

## ALUMNI TYPE: RECENT BOOKS BY IU GRADUATES

It's a very long way from the banks of the Zdwiza River in Ukraine to Bloomington, Ind.

Kay Baldwin Gill's mother, Sonia Turbowskia, BA'32, began that journey as a child in 1919, when a murderous pogrom forced her family out of their Ukrainian home. Gill, BA'57, has retraced Sonia's footsteps in her first novel, *Mirel's Daughter*.

The story is almost unbearably painful. Sonia was raped by bandits, was forced to abandon her dying mother in a field, and watched her sister die of typhus and starvation just as they reached the relative safety of Kiev.

Sonia alone survived to reach the near-mythical sanctuary of Chicago, where two much-older brothers had established themselves some years before. Never rich, the brothers had worked in steel mills in Gary to put themselves through college, and they made sure that Sonia, whose last name was shortened to Turbow, learned English and got an education – both essential, in their eyes, to becoming an American.



Sonia Turbow, pictured here in about 1932, escaped Ukraine in 1919. Her journey to the U.S. is the basis for a new novel by her daughter, Kay Gill.

Her brothers sent Sonia to IU, where she majored in German – close kin to her native Yiddish – and met and fell in love with Fred Baldwin, BA'32, DDS'42, a young Hoosier. They married in 1932, months after graduating. Fred – despite a secret desire to write – became a dentist, and, after a stint in the Army during World War II, he and Sonia raised their family in quiet, respectable, solidly middle-class Muncie, Ind.

Gill grew up hearing tantalizing fragments about her mother's faraway childhood, but she didn't learn what had really happened until near the end of Sonia's life. She decided then that the story needed to be recorded.

At first, Gill intended to write her mother's story as a memoir. But by the time Sonia could bear to tell all that she remembered, she found that she didn't remember it all. The story itself remained clear, Gill said. But neighbors, friends, places, and day-to-day details had faded.

"I realized that I had to write it as fiction because I had to create the community around her story," says Gill, a writer and editor who lives near Louisville, Ky.

Her mother, who died in 1987, supported the project from the beginning. "She thought it was important that people know these things," Gill says.

Gill was no neophyte when it came to writing. Trained as a journalist, she had met her own husband, George, at IU in the 1950s, when they were both vying for the editorship of the *Daily Student*. George Gill, BA'57, DHL'94, went on to become the publisher of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and was a 1984 recipient of IU's Distinguished Alumni Service Award. During the decade she was working on *Mirel's Daughter*, Kay Gill published two nonfiction books.

Writing fiction was new to her, though, and she was determined to do this story justice. In addition to doing extensive research, she took creative-writing classes at the University of Louisville. There she worked with novelist Sena Jeter Naslund, co-founder of Fleur-de-Lis Press, which later published Gill's novel.

Gill says writing *Mirel's Daughter* was "very emotional."

"I shed a lot of tears," says Gill, whose current project is loosely based on her father's life as a young man. "Even when I was rewriting, the tears would flow."

