

RUSSIA: MY TRIP WITH STUDENTS TO THE USSR, SUMMER OF 1990

By Thomas Alexander Stokoe

SKYLINE'S INVITATION TO THE USSR

At a Skyline High School faculty meeting in the spring of 1990, our principal announced that Skyline had received an invitation from the USSR government to send a group of students and teachers to the Soviet Union on a cultural exchange program. We would send a group for three weeks and reciprocate by hosting a USSR group of teachers and students for three weeks. Teachers interested could sign up. I signed up. It was later announced that



Chas Adams (History teacher), Julie Allred (Business teacher), Deanne Sweeten (English teacher) and Tom Stokoe (Drama teacher) would head the group of students to the Soviet Union.

Each teacher and student would pay their own air fare round trip from Salt Lake City to Moscow and return. The Soviet government would pick up the tab for our accommodations, food and travel within the Soviet Union. The final travel list consisted of twenty-three students: 17 from Skyline and 6 from Olympus High, 4 teachers, and 2 mothers as chaperones, Sunny Reinholt and Marilyn Hansen for a total of twenty-nine.

In preparation for the trip, we met one evening per week at Skyline for lessons in the Russian language as taught by a Russian. We learned basic words and short phrases deemed helpful in communication - "Hello, how are you?" and "please" and "thank you." We were informed not to take any religious literature as it was against the laws of the USSR to bring such into the country. This was firmly stressed.

As time drew close to depart for the Soviet Union, I had a strong impression to take ten Books of Mormon in the Russian language. So, I bought ten books from the LDS Distribution Center and packed them in the bottom of my suitcase. I prayed nightly that I might succeed in taking them into the country and giving them to persons whom I felt should receive them.

ARRIVAL IN MOSCOW

The long-awaited day in June arrived. Parents and family bade us farewell at the Salt Lake airport. It was a tender departure. Then we flew to JFK airport in New York, on to Helsinki, Finland and to Moscow. It was a long journey, but there was an enthusiastic spirit in our group as well as one of anticipation.

As the plane hovered in the sky above Moscow we could see high rise buildings dotting the landscape. There were literally hundreds of them if not a few thousand. It was the dominant feature of the landscape. The plane landed. I looked out the port hole on the right and then on the left. There was a soldier with a rifle on either side. As we disembarked and walked towards customs, I counted twenty soldiers all bearing rifles situated strategically in the surroundings. This was a sight not to be found at U.S. airports in 1990. We entered the customs building.

We were told to wait to the side as plane load after plane load of passengers went through customs suitcase check - all suitcases opened and searched. Finally, we were the sole group remaining. A lady emerged and said, "I am Jane, your leader and interpreter. All of you come this way and follow me. Your suitcases will not be opened and searched. Bring them with you and we will go outside and board the bus."

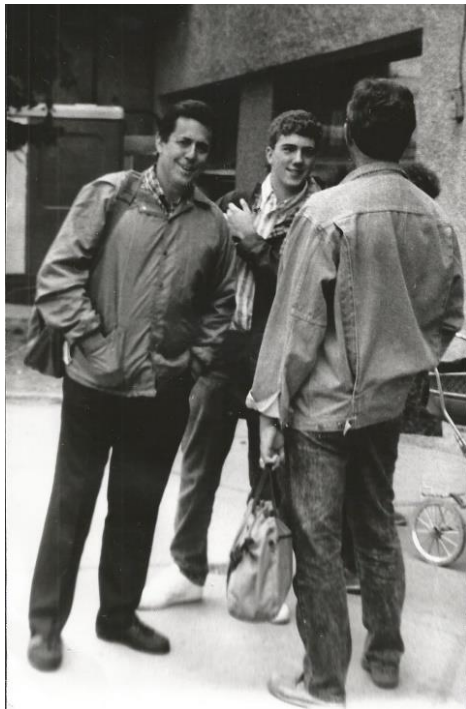


Jane, middle with Pat Ashby, left and Mary Bunten on right

I would find out later that many in our group had brought with them Books of Mormon in Russian but each one did not know others had them. The missionary spirit had touched the hearts of members of our group and the way paved for the books' entry into the USSR. The books would be given to persons interested and willing to receive them. This has been a testimony to me. "Every member a missionary." The Spirit of the Lord prompts the hearts of the willing and as Nephi says in 1 Nephi 3:7 "I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."

OFF TO ZELENOGRAD

As we emerged from the airport and approached the bus we were met by families - parents and teenagers - who would host us in their homes. They handed us bouquets of flowers, a nice welcome gesture. Then we boarded the bus and headed toward the city of Zelongrad, some 120 miles away where we would be farmed out to reside with families. It was a city with a population of 120,000 people and was constructed under the direction of Nikita Kruschev in 1962. We would be the first group of Americans to ever visit and reside in this city. Thus, would begin a very interesting and intriguing three weeks in Russia.



Tom and Brigg Noyes facing Chas Adams



St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square

The first thing I noticed was all cars looked alike. There was one model, a small car called the “Lada”; public transportation buses were all painted the same color, and streets we traveled had no marked lanes. It was a traffic free for all with cars, trucks, and buses each forging their own path dominated by constant horn honking. Compared to back home this was a jumbled traffic mess, but somehow it sorted itself out and vehicles arrived at destinations barring no breakdowns or accidents.

Over the next few days, as we drove in our bus, it became more apparent that the philosophy of driving was “Kill the pedestrian.” I saw men, women, and youth at the side of streets literally in sprint position, seeking a gap in traffic, then running to the other side. The pedestrian obviously had no right to safe street crossing. Once we saw a woman lying on the roadside who had been hit by a vehicle.

The landscape was interesting thickly dotted with green trees, bushes and grass. As we passed fields, we saw an occasional farmer on an old tractor that looked like it was built in the 1920’s.

Also, kids' bicycles looked like they were built in the 1920's. Within two days, my impression of Russia was "It's fifty years behind the U.S. and other modern countries."

As the bus pulled into a parking lot in Zelonograd, there assembled were the families that would host us. They stood quietly, humbly as though not what to expect. I was designated spokesman for our group. I told everyone to exit the bus with big smiles and circulate shaking hands with everyone, greeting all with "Hello" in Russian. I was the first to get off the bus and commenced shaking hands, smiling and saying "Hello". Our students followed suit with enthusiasm and smiling faces shaking hands with family members. This was the beginning of genuine friendship that would grow over the next three weeks.



Families that hosted 17 Skyline students, 6 Olympus students and their 6 chaperones

Each one of us was assigned to a Russian family and departed to the high-rise building and apartment we would dwell in. Our students stayed with families who had a teenager who spoke English. I would be staying with Jane Belyustova, our Russian leader and interpreter, and with her husband Vassili, a medical doctor and gynecologist of twenty-six years-experience, and their son Vassili junior, a junior high school student. The apartment had a small kitchen, a bathroom, a bedroom and a living room. I would sleep in the living room. Dr. Vassili did not speak English but Vassili Jr. pictured, could. They had a small schnauzer dog. It would be an enjoyable stay.

RUBLES/DOLLAR EXCHANGE

Each adult leader was to be in charge of a group of students. My students were Katie Colemere, Lindsay Boyer, Morgan Boyack, and Cabot Morgan. One thing I must say about our students - they were great teenagers, thoughtful, respectful, considerate and kind. Only a couple of times was there a concern. We told the students do not exchange dollars for rubles on the street with the Black- Market racketeers. Walking a street, a couple of our boys were offered a

wonderful “rubles for dollars exchange rate” that far exceeded that of banks. The boys obliged, gave the dollars, received the counted rubles and were very happy. After the racketeers had disappeared, they double checked their rubles and discovered they had been ripped off big time. Lesson learned. Group obedience prevailed from that point on regarding rubles/dollars exchange



A blond Russian (left) with two Skyline High school Students

WELCOME PARTY AT A LOCAL DISCO

On our second night in Zelenograd we went with our Russian family members to a disco for a “welcome to Russia party.” The disco had a marvelous sound system, a stage, microphones, flashing lights and a dance floor. The disc jockeys ran the sound system playing Russian and American music.

Now prior to leaving the United States I asked Suzanne Parsons, who had a wonderful singing voice and had played a major role in our school musical, to prepare a cassette tape with music to accompany her singing. I wanted us to be prepared incase our group was called upon to perform and Suzanne would represent us. The party got underway and all the kids were dancing and having fun. It was a mixture of Russian dancing and our American hip hop and was just a blast. I was watching when one of the mothers of a Russian student came and grabbed my arm and said, “Come Tom, we dance!” and dragged me on to the dance floor. Wow! I was dancing until the sweat was on my brow and my shirt was clinging damp to my body. All 29 of our Utah group were on the floor dancing with the Russians.

The Russian dancing was great and as the evening progressed something magical occurred. We were no longer Americans and Russians separated by continents geographically apart, but we were united - united in one spirit, one identity, one special body of beautiful and wonderful people, blended in heart, mind, and soul; the epitome of an ideal family of the human race. The feeling of mutual joy and delight was absolutely fantastic.



ENTERTAINMENT - SUZANNE PARSONS REPRESENTS SKYLINE

Then a disc jockey spoke: "It is now time for a special number. Zelenograd will present a special entertainment for our American friends." We all cheered, the number was performed, and we applauded. Then, the moment I had been anticipating when I asked Suzanne Parsons on the Skyline stage to prepare a tape, arrived. "Now America, our guests from Utah, it is your turn!" The Russians smiled, cheered and clapped. I looked at Suzanne, we both smiled, and I nodded toward the stage. She gave the disc jockeys her tape and stood behind the microphone. The music played and she commenced singing.



Noah Davidson and Dennis Shirokov



Russian girl in pink with Suzanne Parsons

I don't know if Russian schools have concert and acapella choirs or madrigals, or present big time musicals like our high schools do in Utah where our audiences are accustomed to hearing good singing voices, but when Suzanne Parsons sang into the microphone on that disco stage, the Russians went wild. They clapped, they shouted, jumped up and down and were absolutely filled with euphoria. She was as Elvis Prestley and the Beattles all rolled in one as the Russians shouted, "More! More! More! Barbra Streisand! Barbra Streisand! More! More! Suzanne

absolutely wowed them and was for those minutes on stage a world-famous star. She couldn't leave the stage. The Russians kept clamoring adoringly for more. It's a good thing she had several song accompaniments on the tape. It was indeed a choice evening, a wonderful evening for Suzanne, and a wonderful evening for all of us.

VISIT TO CITY HALL & OUR GIFT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY OF ZELENograd

We were informed that next day at 9 a.m. we would be going to the government office building and be greeted and welcomed by the mayor of the city. We congregated on the main floor awaiting going upstairs to meet the mayor. As we stood there the thought came to mind that we needed a gift to give the mayor and the city of Zelenograd, a gesture of good will. So I said to our group "We need to give the mayor and city a gift. Who has something that we can give?" A girl said, "I have a CTR ring." Deanne Sweeten said "I have a key ring that says Roosevelt, Utah with a picture of a dinosaur." "I've got a Book of Mormon in Russian," I said. "These will be the gifts we will give." Wherever we went, the Russian students in the families we stayed with always came with us.



Presenting a Book of Mormon to Alexander Kudrea, Mayor of Zelenograd

Jane came out and said "The mayor is ready to meet us. Let's go." The room was quite long with a row of tables facing each other going almost the full length of the room. We assembled on both sides of the row of tables. The mayor stood at the head of the room with two of his cabinet members and Jane as interpreter. Smiling he greeted us in Russian and Jane interpreted his speech that was about 3 minutes long. He was friendly and vivacious. Then Jane said, "Tom, it's your turn to speak."

So, I went to the head of the tables, shook the mayor's hand and the two cabinet members, faced every one and gave an improvisational speech that Jane interpreted in Russian. It went something like this:

“Honorable mayor, officials of the government of Zelenograd, on behalf of our group from the state of Utah in the United States of America, we wish to thank the Soviet government for the invitation to visit your beautiful country. We thank the city of Zelenograd for being our host city and thank the wonderful families who have so graciously hosted us in their homes. A cultural exchange between students and teachers of two countries is a great educational experience and we look forward to hosting teachers and students from Zelenograd in our homes in America.

We thank the Soviet government for all it is providing for us during our visit to your beautiful country and to you, honorable mayor of the city of Zelonograd, for inviting us here today and taking the time to greet us.

On behalf of the schools we represent, plus the state of Utah, we wish to present to you, honorable mayor and the city of Zelenograd, these gifts: a ring with the initials CTR denoting Choose The Right, unity and friendship; a key ring with the name Roosevelt, Utah inscribed upon it with a picture of a dinosaur. Roosevelt is a great archaeological site in Utah where dinosaurs once roamed; and this Book of Mormon (and I had to be careful here on what I said being religious literature was outlawed and this was a communist country) which represents the life and beliefs of people who once resided on the American continent. We appreciate the city of Zelenograd and thank you for your kindness and hospitality.”

MEETING POLITICIANS

The mayor then said in Russian to follow him and we all exited the room and followed him into an auditorium. The seats looked down upon a stage like a Greek amphi-theatre where some 70 politicians were seated in a big 3/4 circle like a horseshoe. The mayor took his place at a desk at the head of the horseshoe and proceeded to address the politicians. We stood looking down at the stage from the upper auditorium seats.

As he spoke, he raised the CTR ring above his head, then the key ring, and then the Book of Mormon and I heard him distinctly say the word “Mamona.” Then something remarkable occurred. The politicians all stood up and facing us gave us a rousing hand of applause that lasted quite a long time. Then they came up and joined us placing pins upon our shirts. In Russia, it is a custom to give pins denoting something significant. A politician, smiling, started placing a pin upon my shirt. A Russian teenager named Vladimir, standing next to me said,

“This is an honor he is bestowing on you. He is the Minister of Culture, Arts and Literature. He is placing upon you the pin of the great Russian poet Pushkin.” I thanked him saying “Spasiba” and we shook hands.



Minister of Culture



Jane, Zelenograd's Mayor & Minister of Culture

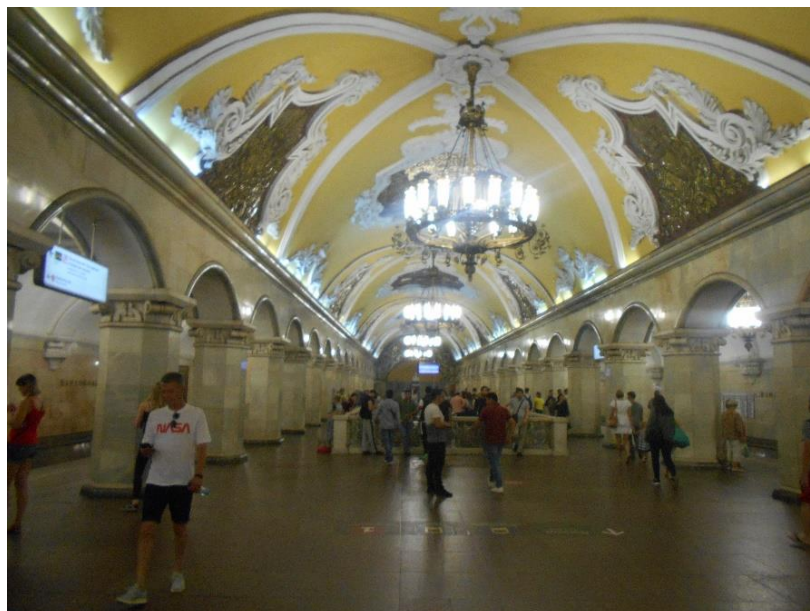


Minister of Education

As we left the government building and got into our bus, I couldn't help thinking of what had just happened. Here we were a small insignificant group of 23 students, 4 teachers and 2 mothers from a democratic country being given a standing ovation by a group of 70 Communist politicians, and being kindly greeted, recognized and honored with a gift of a pin of Russian significance attached to our shirts and blouses. We couldn't be a more insignificant group and yet we were lavishly applauded, and accorded respect, warmth, honor and friendship.

The mayor of Zelenograd was Alexander Kudrea. Alexis Ishook, a Ukrainian, was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the City Council of Zelenograd. The 70 politicians who gave us a standing ovation were called deputies and constituted the City Council.

Each day featured a schedule of places to go, things to see and things to do. The Russians in charge of our group did an excellent job in organizing our daily routine. Unfortunately, the book containing part of my diary of the first week in Russia is lost. But the diary of the second and third week in Russia I still have and commence now to give a daily account of our group activities.

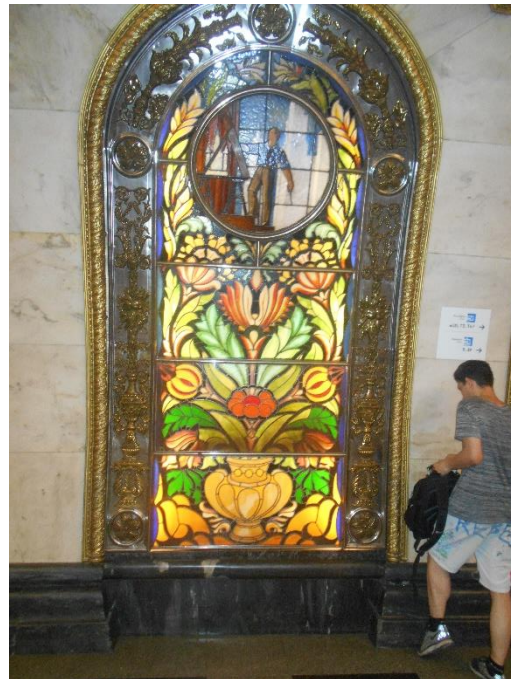
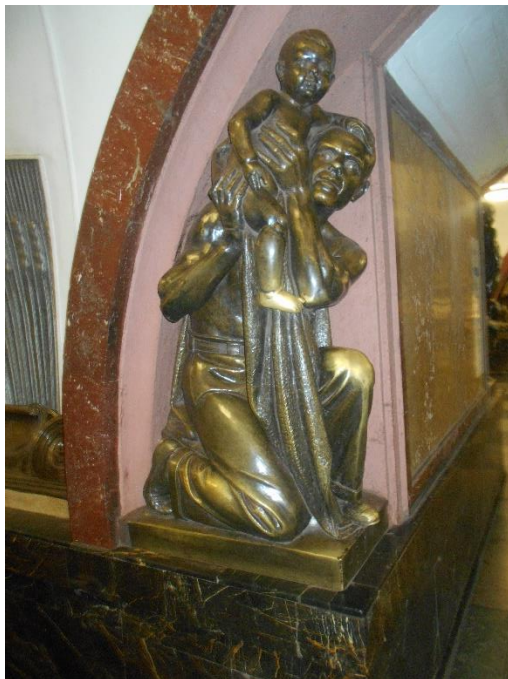


JUNE 26, 1990 - MOSCOW SUBWAY & SOVIET LAWS

Today we boarded our bus and drove into Moscow, a bustling city of streets, traffic and people. We are going to visit the Moscow subway and ride in a subway train. One of the things I noticed is how clean the streets are. There's not a piece of paper to be found anywhere on the streets, no garbage, no graffiti, no slum-like dilapidated, ugly half-torn down buildings. I asked what if someone is caught putting graffiti on buildings. He goes to jail and can be shipped to Siberia for hard labor, even for several years.

We are informed not to spit gum onto the streets or sidewalks. It can result in arrest and jail. I found out that plane hijackers when caught are automatically executed. There is no such thing as a prisoner being on death row for 20-30 years with repeated court appeals like in the U.S. Here in the Soviet Union the law moves swiftly.

As we descended into the subway, I was astounded at seeing beautiful chandeliers hanging from ceilings with beautiful mosaics and statues adorning the walls. The people of the Soviet Union are to be praised and commended for their Moscow subway and the fantastic works of art that render the subway an elegant museum. I have been in the London and New York subway, but the Moscow subway is far superior to either one. Upon return to Zelenograd, Jane and Dr. Vassili and I went for a stroll in the nearby woods.



“The goal of the Soviet government is to create ‘the new Soviet man,’ a new type of person free from greed and selfishness, laziness and dishonesty.”

JUNE, 27 1990 - ZELENOGRAD INSTITUTE OF ELECTRONICS

Today we stayed in Zelonograd. It was a sports day and tour. At 9:30 AM we went and toured the Zelenograd, Institute of Electronics and observed students making small computer games for kids. The devices are about the size of an audio cassette tape. This was an interesting tour and we were allowed to ask questions. During the school this was a part time job for the Institute students. During the summer they are allowed to work more hours. They work a mandatory four hours per day with the option after lunch to work 1-2 additional hours. They receive one paycheck at the end of August for the entire summer of work. Hence, they work for three straight months before receiving a paycheck.

They earn 100 rubles per month or \$16, so for a minimum of 80 hours work a month each student earns \$16 which equals 16 cents per hour. The computer devices each cost 22 rubles to make which include materials and labor. They are sold for 23 rubles. I asked the supervisor "Why don't you sell them for more money and make a larger profit?" The supervisor smiled and replied, "Because this is our system." We then went into an adjacent room and played Soviet computer games.

AMERICAN EMBASSY VISIT

Next, we rode the bus to City Hall and met the secretary of the American Embassy who had requested to meet with us. She was a woman who could speak Russian and came from Seattle. She asked a few questions about our stay and our reactions to being in the Soviet Union. We told her we really enjoyed being here, that the people and our hosts were really nice - we loved them. Then we went to a swimming pool and swam which was fun and then played games on a field.

ROWING BOAT AND SPEEDOS



Jima and Jane's son Vassili Jr.



Rena Reinhold, Denis Shirikov, Katie Colemere

Vassili junior (right) and his friend Jima and I went rowing in a boat on a nearby river. Jima is a small boy age fourteen. He's not much larger than my son Neil, age eight. Vasili and Jima both rowed the boat but would not let me row because I was a guest. Most of the Soviet males wear speedos when playing tennis or games. The Soviet speedos are a few centimeters larger than a jock strap. Our American girls enjoyed looking at the Russian guys in their speedos and smiling made comments among themselves.

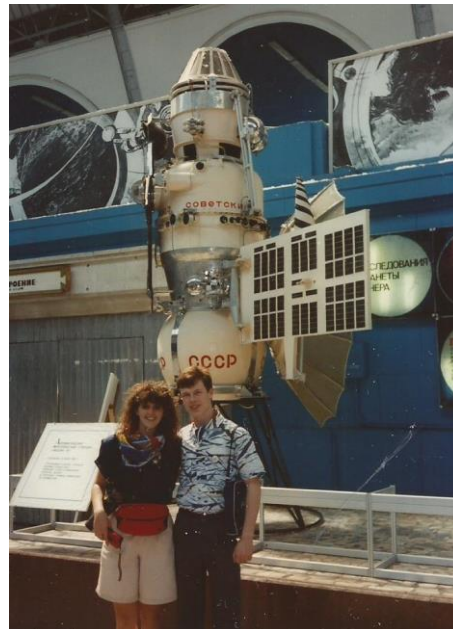
The first five days here in the Soviet Union have been cold and slightly rainy. The temperature has been in the low fifties and forties Fahrenheit. Today, our sports day, was the hottest day since our arrival. We capped the day with a dance at the "Renaissance Discoteque."

JUNE 28, 1990 - SIGHTSEEING IN MOSCOW

Today we went sightseeing in Moscow and saw the Pushkin Museum named after the great Russian poet. It was a fantastic museum with statues, frescoes, paintings, drawings, ornaments etc. with objects from around the world commencing with the ancient Greek period to the 20th century. I especially enjoyed the ancient Egyptian room, the Roman room, the Middle Ages area, and the Renaissance area. The ancient Egyptian room had two gigantic statues resembling the sphinx. Everything was fantastic. We saw paintings by the great Renaissance artist Veronese and Tintorello plus paintings by Picasso of the 1800's. We all marveled at what we saw. I bought postcards in a booklet illustrating some of the paintings.



Russian and Cabot



Jennifer Hughes with the same Soviet student

Next, we went to the equivalent of the Soviet Smithsonian. This included the space building with aeronautical exhibits, a farm building, and an electronics building. Some of the architecture on the grounds was spectacular. We roamed around and had a good time.

Next, we went to the Moscow Television station where our group was filmed under some trees. A few of our students were interviewed as to thoughts and feelings about the Soviet Union. Then we went indoors and toured the TV station where various units were explained. We then walked about 100 yards to a building shaped like space needle and ascended halfway to the top to a restaurant for lunch. This space needle building is 500 meters tall or over 500 yards or five football lengths tall. The restaurant revolves in a complete 360 degree circle every forty-five minutes. A couple of our girls got motion sickness. The menu was chicken, rolls, ice cream and some kind of a cool aid drink. Then we descended in the elevator, got on our bus and came home to Zelenograd. It was a good day.

This Tower is twice as tall as pictured; we are waiting to go in.



DINNER WITH THE POPOLOVS

I was invited to dinner by Boris Popolov. His wife, Raisa, and their son Meesha, met us as our bus pulled in and they took me to their apartment. They had been reading the Book of Mormon I gave them. I think Marilyn Hansen may have given them a Book of Mormon too. The family reads from the Book of Mormon daily. Boris and Raisa are schoolteachers and don't speak English. I don't speak Russian but what would ensue would be a marvelous evening communicating through pantomime, vocal sounds and enactment, just like a game of charades.

We had a nice dinner of canned sardines, salami, potatoes, baked pork, pepsi cola, banana juice, and a drink made in the state of Ubekistan. Their sixteen-year old son is named Alex. The parents and I conversed for two hours - they speak in Russian and I in English. and what a fabulous two hours that was. It was fun and we communicated. I could understand what they were trying to tell me. and they could understand what I was trying to tell them. This is a delightful and humble family. I really like them and had a very enjoyable time.

Meesha is age 23 and has graduated from the Moscow Institute of Commerce. He attended for five years. Alex just graduated from high school. After this delightful and wonderful evening with the Popolovs, Boris walked me home. He is a great singer. I can see him being the chorister for a LDS branch some day in the future in Zelenograd and the branch choir director. He is a neat man and I really like him. He gives gifts to everybody practically every morning as we board our chartered bus to go sightseeing.

Every single day has been a great day. These Russian people are wonderful people. I just saw our group on the Russian news at 1:20 a.m. as I was writing in my journal. The TV station filmed us and interviewed several students, but the final version shown on television was cut down and concise. It ended with us singing "It's a Small World." However, it did mention we were Mormons.

Photo of our group in front of the TV Station.



Boris Popolov (below) teaches school.



JUNE 29, 1990 - VISITING A RUSSIAN HOSPITAL

Today, Dr. Vassili, Jane, Sunny Rheinolt and I visited a hospital. Sunny and I were the only ones in our group to do so. This was made possible because Dr. Vassili is a gynecologist at the hospital. It was an interesting visit. We saw an operating room, a meeting room for doctors, rooms for diagnosing and treating patients, a rehabilitation room, a hall with sick patients in bed, a room where patients bathed and showered, a staff meeting room, and we toured three floors of the hospital.

We met with the head surgeon, head administrative doctor, head nurse, and chief surgeon's son who is also a doctor aged 25 just returned from visiting in Santa Monica, California. We sat in the administrative office for 20 minutes where the doctors gave us a verbal rundown of the entire hospital and then we asked questions.

Sunny and I were told that the average doctor's salary per month was 200 rubles or \$34. A young doctor who had finished his schooling, training, and internship begins practice at 170 rubles per month or \$19. The head doctor for the entire hospital, a man about 52 years of age, makes 370 rubles per month or \$62. The head surgeon for the entire hospital, a man about 60 years of age, makes 400 rubles per month or \$67.

In this hospital there are 70 full time doctors. All told, 970 doctors and nurses work here -

900 nurses and 70 doctors. We were told 2,500 babies are born in this hospital per year and 5,000 abortions take place in this hospital per year. The state issues each man 4 condoms per year. That is his year's supply. Birth control in the USSR is severely lacking. This hospital with its several buildings can accommodate 1200 patients - sometimes with 30-40 patients per room or hall There are rooms with 4 patients per room and rooms for 1 or 2 patients.

The hospital has 1200 beds and the 30-40 bed areas are open barracks in style. I was very impressed by the dedication and commitment of the doctors who work over and beyond their regular shift hours to help patients in need. The head doctor for the entire hospital told me their priority was the patients, their health and welfare and that their pay was secondary to the needs of patients, no matter the hours of work. It was very touching, and I was deeply moved by the dedication of Russian doctors to the welfare of patients.



Our group in front of the University of Moscow

A VISIT TO AN AUTOMOBILE REPAIR SHOP

From the hospital we went to an automobile repair shop. I had seen vehicles broken down at the side of roads and wondered why they hadn't been towed to automobile repair shops. Also, drivers, taking off their windshield wipers upon exiting their vehicles in Moscow and locking them in the trunk. "Why take off the windshield wipers?" I asked Jane. "There is a shortage of windshield wipers in the USSR currently. If they are left on cars, they get stolen."

Visiting the automobile repair shop would be a very enlightening experience. In this city of Zelenograd with its population of 120,000 people I was informed that this automobile shop was the only automobile repair shop in Zelenograd. The shop foreman told me car owners have a terrible time when their cars breakdown and need repair. It's extremely hard to get parts

and if you break down on the road it's too bad. There's virtually no towing services and no mechanics to help you. You're on your own. Even if you have a flat tire you fix it yourself with your own tools, tire repair kit, and pump. But what was most astounding to me was - to get your car fixed you are on a six- month waiting list. On the 40-mile road stretch between Zelenograd and Moscow, I saw 10-15 stalled cars a day.

GAS OR PETROL STATIONS

I have only seen three petrol stations in Moscow in the past week and a half and it's a city of 9 million people. Zelenograd has one petrol station and as we drove by it the lineup of vehicles needing petrol was 75-100 yards long. Young men carrying large petrol cans walked along the line of vehicles pouring petrol into the tanks.

FIRST MCDONALD'S IN THE USSR

We happened to be driving in Moscow on the day McDonald's opened, the first McDonald's in the USSR. It was quite the sight to see. As we drove slowly along there were 4 lines of people side by side, each line at least 100 yards long, waiting to sample the first American hamburgers in Russia. A memorable occasion, not just for the Russians, but for the McDonald's chain arriving in the USSR. Two days later, our bus slowly passed McDonald's and there was a single line that went all the way down the street, circled part of a park and down another street. I estimated the line to be about 200 yards long. The time of day was 4 p.m. Another two days later when we passed there was a single line about 50 yards long.

MOSCOW, OPERA & ART GALLERY

I had not seen any streetwalkers on Moscow streets and asked Yana, one of our female Russian interpreters, about them. She said they don't walk the streets in Moscow. They meet at hotels and arrangements are made by a hotel clerk.

Tonight, we went to the Russian Opera House and saw Mozart's "The Magic Flute" performed on a totally unorthodox stage. I had never seen an opera staged like this in my life. They put the entire orchestra on the stage and the opera company performs in front of the orchestra, behind the orchestra, and through the orchestra. Actors pass through the middle of the orchestra from upstage to downstage and the conductor tucks his elbows in so the actors can get past as he conducts the orchestra. As strange as it was it worked marvelously.

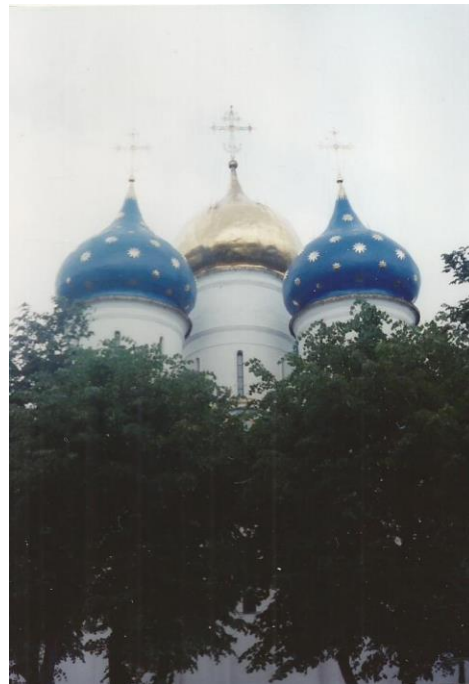
The conductor never used a score. He had the entire show memorized. He was great. The show was excellent. The only obvious flaw was the spotlights. Their spotlight technicians are not as good as my Skyline stagecrew spotlighters. The Russians would turn a spotlight on and gropingly sweep the stage seeking the actor before hitting him and framing him 100% in light. For professionals I would give them a grade of D+ otherwise everything else in the show was outstanding.

The theatre was elegant with the front and side hallways beautifully decorated. The seats, though they were cushioned, were thin and too hard. They are about 1/3rd the thickness of

auditorium seats in the USA. Your posterior hurts after half an hour of sitting. The acting, singing, and directing was excellent, the staging unique.

Next, we went to an art Gallery with the main floor about the size of the main floor in the Salt Palace, Salt Lake City. The paintings were striking and fabulous. I took some photos, bought a calendar and book illustrating some of the art- work to show Diane. Everywhere we go, every single day, the things we see are fantastic. When I think of my poor wife at home missing out on all of this, I feel kind of bad. I hope she is not re-carpeting the house in my absence. Today was another great day. (When I returned home, I discovered she had bought a hot tub and had it installed at the back of our house).

There are five television stations total in the USSR. The political sessions are on television 10 a.m. until midnight. The Supreme Soviet and deputies work hard. It seems they are very committed. The average woman in the USSR has five abortions. The Soviet doctors are very dedicated and work 24- hour shifts, sometimes 28 -hour shifts. This is an extremely culturally rich country. It's quite incredible. The line to catch the bus this morning from Zelenograd to Moscow was about sixty yards long. The other day I wanted to drink a pepsi but didn't want to stand in a thirty-yard long line to get one. I wonder how Dr. Garner Meads and Dr. Mark Curtis in my ward will react when I tell them the average doctor in the USSR makes \$34 a month.



MARRIAGE LICENSES & POINTS OF INTEREST

These take three weeks to obtain. Newlyweds getting their own apartment is impossible. They live with parents. Buying a car is a nine-year waiting period. So, if one wishes to buy a car say at age twenty-one, their name must be placed on a waiting list at age twelve. Intentional murder not in self-defense is death by firing squad.



When a couple get married the ceremony is generally by the state in a government office. Then occurs the custom of touring the town or city visiting monuments and placing flowers at the base. Accompanying them are bridesmaids and their families. The monuments are huge and reflect famous historical persons and war images. Artists post their wears on Arbut street where customers may go to view Russian art and select items for their home. Old ladies don't like their photo taken. I was impressed with the young doctor I met yesterday aged twenty-five named Zhina. The past four days have been warm.

FUNERALS, GLOOMY FACES AND MANIAC DRIVERS

The body is always washed before burial. On the 4th, 9th and 20th day after burial, the family members and friends meet for special customary remembrance activities on behalf of the deceased. Only a few Soviets have a church related burial.



People who work in shops have gloomy expressions on their faces. To date I have seen only one smiling face behind a store counter and that's when twenty-nine Americans came into her souvenir shop and started buying left and right. Almost daily, black market people on the street offer me rubles for dollars. At the bank the going rate is six rubles per dollar. Yesterday, on the street I was offered 20 rubles per dollar. We get approached every day.

The Soviet drivers are maniacs. It's the system - free for all traffic, no rules. With no marked lanes it's a shamble. It appears a supposed 3-lane road in our country is "make five lanes abreast in the USSR." It's a zig zag mad rush to get ahead. Anything goes and there is no such thing as courtesy, only "Get out of my way and kill the pedestrian!" Drivers exist by virtue of the horn. They blow their horns all the time as they forge through traffic. I would estimate on our two-hour excursion today our bus driver honked his horn well over one hundred times and flipped gestures at drivers as we passed them by. It seems the more you flip and honk the more passage-way you get.

We approached a spot on a major highway where a bulldozer was ripping up part of the road. The road narrowed down to one lane. Approaching the work area there were no road signs, no road guards, no nothing. There was a mad dash to get through the single lane space, deliberately cutting off one another and not letting anyone in. Our bus driver's philosophy was "I'm bigger than you; you're going to be crushed!" The Soviet road repair philosophy seems to be, "Let's create a road hazard and see how many vehicles can be smashed today."

JULY 1, 1990 - YACHTING AND SWIMMING

Today, my family went with Kostia our neighbor and Sasha to the river Kasna. There were hundreds of people swimming and sun-bathing and having a picnic. I went yachting with Vasili Jr. and Tanya age sixteen. It was fun. Ryan and Kim Whitlock and their family were there also with Boris and Alberto whom we nicknamed Arnold Schwartznegger. On weekends Russians go to rivers and lakes and rural areas where they have dachas (cabins).

JULY 2, 1990 - SIBERIAN FOLKDANCERS



City of Leningrad – After 1991 the city is once again known as St. Petersburg

Today, we arrived in Leningrad and checked in at our hotel each receiving a card with the hotel name, address and phone number. It is big with 777 rooms. During the eight-hour train ride from Moscow (11:30p.m. - 7:30a.m.) we slept four to a sleeper - Chas Adams, Cabot Nelson, Loren Larsen and I. We took a bus from the railroad station to the hotel, checked in, had breakfast and went sight- seeing. I'm rooming with Cabot Nelson. Leningrad is an old city. Moscow is a better- looking city. Boris helped Cabot and I shop. After 6p.m. I asked Titania, one of our interpreters, chaperone and group leader, if there was any theatrical entertainment. She said "Phantom of the Opera" would open July 11.

By chance I saw a poster in the hotel lobby advertising "The Siberian Folk dancers." It was playing tonight. She checked, sold out, no tickets. I really wanted to see the show. In fact, before leaving Salt Lake City I had prayed that I might have the opportunity to see a Folk dancing performance. I talked to Boris and said let's get a taxi and go to the theatre and see if we could get in. We got a cab and traveled twenty minutes to the theatre. Boris checked. No tickets.

About a dozen buses had pulled in with tourists to see the show. Group after group went in as I stood watching. Finally, the last group came in and their tour guide was speaking in English. "We need to get in quickly as the show is about to start." He was tearing tickets and giving them to the ushers. All went in. I approached him and asked, "Would you happen to have one more ticket. I really want to see the show?" He said, "I'm sorry. I only had enough for my group." He thumbed through the torn tickets and at the very bottom, the last in the stack, was a ticket that had missed being torn. He gave it to me and said, "Enjoy the show." How much do I owe you?" "Nothing. Just enjoy the show." I thanked him and said to Boris "You take taxi and go to hotel." I gave him money then entered the theatre and sat down as the curtain opened.

The show was outstanding, absolutely fabulous and I was elated to see it. A truly wonderful performance. The Lord had blessed me and answered my prayer. The show ended and the patrons entered their buses and they started pulling out. There were no taxis. How could I get to the hotel? As the last bus in the parking lot was about to pull out, I went to the bus door and said to the driver "Pajulsta." meaning "Please." and gave him my hotel card with the address. He looked at it smiled, said "Da" and gestured me to come aboard. He took me to the front of my hotel, smiled and waved pointing to the hotel as we as we pulled up. I said, "Spasiba, spasiba" meaning "Thank you." I was twice blessed: to be given a ticket to see the show and to receive a bus ride home. Please and Thank you are two of the best words you could learn in any language.



JULY 3, 1990 - PETER THE GREAT



Today we went to the estate of Peter the Great. It covered a large area to include his palace, several buildings, and many fountains and golden statues. The buildings were beautiful with mosaics, reliefs, paintings, and elegant tile and porcelain work. He liked Chinese art and had a ship full of Chinese art come to Russia to decorate his estate. It caught fire and never made it to Russia. So, he commissioned his resident Russian artists to create Chinese paintings and porcelain work to decorate his estate. The lavish interior of the palace, the ornate buildings, and grounds with gushing fountains and golden statues are an elegance to behold.



A cobblestone pathway had a fountain in its midst that spurted water periodically about twenty feet in the air. There is a secret cobblestone, if stood upon, would cause the fountain to spurt and shower people surrounding it. Morgan Boyack, studentbody vice president, accidentally discovered the cobblestone and had fun stepping on it to shower passersby. No one

knew of the cobble stone except Morgan and I. Morgan and Briggs had video cameras and recorded many of the sights of the day.

We had a sack lunch and at 4:15p.m. left the estate walking to the wharf and boarding a hydrofoil that took us close to our hotel. It was a fun half-hour ride. We walked half a mile through the city over cobblestone roads following a canal and boarded our bus to the hotel. After dinner we took a twenty-minute boat ride up the Leningrad canal then boarded our bus back to the hotel. It was a fun day.

JULY 4, 1990 - PALACES AND PATRIOTISM

Last night, Cabot and I did not sleep well due to mosquitoes buzzing around our ears. You wouldn't think there would be mosquitoes in a hotel. The water in Leningrad comes out of the tap yellowish in color which we bathe in. No wonder we were told not to drink the water here. The police guard the doors at the hotel. There are four doors in the main lobby. Three are locked and three policemen stand at the one open door. Tourists can come and go but anyone Russian has to show I.D. They do this to keep the riff-raff out and thieves. A lady sits at a desk on each floor. We hand her our room key whenever we leave the building.

Today, we went to Catherine's Palace, later to the home of Nicholas and Alexandria. In 1917 Alexandria was in the palace while Nicholas was at the front with the war. When Nicholas returned, he and his family were put under arrest. The palace is full of decorations, paintings and beautiful furniture. It is indeed a palace befitting of a Tsar. In the afternoon we went to the Pavlov Palace, another palace befitting a Tsar.



At lunch time we went to a restaurant. It's July 4th. America is celebrating independence back home. Upon entering we saw a long row of tables neatly set with a small American flag at each table setting, twenty-nine total. We were told to stand behind our chairs. Then the Star Spangled Banner suddenly echoed through the hall. A surge of patriotism swept throughout us. I

have never felt so patriotic in my whole life, even while serving in the U.S. army, as I did this very moment standing in the USSR the heart of communism. Here we are a group of nobodies, just 29 American students, teachers, and chaperones and they honor us with such a patriotic tribute. The evening was capped with a visit to the ballet.

JULY 5, 1990 - ST. ISAACS, THE HERMITAGE, NEFSKY PROSPECT, TRAIN

Today we visited St. Isaac's cathedral, the largest in the Soviet Union and fourth largest in the world. The interior was incredible with paintings all over the ceiling and walls, and beautiful decorative, woodwork. It was magnificent. Then we visited the Hermitage, a giant museum the size of Harmons parking lot all the way to Mervyns 3 stories high. We are told the Hermitage museum has three million pieces of art and if a person spent 5 minutes looking at each piece, it would take three years to get through at 24 hours per day.

Yesterday, I saw the most beautiful girl I have seen in the Soviet Union She looked like a model, a movie star. It's the second time I have seen her. I took her photo twice as she ran across the grass towards me in an 18th century dress holding it up almost to her thighs. A photographer was filming her from the second story of Catherine's Palace behind me. The model's name was Lena. The movie or television company had to do about eight takes to get the scene right.

I went shopping with Boris at Nefsky Prospect, the biggest shopping center in Leningrad. I bought a grey fur coat for my dear wife because I love her and five Russian hats for the boys. We will be leaving in a few minutes to catch the train back to Moscow. It has been a neat trip to Leningrad. Boris is a good man. A school teacher, he has been my voice piece as we shop. We have been exposed to a lot of Russian culture and history. We have enjoyed our stay here. Our Leningrad leaders gave us souvenirs and have been very good to us.

Aboard the train, we viewed the landscape through the corridor windows as we whizzed by. The USSR is a beautiful country, flat in the western half, green with trees tall and elegant, birch and oak. Everywhere the vegetation is green. We sang songs in one sleeping cabin, 12 students jammed in and four standing at the door in the corridor. We stood in the train corridor for two hours watching the Russian countryside as we sped from Leningrad to Moscow. Boris, my good friend age 48 with a beautiful voice, stood next to me and softly sang about mother Russia. Diane would have enjoyed standing there listening with me.

At midnight, Chaz Adams and Cabot Nelson jumped into their bunks while I spent fifteen minutes showing Boris photos of my family then we retired. The train cabin is comfortable with two double bunks on each side. I slept quite comfortably. Everyone has been nice to us. Every day has been special and wonderful. I think I rode on the same railway tracks as Lenin did from Moscow to Leningrad and back organizing the revolution. I miss Diane; when I showed Boris her photo he smiled and gave the thumbs up.

JULY 6, 1990 - SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY, DANCING

We are now back in Zelenograd staying with our Russian families. I've been thinking of Diane. She would have enjoyed this trip. This evening Vassili, Jane and I drove to Moscow to see a performance by the British Modern Dance Company. It reminded me of Utah's Ririe Woodbury Company. At the ballet I met two university students named Ira age 22 and Toma age 21. They both attend the Gorki School of Puppetry. They spoke good English and told me about their school: (1) They attend 6 days per week for 12 hours per day. (2) Six hours a day of puppetry training to include hand puppets, marionette, full body, and leg puppets and others I didn't quite understand. (3) Two hours per day dance training (4) One hour per day voice training and singing (5) One hour a day of Russian history and world philosophy (6) One hour per day of fencing (7) Two hours of acting classes three days a week. Sometimes, they even have classes on Sundays.

It takes four years to graduate then you're placed in the Resident Puppet Company. There is also a renowned Puppet School in Moscow. The school sounded tough to me and the students said it was difficult. I enjoyed talking to them. They are the only theater students I have met. They invited me to a puppet performance tomorrow night, but our schedule is loaded. Vassili didn't go to the ballet he just dropped Jane and I off. We came home by subway and bus. It was an entertaining evening.

I'm beginning to count the days until I come home. I miss Diane. The Russians really like to sing and dance and are uninhibited. Men dance with men, women dance with women, and men dance with women. At the hotel in Leningrad when the band played in the evening the first up to dance were two men, then each got their wife and danced. The Russians are fantastic dancers and they know how to have a good time. Contemporary dancing mixed with their Russian steps and style make them all look superb. They look a hundred times better than us. At the hotel in Leningrad they had a floor show just like a Las Vegas floor show with show girls. Boris is a good man and his wife Raiza is a riot. I look forward to them accepting the gospel. I really like this family.

JULY 7, 1990 - ASTROLOGY, PAST LIVES AND REINCARNATION

Vassili and Jane's oldest son, Anton, has studied astrology and is into astrological reading, prognosis, and former life determination. He came to visit us and asked if I would consent to an astrological reading to include my family. I consented and gave him our birth dates and sex whether male or female. He consulted his charts and processes, took the information with him to be computerized, and came back another evening with the results as follows:

TOM STOKOE: In my former life I was born in 750 A.D. in Turkey. I like to move around and travel. I'm always on the go. My mission in life is to believe in the Creator of this space or world. I need to be more decisive and assertive

DIANE STOKOE: Was born several times before. She is Bohemian and artistic. She could serve the dark forces. In previous life she was involved in painting and fortune telling. She has lived twice. The first life she was born in 375 A.D, but he did not know where. Her second life she was born in 1475 A.D. in either Canada or Central America. She needs a good Guru. Her

mind still needs to develop. Whatever investment she makes in herself will be paid back in self-development.



Mother's Day photo 1991 - clockwise from Diane, Neil, Steve, Dean, Brian, Matt and David

DAVID STOKOE: Was a man, stubborn. He could be extremely religious or the opposite. He could be an outstanding missionary. He is very sure of himself in whatever he does. In his previous life he was an actor or director of a group and was born in 1750 in Wales, England. He is very aggressive but needs to become wise and thoughtful, regarding other people. By managing himself he can be very helpful to other people and be happier.

STEPHEN STOKOE: Was born a man, very energetic, a planner, a pusher of ideas and a responsible person even as a street sweeper. Born a leader but dug the soil for different reasons. First born in 1825 and again in 1875. First life span was short, and he was born in northern China. He should overcome self-egotism and help others overcome self-egotism.

BRIAN BELOV: Stephen and Brian knew each other prior to this life. Brian was probably a mechanic of sorts. He was born in 1000 A.D. and again in 1750 in Labrador. He needs to learn to be tolerant and understand other people and help them.

Anton did these astrological projections worked out by Soviets on computers. All I told him was the birth date and sex whether male or female and he went through the computerized charts. Jane interpreted what he said into English as he presented his findings.

LEO TOLSTOY'S HOME

Today we went to Moscow and visited the house of Leo Tolstoy where he wrote "War and Peace." We went through every room. I took two photos: one of his bed and the other the exterior of his house. Then we visited a monastery and ate lunch at the Cosmos hotel. Next, we visited a very striking tall Russian Orthodox church and entered into the one and only chamber



The church stretched upward approximately as high as Moroni on the Salt Lake temple. The acoustics were phenomenal. An acapella choir, a madrigal group of 6 women and 9 men, sang 17th century songs for half an hour. Each singer had a fantastic voice and they sounded simply marvelous. There were those among us who wanted to hear a great choir sing. They got their wish today. I bought Diane a small teapot outside the monastery as she wanted a samovar. Took photos of two bridal groups. The Russian brides were very beautiful. In the evening Anton came over with his astrological findings.

JULY 18, 1990 - TCHAIKOVSKY, KREMLIN, ESP

Today we went to Tchaikovsky's place and walked through his house. Saw where he created his masterpieces. The room was semi-dark and moody. We sat in the adjacent concert hall and listened to a twenty- minute recording of his work then back to Zelenograd. After lunch Vassili, Jane, Deanne Sweeten and I drove to Moscow and went through the Kremlin and then the Kremlin museum. I have never seen such an amount of treasure in my life. Everything seemed to be made of gold, diamonds, emeralds, pearls and all manner of precious stones. We saw billions worth of work that was mind boggling and absolutely phenomenal.

Deanne and I were the only ones in our group to see the Kremlin museum. Jane got special passes. Sunny and Deanne joined us for dinner at Jane's apartment then we went to an ESP session at a woman's apartment. She did ESP on all of us, also three guys who had us meditate staring at a color wheel listening to weird sounds. We met Olga, a cute nineteen- year old girl and attempted conversing with her. The ESP lady told me my head was not clear, to watch my stomach for I had problems there and stop eating beef. She said God protected my space. The color wheel guy said my magnetic field was closed and heavy whereas his was light and open. Hence, we could not communicate at that particular moment.

JULY 9, 1990 - FAREWELL PARTY

Ina, the ESP lady came to the party. She read my aura again. She is a spiritualist. She said that God had given me power to heal like her. She brought me a photo of her daughter, Olga, and a letter and gifts. I like her and her daughter. I told Ina someday two young men with ties

and white shirts will come and teach her family about God. She will recognize them by the purity of their spirits. It was a very enjoyable farewell party, slightly sad knowing we were leaving tomorrow.



Today our group went to Moscow and toured the Kremlin and saw the interior of two churches. We saw hundreds of deputies crossing the quadrangle as they broke from a political session. Tonight, we had a farewell party for tomorrow we go home. I gave my Russian farewell speech that Alexander helped me write. I really love these people. They are great people. These Russian friends are very special, and the gospel is the greatest gift I can share with them. We were treated like princes and princesses, waited on, catered to, attended upon. They sacrificed for us. They are great people. Another fun dance, food, soft drinks. These people are so special, so neat.

JULY 10, 1990: HOMEWARD BOUND

I packed and got up early. As we loaded the bus with our suitcases and said goodbye it was difficult. I said goodbye to as many as I could. Ina came special with Olga. She asked me to write to her. Also, I would write Boris, my good friend. Vassili the doctor and Jane and Vassili Jr. have been so good to me. Jane is a very special lady. The whole family treated me so well. To the airport we went. Many came to see us off and say goodbye. Our Soviet friends were sad to see us leave; we were sad to say goodbye. I love these people, the families we stayed with, they are fantastic people. What a marvelous experience this has been. How can we ever repay their kindness, warmth and love. We left the airport with hugs, tears, and kisses. We love these people and they love us. I shall always love these people of the Soviet Union. I shall always remember them. They are truly choice.

I thank the communist government of the Soviet Union for the invitation extended us to visit their country as a cultural exchange program. It was a wonderful 3-week experience. From the moment we arrived in Moscow to the moment we left, the communist government footed the bill

for everything. We didn't have to spend a cent. All we paid was our round-trip airfare from Salt Lake City to Moscow. The USSR was a most charitable and welcoming host.

We arrived in Helsinki, Finland. It's modern like the U.S. and five times as expensive. There's a different spirit in Helsinki. The Soviet Union has more "hard-grained humility." We spent half the day touring then flew home to the U.S. and Salt Lake City. The memories of Russia and the people we met and stayed with will always be choice in our hearts.

Matt's Story

As far as a story for Mothers' day goes, I don't believe I have much to say that would be of any interest to anyone. It seems to me that everyone views the world somewhat differently, and we all experience life through our own reality. Success, failure and all the other aspects of life are all relative to each individual's view of life. With this in mind, I shall share a few of my experiences in the former Soviet Union. As one familiar with history knows, the Former USSR broke up in the early 1990's becoming what is now Russia and a dozen or so other countries. In June '91, I arrived in Moscow as part of an exchange program sponsored by Mother Diane's Olympus High School.

The first Month was spent with the group of High School Students. I was in College at the time and was acting as one of a number of chaperones to the group of approximately 3 dozen American high school students. This portion of my exchange was spent touring the Eastern Portion of The USSR from St. Petersburg in the North to Sochi in the South, near the Black Sea. The group traveled by Plane, Train, Bus and Boat as we visited Historical Sites in each of the cities of our host exchange families. This touristic portion of my time in the USSR was basically structured and shielded from the realities of life there. It wasn't until after my departure from the group did the real flavor of the country become more evident.



Matt, enjoying the Soviet Union



Tom with Arcady and the woman who set up the exchange

A day after breaking off from the group of Americans, my sponsor, Arcady, made arrangements for me to travel by train to a retreat in the Caucus Mountains. He and his son would meet me later as they were traveling by air. Apparently, only Communist Party officials and those with Party affiliations were able to book air travel at that time. The rest of us working

class types and students piled into the packed trains. I did not mind train travel because it gave me the opportunity to interact with the people and get to know them over a period of days. It also gave me the opportunity to see the stations, sights and beauty of the country obscured by travel through the air. It was difficult to convince some of the people on the trains that I was an actual American. Most people at the time had never met someone from the United States. Most couldn't even dream of meeting someone from the West.

Days of Train Travel were followed by a couple of 10 hours stints of travel in a 4-wheel drive vehicle through the rough roads of the caucuses. The retreat was a summer camp for the students of The Moscow Institute of Technology (The Institute I was to attend in a few weeks). The first week I spent with a group of Soviet students from different cities across the Country. I recall meeting one Student from Kazan. I joked that he may be a relative as I had ancestors from that region. The first wave of Students left the retreat allowing for the second wave of Students to take their place. This group included Arcady and his son, as well as Alan Agketsev and others. After another week of hiking, fireside chats and other typical Mountain Summer Camp activities, Arcady left and made arrangements for me to follow and meet back in Moscow. It was at this time I decided that I had my fill of mountain experience. Alan, myself and two other students, Kolbas and Kosta bribed our way onto a mail truck and passage to the southern city of Vladicavkas. Alan had family there and we decided that unscheduled travel through that area might be more exciting.

Unscheduled travel through the country at that time was a bit tricky, but was made manageable with patience and bribes. As we made our way further east, I noticed more and more tension and animosity from the inhabitants of the people of that region. It seemed that as outsiders, we were treated with suspicion and even loathing. I recall an incidence when a bus driver traveling in an empty bus on the road in front of us became offended by my clothing (short pants). He began shouting at me. I instinctively gave him the one finger salute. He stopped his bus and jumped out to confront me. He began jabbering at me in a language I did not understand, so I gave him some choice colorful English words in response. An unfriendly crowd began to gather, so instead of ending the confrontation with a quick blow to his face with my fist, I chose to walk away and defuse the situation.

Other incidences such as this happened with some regularity during my time in that region. The ignorance of the people there was matched with their complete lack of interest in expanding their interactions with people who were not from their own region. It didn't hit me until decades later the reason for the animosity. The region we were traveling through at that time was Chechnya. Most all of the terrorist activities that have plagued the Russian Homeland have come from that region. The Xenophobia generated by the people of that region even manifested itself in the United States.

The two Boston Marathon Bombers chose to introduce Americans to the Chechen people by exporting their cowardly brand of violence. The welcome embrace given to this family by the people of Boston was returned with death and destruction. My time in Chechnya was punctuated by even more interesting times. It was at this time that the Russian Coup began. Not far from my location, Russian Premier Gorbachev experienced his own difficulties as travel back to Moscow became more tenuous as the tanks began to roll into the city and the lives of the ordinary Soviets waned with uncertainty. That is another story... Hope this Mothers' day treat agrees with you. Sincerely, Matthew



When Matt returned to the U.S. he kissed the ground and said he was glad to be back in a country where there was order. "I might even pay my back parking tickets," he told me. He's become a vegetarian now. Matt hated standing in long lines to buy food in the USSR and was the thinnest I'd ever seen him. Living and teaching English for six months in the Soviet Union had broadened his horizons. This was a life changing experience for my #3 son.

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF SKYLINE'S CULTURAL EXCHANGE



While working on photos to illustrate Tom's story I came across this picture of Skyline Cultural Exchange Participants. The reunion was held on Saturday, February 6th, in 2010 at Mt. Olympus North Stake Building in Salt Lake City. The photo includes, L-R, Skyline students Jason Foster, Cabot Nelson, Jennifer Hughes (Tom Stokoe, Deanne Sweeten, two of four teacher chaperones) and Suzanne Parsons who sang at the Russian disco.