

## **Gene Jaroslaw: a nonagenarian's journey from Stalin's Moscow to Asheville (continued)**

by Jim Lenburg

Gene's parents were dedicated social revolutionaries hoping to find in the Soviet Union the classless society they dreamed of. As a young American living in Moscow, Gene remembers vividly the Great Famine there when Stalin began a program of forced collectivization of agriculture. Many Muscovites were desperate for food, but because Gene's father was paid in dollars, he could purchase goods in well-stocked foreign stores. Eventually he became disillusioned with Stalinism and moved the family back to New York City. Gene recalls that then, as a 10-year-old, he spoke better Russian than he did English!

Although he shared his family's left-wing political views, he refused to join the Communist Youth League in 1939, by then disgusted with Stalin's dictatorial rule.

Gene was attending Brooklyn College when the U.S. entered World War II. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps aviation cadet program and trained to become a bombardier. But he says he flunked the simulation exam when he could only hit 18% of the required 21% of the targets. He then trained as a flight engineer and was assigned to India, where he flew 23 of the war's most dangerous missions over the eastern end of the Himalayas (called flying over The Hump), supplying Chiang Kai-shek's army in Kunming and Shanghai and the American Flying Tigers unit in China. He earned the air medal and was only two flights short of winning the Distinguished Flying Cross when the war ended.

On returning home, Gene married Adele, the love of his life, and opened a contemporary lighting and window treatments store in Brooklyn. After retirement in 1997, the couple moved to a cooperative housing community in West Asheville. Gene has taught several courses at OLLI and currently hosts the Friday Special Interest Group: the Forum. The dedicated 93-year-old persists in fighting for social justice and other progressive causes, as he has his entire life.