [Dr. Woodworth laughs] or maybe military life, because Shukhov is, he's a pragmatist who presents value to other people and what he does. And yet along the way, it's not always ruled by self-interest. There are many times when he simply does a kind thing while playing this game of prison life in the Gulag. He'll do a kind thing just for the sake of doing a kind thing.

And the one that I recall was when they were laying the bricks. I forget who it was, it was Senka— it doesn't matter. It was one of the other characters, and he offered, I think, to lay the bricks for him. And he said, I'm going to do that to just make it easier on him. And it wasn't in exchange for anything at all. Usually, it was.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

Usually it was, but not all the time. And he expresses sympathy also for the captain. He understands the poor captain's plight. He used to be this respected official with authority, and now he's been reduced to this. And Shukhov is genuinely, genuinely takes pity on him.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

So, when I say maybe this is a good guidebook for life or military life, the truth is, you know in the military you do have to play the game to a certain degree or you're not going to make it, you're literally not going to make it through your career. Yet at the same time, you can still manage to be in those scenarios, hopefully in all scenarios, a decent human being too. And Shukhov exemplifies [fades out].

Maj Davis:

And I hated to draw the comparison earlier when we were talking about the waiting for the work to actually happen and being frustrated by the means by which they're supposed to be working. And I was thinking about my own morning, which was when I got here to school and my computer did not work [Dr. Woodworth laughs] and I restarted it and it still didn't work. And then I restarted it again.

Lt Col Gartland:

Furnished government equipment.

Maj Davis:

Yep. And it still didn't work. And I remember I had like a very panicked 20 minutes where I thought, I have to prepare for the podcast. My computer doesn't remember what the Internet is.

Dr. Woodworth:

How can I do my job?

Maj Davis:

Yep. How can I do my job? It can't find one of my monitors. I can't open my e-mails, and I don't know what to do. And I think we, I mean, it's kind of like a DoD joke, I think, that we kind of have these

Lt Col Gartland:

But you're here and very good job, Shukhov.

Maj Davis:

Thank you.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

You pulled it off. You found a way.

Dr. Woodworth:

We're going to all share crusts of bread later. [laughing]

Extra Bowls

Maj Davis:

What I also think is funny. It's interesting too, talking about playing the game, in that scene when they're getting lunch. Shukhov has been in the prison camp for quite some time. He's very crafty, and he notices that the, we'll call him the *chef*, [Dr. Woodworth laughs] who is just another prisoner.

Lt Col Gartland:

That's very generous. That's very generous.

Maj Davis:

Yes. The cook, the person who has heated up the gruel. As he put two bowls on like the little—what I'm imagining is like the waitress window.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Maj Davis:

Which is certainly not what it was. But he puts up two bowls and he gets distracted, and he looks away, and they're counting out the bowls as they put them out to make sure each gang only gets the number for the gang. And he doesn't count those two, and Shukhov takes them and he goes "13 and 14". So they already have all of their bowls and they get into a little bit of a tiff. Where they're like, "Hey, you can't just take those". He's like, "It's not my problem if you don't know how to count". And they kind of have this back and forth and then, you know, it's too much effort to really argue with him about it. So, he ends up just kind of stealing two additional bowls. But then they go to the gang boss, who I think is Pavlo, the assistant gang boss or the deputy gang boss, and it's sort of his to distribute.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Maj Davis:

But the whole meal, Shukhov is eating with one eye on those bowls because he's expecting as the one who finagled them, that his reward will be that he gets one.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Maj Davis:

But he doesn't have a guarantee.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right. He has to wait.

Maj Davis:

And he has to wait.

Dr. Woodworth:

And we're waiting. I was like, oh, please, please let him get that extra bowl.

Lt Col Gartland:

Extra bowls rule.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh, if he doesn't get that, I'm going to be so mad. I got so emotionally wrapped up in it. And I think that is the amazing part of this. It's one day and the details are so tiny.

Lt Col Gartland:

And can you ever imagine in any other story being so preoccupied as a reader?

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah!

Lt Col Gartland:

With that! Will he get his extra bowl of gruel? But you're really

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

But you're really longing for him.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

That's the genius, as you said Liz.

Survival

Dr. Woodworth:

And I had read this in 1986, and I was very inspired by it for a couple of reasons, but I didn't remember if he lived.

Lt Col Gartland:

If Shukhov lived?

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes, if Shukhov lived. So, I was panicking ...

Lt Col Gartland:

I didn't either.

Dr. Woodworth:

... in this read through, thinking, "Oh, does he die?" I, you know, I couldn't remember. And so thinking, "Oh he's got to get that extra bowl of gruel. This is, this is *monumental!*"

And he does, and thank goodness and, but I love what you had to say about this can be *not* a guide to how to live—there's a lot of stuff in here you don't want to do.

Lt Col Gartland:

[laughing]

Dr. Woodworth:

But as a metaphor.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right.

Dr. Woodworth:

For survival.

And in 1986, I was living in Idaho and I was very cold. [laughing] I come from the desert in Southern California. I wasn't prepared for cold. I had blue jeans and cowboy boots. Right. Yep. Thinking that's what you wear.

Lt Col Gartland:

It could be the Gulag to some. [Maj Davis laughs] Yeah, I'm not sure if it was; I'm not sure if it was for you Liz specifically.

Dr. Woodworth:

It was, it was definitely colder than what I was used to. And I read this book and I thought, oh this guy can get through a day. I have no business crying my frozen tears in Idaho about how hard this is for me.

Lt Col Gartland:

For sure.

Dr. Woodworth:

Because this guy—and I knew Solzhenitsyn had actually been through it—this guy lived through a day. If he can do that, I can find a way to be okay here away from my friends, away from my family, in a place where it's cold and the roads are icy and I don't know how to drive. And I thought angora sweater looked good, but it doesn't help you stay warm. [laughter by all]

And so for years, this book was kind of in the back of my mind as one of those really foundational, life changing books. But I didn't understand why. It was just there until I read it this time, and I was like, why, I haven't read this book, like, five more times? Because you get to the end, and it is about—strength—and pity—and survival—and joy—and finding your way wherever you are. That, somebody remind me yesterday of “that bloom where you're planted”.

Maj Davis:

We say that a lot in the military.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes. It was actually a military member who said that to me.

Lt Col Gartland:

Because like Shukhov, you have no choice, many times. Yes.

Dr. Woodworth:

You're going to go where the Air Force needs you to go. And sometimes it's not the job you thought you were going to get either. And so, I love that he somehow manages to get through.

Power of Literature

Lt Col Gartland:

A couple of riffs on that one. Not sure how we're doing on time at this stage. But number one, on the power of literature over the course of a lifetime. And that's happened to me with a couple of books. And I would say that this is one of them, and I'd only read it a couple

of years previous and somehow managed to forget also, I don't know how, but managed to forget whether or not Shukhov lived.

And that is another example Solzhenitsyn's ability as a writer here, because there is a bit of that suspense here—something bad is going to happen to this guy. He just seems to be able to navigate this crazy system too well. Is he going to, as you said, fall off the wall? Is he going to get thrown in solitary for some completely arbitrary reason? And that's there.

Dr. Woodworth:

OH—and he's *almost* going to get caught smuggling in that piece of hacksaw ...

Lt Col Gartland:

OH!

Dr. Woodworth:

... at the end of the day. I actually think I was sweating, when they were getting searched after their work in the power plant coming back to the prison. Did they have to recount the prisoners?

Lt Col Gartland:

They were recounting. It happened a bunch, a bunch of times.

Maj Davis:

They were out there for an extra hour and a half because one of the prisoners fell asleep and they couldn't find him.

Dr. Woodworth:

That's right.

Lt Col Gartland:

It was the spy. It was the Moldavian spy—the actual spy.

Dr. Woodworth:

That's right. And so they had to recount and recount. And then they started to like check the shoes, the, not

socks, they had foot rags, ugh, and, you know, open up their clothes expose themselves to this freezing weather. And now it's dark in the evening. And he's got that little tiny piece of hacksaw in his mitten.

And he is one mitten away from death.

It is so powerful.

Lt Col Gartland:

So, and to set it up for the reader, what happens is that he has to, as Liz said, he has to spread open his jacket and then hold up his mittens in front of the guard. And so, the guard goes to grab one of the mittens and crush it as is described in the book to make sure that there's nothing in it and then winds up **NOT** checking the other one.

Dr. Woodworth:

Absolutely.

Lt Col Gartland:

That has the shard, the shard of steel in it.

Capt Hedden:

Well, and even that Shukhov had exerted what control he could buy picking which line, which search line has going to, because he felt like this is kind of grizzled older gentleman might not be quite as gung-ho as some of the younger guards who are doing the searches. So, I wasn't as apprehensive per se. I was just, I was like, "Oh, here it is. This is it. **This is this!**"

Lt Col Gartland:

This is it! [laughter by all]

Here comes solitary.

Capt Hedden:

This is how the day ends. And he's done for. But then he escaped. I was like, "Oh, that's not nearly as Russian as I was expecting"

[laughter by all]

Lt Col Gartland:

Just a bit of luck. Maybe also one of one of the lessons here.

Dr. Woodworth:

Right.

Be Grateful for What You Have

Lt Col Gartland:

The other thing I was going to say Liz on your comment—concerned how so much of this book also, on a very simple level, where I mean we can talk, yeah we can talk about themes, we can talk about Marxism, we can talk about all sorts of things in varying degrees of sophistication, but clearly, one lesson from this book is just be grateful for what you have. And I'm not surprised at all, that this would have stayed in your memory during what were, relatively speaking, trying circumstances for you out in Idaho.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

Okay, with the with the cowboy boots and everything [Dr. Woodworth laughs] that you would think back on. Whoa. And Solzhenitzyn actually did live ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... through this out in Siberia, 40 below, year after year.

Dr. Woodworth:

Much colder than Idaho. [laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

Much colder than Idaho. And it does put into perspective when we say first world problems.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes, it really does.

Lt Col Gartland:

They are not Gulag-level problems.

Dr. Woodworth:

There's a line in the book, Shukhov is thinking, "So leave envy to those who always think the radish in the other fellow's hand is bigger than yours."

Lt Col Gartland:

The radish.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes, Shukhov knows life and never opens his belly to what doesn't belong to him.

That for me was so powerful, because that is if, there is no grass that is greener. Well, there's no grass. [laughter by all]

Lt Col Gartland:

There is, yes, there is there is no grass.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah, and that, I think, is part of his strength. And maybe, of course I don't remember that, but maybe that's part of the lesson that stuck with me—is don't envy people, things that you don't have. Be aware of what you have. Be mindful. Be focused live the life you have—so that you don't spend it in dreaming away, I wish I had a bigger radish.

Lt Col Gartland:

Right? Of all things [laughing].

Dr. Woodworth:

Of all things.

Lt Col Gartland:

Which really, when I read that, I thought to myself, that's interesting that he said radish ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Food. It's the food thing.

Lt Col Gartland:

... because, clearly, clearly culturally that has more value in other places. I personally don't mind radishes at all, but that's about the best I could say about radishes, is that I don't mind them at all. But nonetheless ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

... that's, that would be something that a lot of those people would die to actually have a radish. Something out of out of the norm for what they were dealing with.

Go ahead Erin.

Maj Davis:

So to kind of, I think a nice clean way to kind of talk about the idea that you know, it could be worse and maybe just be appreciating what you have is really the very end of the book where it says:

Shukhov went to sleep and he was very happy. He'd had a lot of luck today. They hadn't him put him in the cooler. The gang hadn't been chased out to work in the socialist community, community development. He'd finagled an extra bowl of mush at noon. The boss had gotten them good rates for their work.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughing] Mush.

Maj Davis:

He felt good making that wall. They hadn't found that piece of steel in the frisk. Caesar had paid him off in the evening. He'd bought some tobacco, and he'd gotten over that sickness. Nothing had spoiled the day and he had almost been happy. There were 3,653 days like this in his sentence from reveille to lights out. The three extra ones were because of the leap years.

Lt Col Gartland:

Be grateful for what you have.

Maj Davis:

Be grateful for what you have.

Lt Col Gartland:

Work with what you got. For sure, a lesson of this book.

Connections

Capt Hedden:

I think that perspective and the marvel of writing this book on these conditions and yet so many of the human aspects of it translate perfectly well. Whether it's a very first world condition and how you relate to other people and how you can find satisfaction in your work and what you have, whether you're a prisoner in the Gulag or you're, you know, enjoying all the first world comforts that we do. There's still a ton of ways that being human looks, it looks real similar across times and conditions, and culture.

Dr. Woodworth:

Oh, Charlie, I think you said it. That is the point! That's why we're all here, right? Because literature is what connects us. We read literature; we find value in it. It's about the human soul. We write books. We read books to get connections. The StoryCenter in California has this phrase: "Story is the shortest distance between two people".

Maj Davis:

Hmm.

Dr. Woodworth:

And I think that's why we do this.

Lt Col Gartland:

Awesome quote.

Dr. Woodworth:

We are drawn to these stories.

Lt Col Gartland:

What could we have in common with these people freezing in the Gulag? It turns out quite a bit.

Dr. Woodworth:

Quite a bit.

We all know the person who wears the fur hat, that tries to lord it over everyone. And we all know the bowl licker, and I mean not literally of course. [Maj Davis laughs]

But stories are the things—how we define ourselves is always by story and by sharing stories like this with the author and with people who lives something similar, I think we have a human connection that we crave. And I think why we keep writing and reading books that tell these stories about things will never experience, I hope. But how connected did we feel? We were just talked about, "Oh, I hope everything goes okay when they're building the wall. I hope he gets a second chance, you know, at mush at lunch". That we're drawn into the story because we care, because we're humans and we have empathy. It teaches us to be careful of others, and I think that's the great gift that we get when we read literature like this, the connection and the caring.

Lt Col Gartland:

And on top of that, you also learn something about a pretty definitive period in well, I don't want to say Western history, you know the Western-Eastern bridge of history of what it was for all of these people to suffer out in the, out in the frozen tundra for years and years and years on end.

How are we doing Erin?

Wrap Up

Maj Davis:

I think we're good. I think we're about to hit the wrap up point.

But sir, to kind of comment on your comment, I think also too you know, going back to what Dr. Woodward said about empathy and about human experience through literature, I think it's also really telling that, you know, we're reading this book now here. Some of us are wearing military uniforms, American U.S. military uniforms, and this is about a person who had an experience in a country that was at the time of the writing and the experience our enemy, you know, he wrote this during the Cold War. And I think it just goes to show that, you know, you can fall in any side of a war or a conflict and people are still people. You know, people in other countries, are still people.

I think there's a lot going on right now, of course at the time of our recording, with Ukraine and Russia, and the response of the Russian people to the invasion and how much they know about it, how much they don't know about it, and the number of people who went out in the street to protest, regardless of the consequences that would follow. And I think, you know, stuff like this when you read literature, it just reminds you that no matter the circumstances, you know, it's all, everyone's just people.

Lt Col Gartland:

All mankind is one.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah. There's an interesting line that Solzhenitsyn repeats twice. "How can you expect a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold?" And even though that suggests a distance. It's also the thing that pulls us into the book, and how we can connect to the book. It's a way for us to be aware of that connection.

Capt Hedden:

That's fascinating, because he answered the question by writing the book, right? [laughing]

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes. Yes. Exactly.

Capt Hedden:

This is how.

Dr. Woodworth:

This is how. This is how we do it.

And as you said in the beginning, Erin, this book—changed. It revealed the Gulag system for the first time. I imagine there were whispers like, "Why did half our village disappear? Where did they go?"

And millions of people went through the Gulags. It wasn't just this small group. And this book was really the first and it was Khrushchev's like, let's distance me from Stalin, because actually I did a lot of work for him and ...

Lt Col Gartland:

And knew, and knew about this.

Dr. Woodworth:

And knew about this.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes. And millions and millions of Russians had no clue. They just knew that that Solzhenitsyn disappeared. He's not here anymore. I wonder what's up with him.

Dr. Woodworth:

And the book is the book sold out, published by Novy Mir [New World]. It's sold out almost before it was published. 95,000 copies [snaps fingers] gone like this. And then there was a huge black-market trade. And *The New York Times* reviewed it in 1963 and said, "Don't worry, that the translation is kind of clunky. Read it."

Lt Col Gartland:

Fascinating. We didn't even get a chance to cover so many—again, another one of those books. There are so many other, just to give a sampling, freedom would be one of them. And whether freedom is the natural

condition of man, of humans. Are they meant to, are they meant to be lorded over by despots? I think there's a part of this book that says, no matter how much you oppress people, no matter how authoritarian and totalitarian the regime, freedom still springs forth.

And you see that in all of the little shenanigans in which Shukhov is engaged, throughout the book, and his trade craft, and favors that he does for people, and the rubles that he has, the two rubles ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... that he has *hidden* in his jacket in that inside pocket, I think Liz, that you were talking about it before so that he can buy the tobacco. There still is, at a very rudimentary impoverished level, there still is a free enterprise, of sense ...

Capt Hedden:

Right.

Lt Col Gartland:

... that was taking place.

Charlie.

Capt Hedden:

Yeah, I was just thinking about that, because and that's another *whole* part of this that we couldn't get into is the economics and tie it right into the freedom. And it's the, it's the flower growing up in the sidewalk, plus, like if there, life finds a way, free market principles found a way even in ... [Dr. Woodworth laughing]

Lt Col Gartland:

[laughing] Even in the Gulag! That couldn't eradicate it.

[group laughing]

Capt Hedden:

... even in the Soviet Gulag. Like you had people trading what they can do and what they have for things that they want.

Lt Col Gartland:

It was a pretty advanced barter system that Shukhov is the exemplification of.

And another theme would be family. The meaning of family. Family gets completely eradicated here. Who's his family now? Not his wife, Liz, as you said, he doesn't even remember what she looks like. Instead, it's his fellow inmates.

Capt Hedden:

Oh, yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

They're family.

Capt Hedden:

Yeah. His paternal attitude toward Gopchik ...

Dr. Woodworth:

Yes.

Capt Hedden:

... you know, that's my boy. He's going to do fine in this prison camp, right? That's his kind of glow. His attitude toward this kid is, he's figuring it out. He's finding that, he's finding the way. [laughter]

Lt Col Gartland:

And to Tyurin he refers to as his father.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

Lt Col Gartland:

He was, he was a father to us.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah.

It is really hard to read it, though, isn't it?

Lt Col Gartland:

It is.

Dr. Woodworth:

It's when we think about the current situation and the worry we have about autocrats in our world now, and a book that was published in the early sixties still *really* got a lot of truth ringing through it.

Lt Col Gartland:

It is a Great Power Competition read.

Dr. Woodworth:

[laughing] Yes, it is.

Lt Col Gartland:

There is no, no doubt about that. And now, if for no other reason, although we've been talking about other reasons throughout this entire podcast, but if for no other reason, it certainly will give you an insight into the totalitarian mindset and the consequence of the fairly anguishing, miserable consequences of having to endure, having to be on the receiving end of that.

Dr. Woodworth:

It's definitely haunting when you think about the former Soviet states that broke away, like Ukraine.

Lt Col Gartland:

Ukraine, and there's a Ukrainian in the book.

Dr. Woodworth:

Yeah, there is a Ukrainian, there is a Latvian. The worry is the same. And I hope one day we don't have to worry about those things. But I think that's what literature does for us. It makes us appreciate the endurance of humankind.

Closing

Maj Davis:

All right. Well, I think that's it on this one. Again, we highly encourage you to go out and read this book. It is not long. If your feeling hot, this will help you feel cold. [group laughs]

And I think I think from the four of us, I think we really enjoyed it. We enjoy the opportunity to read it and kind of have the discussion, and I think, again, there's a little bit of maybe you worry about history repeating itself. I know in the, they have a little section at the beginning of the book when the book was first published, where it says instead of a forward and it talks about how "this book echoes the unhealthy phenomena in our life associated with the period of the personality cult now exposed and rejected by the party", and I *feel* like maybe things have wrapped back around a little bit more than they thought they would in the sixties, but highly encourage you to go out and read this book especially given the political climate.

And we want to say thank you again so much to Dr. Woodworth for being here to talk about this with us. And also Col Gartland again.

Dr. Woodworth:

Thanks for inviting me again.

Lt Col Gartland:

Thanks Liz for coming.

Maj Davis:

Yeah, we have had a lot of fun.

Dr. Woodworth:

My pleasure.

Lt Col Gartland:

It's been fantastic.

Maj Davis:

All right. We'll see you next time.

Capt Hedden:

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[Music: Band playing ending of the Air Force song]

Glossary

- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **USSR:** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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