

# Tonya's future

Scholarly sources:

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## Meet Tonya

Tonya was an eighteen-year-old girl living in Siberia in 1993. She was a member of the Evenki ethnic group.

Because of her age she was at a stage where she had to make important decisions about her future.

But we'll get to that in a minute. First let's learn a bit about her world.



## Tonya's world

Tonya lived in Siberia, which is located in Northeast Asia. The Evenki people lived near Lake Baikal.

The area is very, very cold.

Until the early 1990s, all of Siberia was part of the Soviet Union and the Communists' rule was very hard on the Evenki.



The Communists forced the Evenki onto collective farms and set up boarding schools for the children.

But despite these restrictions, Tonya had a lot of freedom as a little girl in Siberia. This is because the Evenki culture let children develop at their own pace and make many of their own decisions.



Tonya lived in a small village called Evopolinoye. Only one-hundred and twenty people lived there. The village had an administrative building, a school, and about fifteen two-story houses clustered together.

Tonya had been a good student in school. In her last year at the school, Tonya's teachers gave her a number of booklets on colleges where she could apply.



They even took her on a trip to St. Petersburg, Russia where she could visit some of the colleges.



Tonya thought St. Petersburg was beautiful. She got to visit the Academy of Arts, the great cathedral, and many other sites.

But as much as she enjoyed the trip, she knew that a great decision was looming right in front of her.



## Tonya's decision

Tonya had to decide on a field of study at college. Her options were down to three and each choice would determine how the rest of her life would be spent.





## Choice Number One

First, she could study to be a teacher and return to her village school.



Her village school had originally been set up by the Soviet Union, but the students were restricted in what they could study, which never included anything about Evenki culture—or any other cultures for that matter.

In addition, the students were forced to live in the school while their parents went out with their reindeer.



See, the Evenki people were nomadic reindeer herders and hunters.

Reindeer provided the Evenki with milk for food and trade.

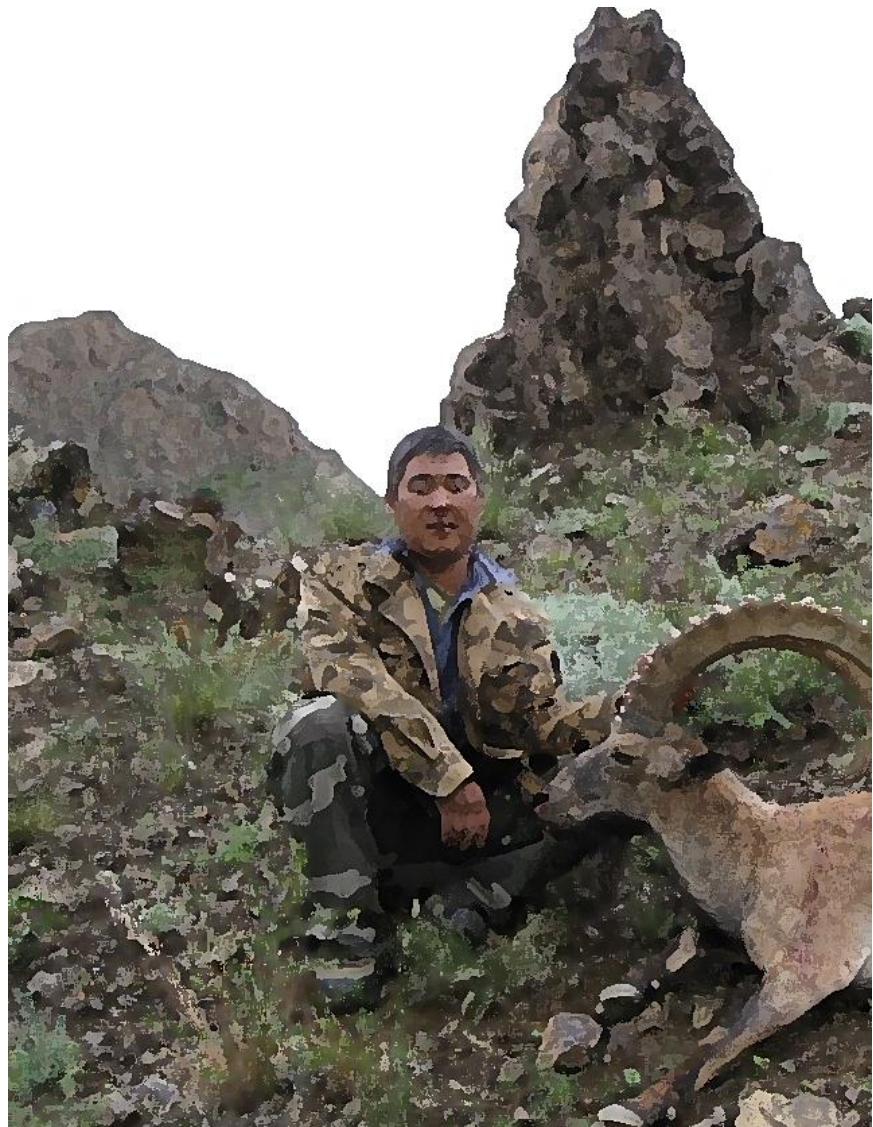


The reindeer were also used for transportation. People would ride them or use them for pulling sleds. All year the families would move the reindeer around Siberia to find the best grazing meadows and water sources for the animals.

Tonya remembered these glorious summers away from school when she'd spend all day herding and riding her favorite reindeer with her parents.



And during the coldest months when Tonya was in school, the Evenki would move to small camps to hunt large game animals to feed their families and sell their hides.



But the Soviets saw the Evenki as backward and wanted them to end their practices. This is why they tried to keep the children away from their parents in these boarding schools.

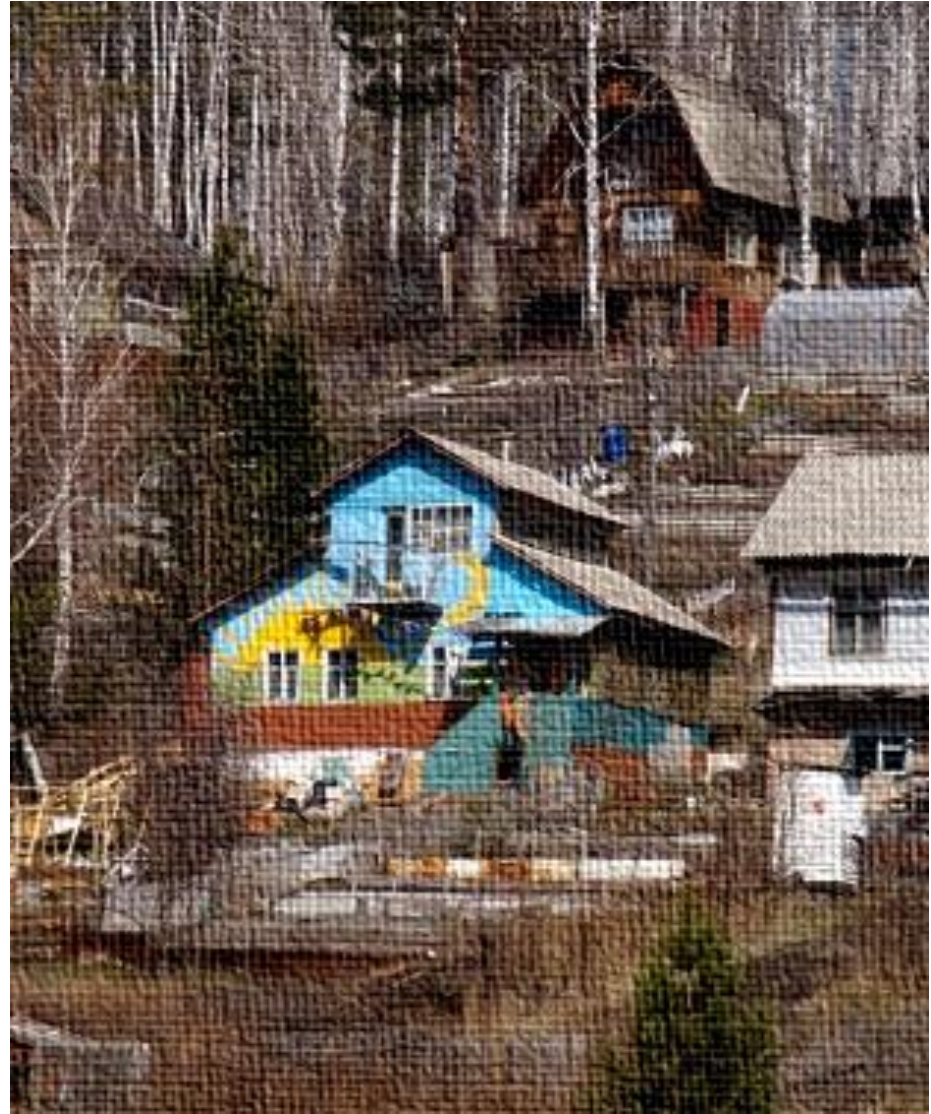
However, the Soviet Union had dissolved in 1991 and the entire school system was being restructured. If Tonya chose to study to become a teacher, she could be part of the restructuring. She could make sure that the children learned the history of their own culture as well as the history and practices of other peoples.

She would also make sure that the children had enough time off to go reindeer herding with their parents.



Besides that, Tonya could return to the home she loved. Here she might eventually raise children of her own in the village of her childhood.

But this was only one of Tonya's options.



## Choice number two

Tonya's second option was very different. Tonya might decide to enter the professions. She was considering studying law.





If Tonya went into the professions she would stay in beautiful St. Petersburg to earn her income.

With the high income she'd earn, she could also rescue members of her extended family.



See, under the Soviet Union, her reindeer-herding relatives were forced to work on a herding collective where the government told them what they could and could not do.

However, they also received a salary for doing this— something they no longer had.



And while Tonya's relatives enjoyed their new freedoms, they were now forced to look elsewhere for the money they needed to survive.

Many of them had taken up trapping sable and fox and selling their hides, but this was not bringing in all the money they needed.



In St. Petersburg, where Tonya could earn a substantial salary, she could build a large home where her parents, siblings, and extended family could live.



While her family might not be happy giving up their cultural practices, perhaps some of them could open up merchant stands along the streets of St. Petersburg.

Two of her cousins painted Evenki scenes and portraits. Perhaps they could sell these works of art.

But there was still one other option.



## Choice number three

Tonya's third option was even more different. She could study cultural anthropology in school and return to her village to become a shaman.

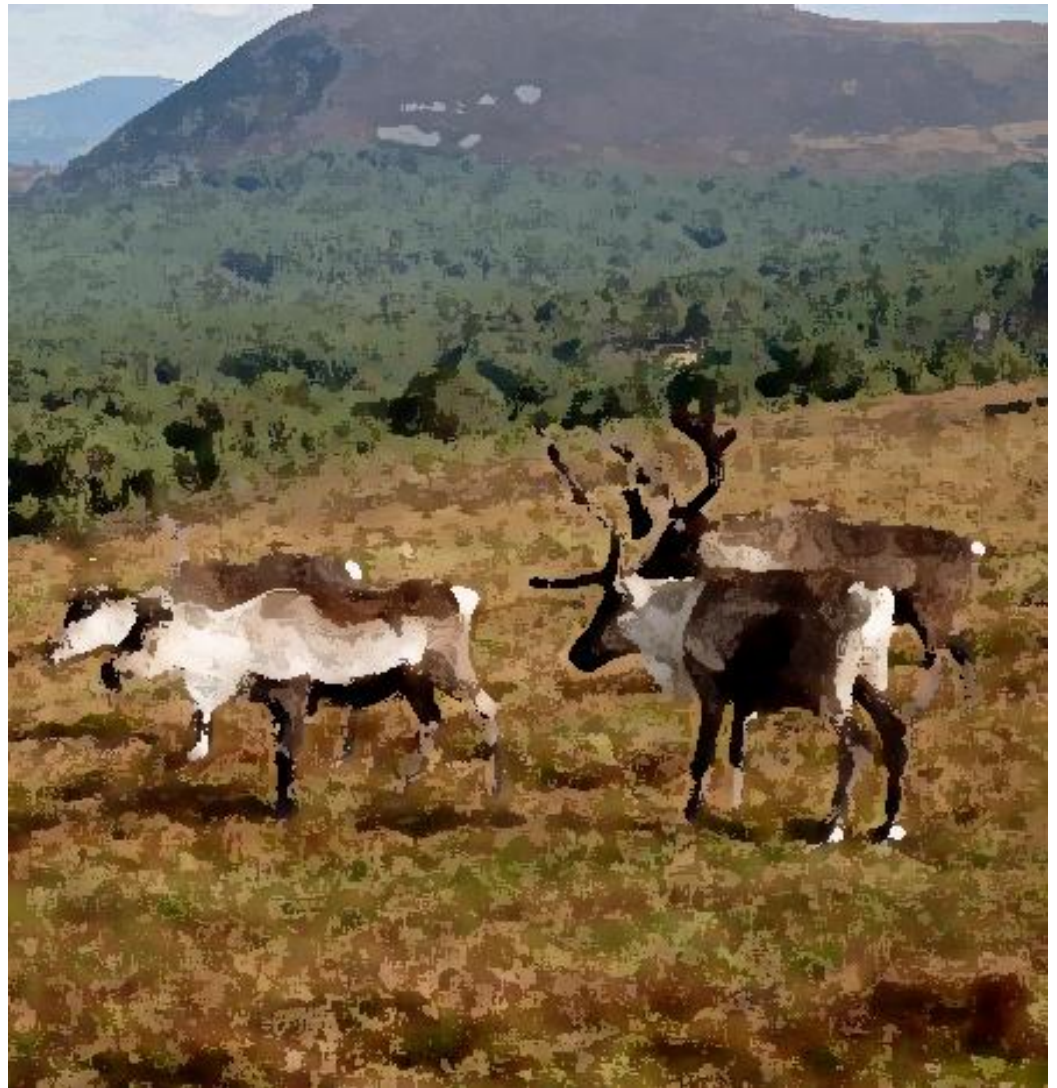
A shaman acted as a medium between the visible world and an invisible spirit world in order to heal people and have some control over nature.



Among the Evenki, the shaman was the most respected member of society.

In Tonya's village, the people would give the shaman one to four reindeer for every ritual he or she performed. The villagers believed the shaman kept their herds safe and protected the people from enemies, illness, bad luck, and hunger.

Tonya's grandfather had been a shaman.



The Soviet Union outlawed shamanism, but her grandfather kept practicing it anyway.

Eventually the Soviets found out and took him to a prison camp outside her village, where he died shortly after he'd arrived.





But Tonya remembered so much. From the time she was ten, she had helped her grandfather during many of his rituals. He'd told her that she might take on his role one day—that she had the right insight for it and the right compassion for her villagers, animals, and environment.

Her grandfather taught her that being a shaman meant having a sense of responsibility to nature and nature's spirits. He was starting to train her when the Soviets arrested him.



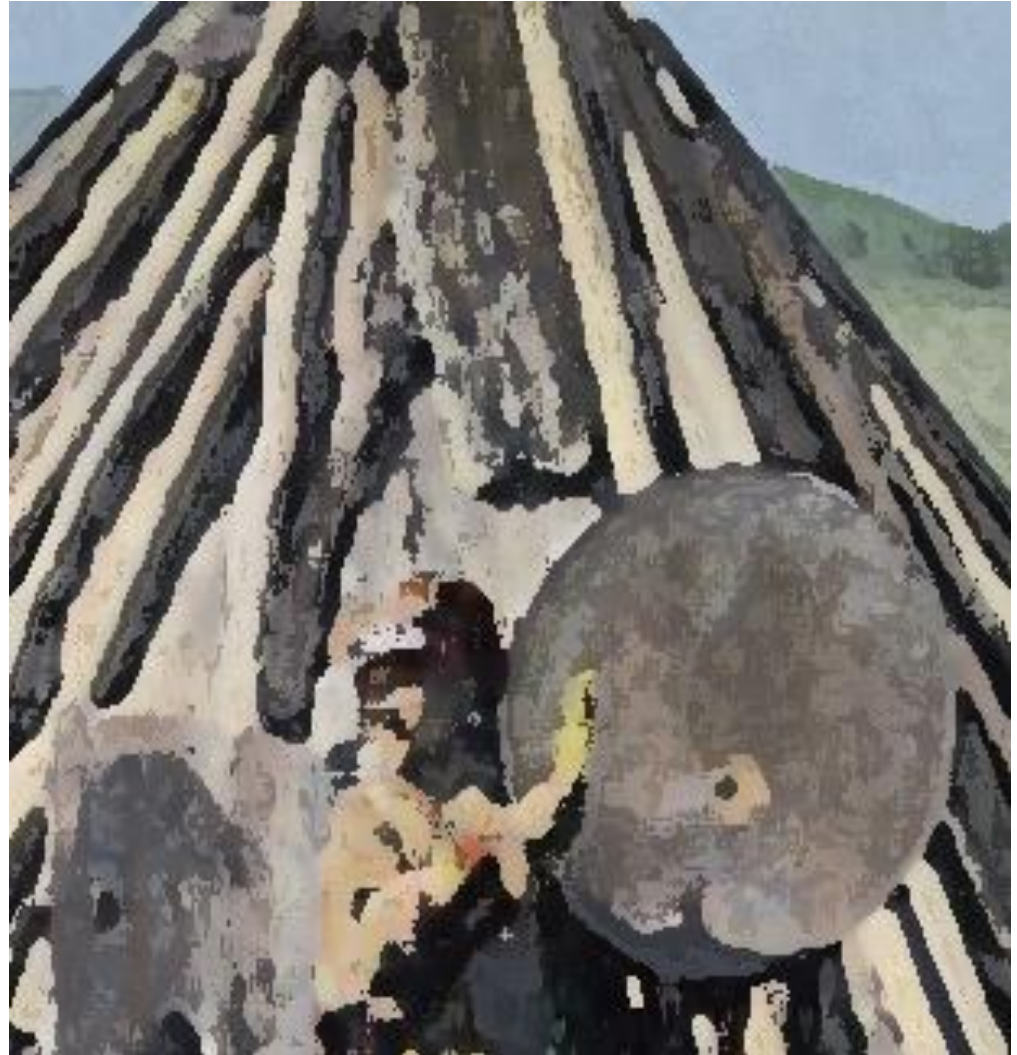
But Tonya had kept most of his clothing and tools.

She'd taken care of his drum. She knew how to beat the drum and make sounds like the guardian spirits of *One-who-walks-round-the-earth* (the bear) and *Broad-soled-one* (the wolf).

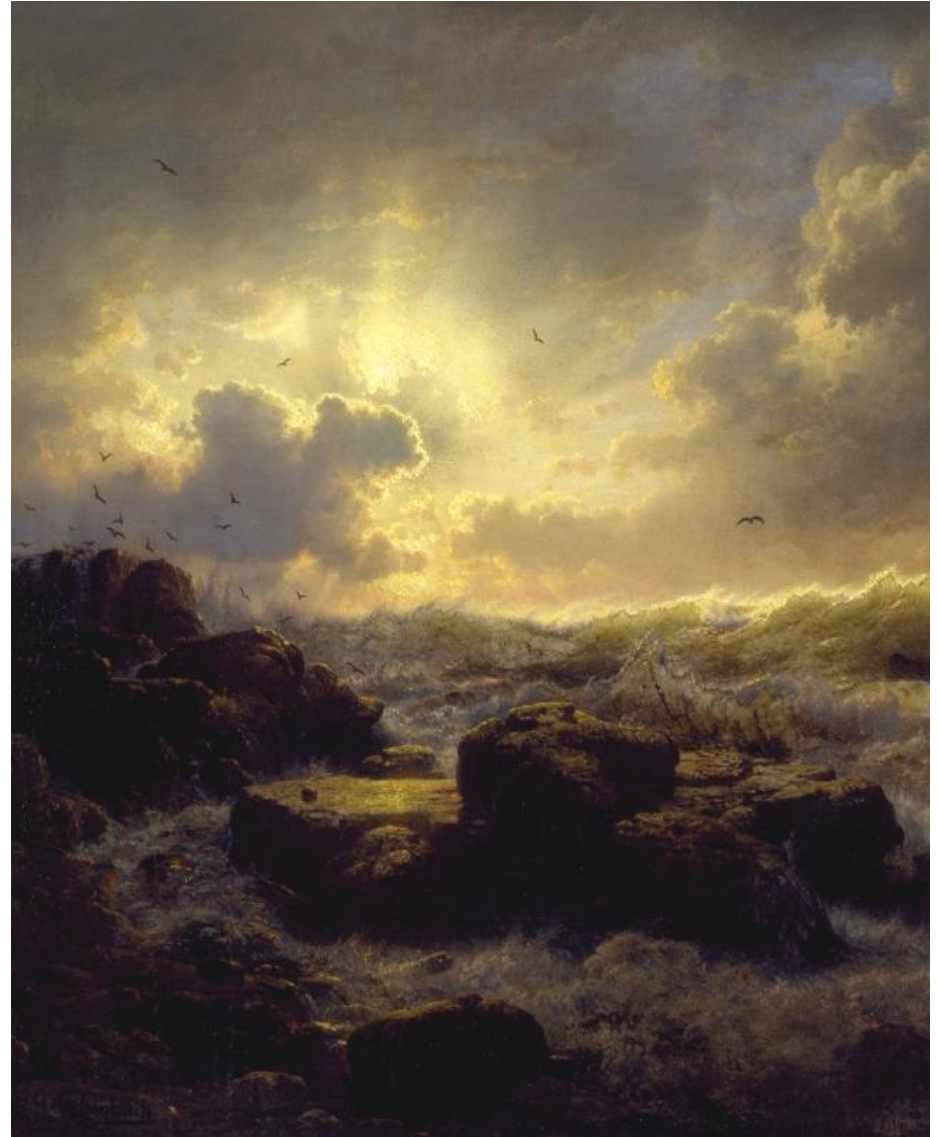


She even remembered what her grandfather's tent looked like, with its connections to the upper, middle, and lower worlds through a hearth, a larch tree, and dummies.

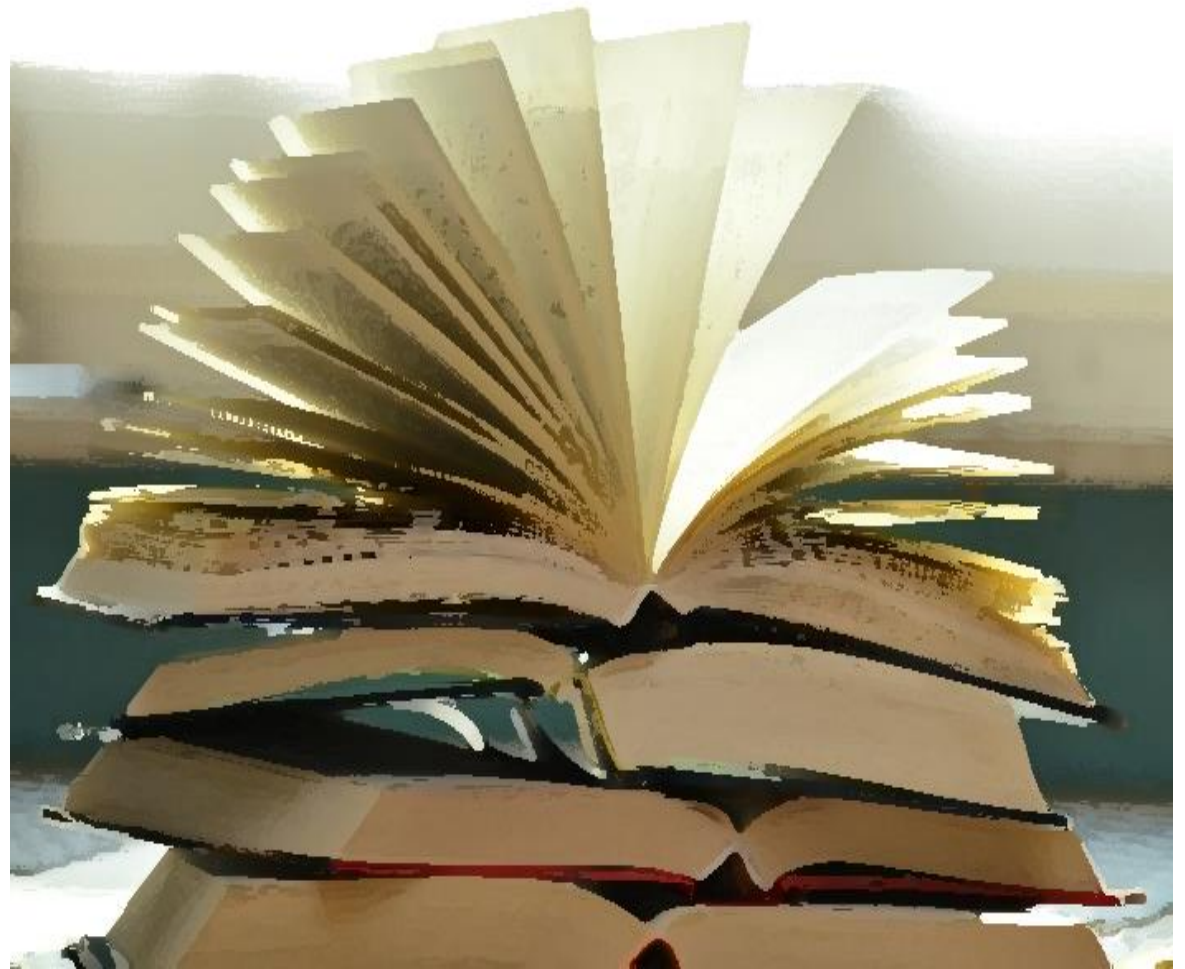
She still had the two wooden figures at the tent's entrance that represented her family's ancestors.



At times she felt the spirits of her ancestors calling her—calling her to bring back the balance her people and their world once had before the Soviets changed everything.



But becoming a shaman required years of training and there were no more shamans around to teach her. Tonya would have to study the works of cultural anthropologists who had documented the ways of Siberian shamans—just to know how to perform all the rituals.



Tonya was under much pressure from her villagers to study and become a shaman. They wanted to return to the times when their welfare was protected by the shamans and their work.



But what was Tonya to do? All her choices had some benefits to her people and some possible drawbacks.

Tonya just could not decide. Therefore, she's asking you to help her with the big decision.

What should she do?



# **You vote. What should Tonya do?**

**1. BECOME A TEACHER AND RETURN TO HER VILLAGE TO HELP RESTRUCTURE THE SCHOOL?**

**2. BECOME A LAWYER AND BRING HER STRUGGLING FAMILY/RELATIVES TO ST. PETERSBURG?**

**3. STUDY ANTHROPOLOGY AND BRING BACK THE PRACTICE OF SHAMANISM TO HER VILLAGE?**



**THANK YOU!**

The end

Let's talk!!!!