

SIBERIAN JOURNAL OF MICHAEL SERAPHINOFF -1993

Introduction

It was sometime in the fall of 1992 that word was announced that Skagit Valley College would like one of its professors to volunteer to spend the winter as an exchange teacher at a college in Siberia. Due to a background in Slavic languages and literature, I was personally invited to take the college up on this once in a lifetime offer. My first reaction was to ask myself who would be crazy enough to trade a comfortable post in the lovely, mild and civilized Puget Sound basin for a teaching assignment in Siberia in January. Then, after weighing the various pros and cons with my faithful partner in adventure and life, Susan Prescott, known among friends as simply Prescott, it was decided that I was, or, maybe, we were crazy enough, since Prescott wanted to join me in this adventure.

Once we had made the decision, and it had been agreed upon by the college, it was fun to announce to family and friends that the college where I had been teaching English for the past five years was now sending us to Siberia. During the month required to arrange tickets and visas and to temporarily shut down our rather complicated homestead, with its livestock and its self-contained water, power and plumbing systems, we read up on Siberia. This included short stories by acclaimed Siberian writer Valeri Rasputin and the travel adventure story, *A Siberian Odyssey* by journalist Frederick Kempe, that described an extended journey by boat down nearly the entire length of the Ob River, which happened to be the river that flowed through the Novosibirsk region where we would be living. Later we took in a general overview of Russian history, spoon-fed so to speak, through the lengthy historical novel *Russka* by Edward Rutherford. At the same time, I was brushing up on my rather rusty Russian. I had studied Russian nearly 25 years before, including a summer term at Leningrad State University. In the meantime I had only occasionally read Russian as part of graduate study in Slavic languages and literature at the University of Washington in Seattle, where I had mainly focused on South Slavic studies. In addition, Prescott and I begged, borrowed and when all else failed, bought clothing and supplies we would need in the frozen north. Finally, the day arrived for us to climb aboard a jet plane that would start us on our long journey to the Akademgorodok (Academic City) in the Novosibirsk region of Siberian Russia. The rest is now history, and the subject of the journal you are about to read.

Journal

January 31

It's about 1:00 a.m. and we're somewhere over Greenland. This Lufthansa flight is not exactly preparing us for what is to come. Too easy. Too civilized, orderly and comfortable. I'm not complaining, but the Germans are soon going to drop us off in a considerably less tidy world, if the day's papers that I just read are to be believed. I spotted three articles on recent developments in Russia, and none of these were any cause for optimism. One described an epidemic of diphtheria spreading through Russian cities. Another talked about how inflation on foodstuffs was running at 2% a day and how the economy was very liable to be hyper-inflationary in the near future. The third article told about plans to move recently demobilized military units into Moscow in order to bolster the police force that is unable to cope with the city's recent crime wave. Crime, poverty and disease.

In the words of a recent V.P. candidate, "Who am I, what am I doing here?" or, maybe, better, "Why did I let myself and Prescott talk ourselves into this trip?" I can think of at least two Russian words *obmen* (exchange) and *liubopitnost* (curiosity) to explain it.

February 1

We have arrived and departed Frankfurt without problems, and we have just set down in cold, dark Moscow. We would likely have struggled to make our way to the domestic line airport, but instead we have easily made the trip with the help of Dmitri, a young administrator from the Novosibirsk College of Informatics. His English is good and we've learned a good deal about where we're going and what we can expect. He is concerned about the economic situation, but I sense no panic or despair. Our first ride on an aeroflot domestic flight was an experience. We climbed up a wide stairway into the maw of a huge airplane with seating for 300 passengers. Tickets for Russians are getting more expensive, but at the equivalent of \$25 in rubles, they are still within the reach of most people. This overnight flight, Moscow-Novosibirsk, was nearly full. The people were dressed and appeared not unlike the people I remember on the streets of Leningrad 25 years ago, with the difference that people here almost all had on what we would consider expensive fur hats. Apparently they cost between \$25-\$30.

The emphasis on these flights is on quantity over quality, especially if one compares such flights with travel on Lufthansa. Most people never even bothered to buckle their seat belts. (The decision was made easier for me, because my seat belt wouldn't latch). When meal time came, we were each given a cellophane bag with a hunk of bread and cheese, some cookies and a piece of cold chicken. (Prescott thought that I had also received a slice of some kind of red berry pastry, until upon closer inspection it turned out that my piece of chicken was definitely on the under-cooked side.) Standards are decidedly lower than we have come to

expect. Everything is less refined, but things work all the same, just as they did for Americans forty or fifty years ago, when our standard of living was closer to what Russians know today.

February 2

Novosibirsk was considerably colder than Moscow. The runways at the airport had about a six-inch layer of rough ice on them and the temperature was around 5-10 degrees F. We've arrived after an hour's drive at our new apartment home. It is a pleasant little apartment with living room, bedroom, kitchen and bath. It has a lovely view of the surrounding pine and birch wood, criss-crossed by a number of footpaths used by skiers and the apartment complex's residents. The snow is about two feet deep and the wind whistles occasionally as it passes over our building. The apartment has a small and somewhat primitive but useable clothes washer in the bathroom. Lots of hot water and steam heat keep the place a comfortable 60-65 degrees. We have no telephone, but we get a big color TV that picks up two channels well. The kitchen is simple but nice. There is an electric stove but no oven. Our hosts considerately left us to sleep til late afternoon, when an assistant director, Sergei, came by and showed us around the area. We visited the post office, grocery and dry goods store, and picked up bread, cabbage, butter and kefir milk. Prices were good. About a dollar in rubles for everything. Sergei only speaks Russian, so I got my first taste of strained communication, but we communicate. He majored in history, which makes for interesting conversation. He has left now and we've prepared a small meal and we'll soon go off to bed.

February 3

It was difficult to sleep after a long nap the day before and with a head filled with new images. Perhaps the strongest or most vivid of these was on our walk to the store and post office. There was a strong breeze blowing fresh, dry snow into our faces as we walked, and the surrounding woods were filled with pristine white powder snow. It kept crossing my mind, "Hey, this is Siberia, and it's really pretty nice." The name has certainly been associated with a lot of unpleasantness, but no one should blame the countryside. This morning the wind is howling and cool air is finding its way through the gauze sealing around the double-paned windows. Sergei came and escorted us to the college. It was considerably colder this morning. My nose got cold immediately when we stepped outside.

We met the college director, Nikolai Sychov, for the first time today at the bus stop. He seemed somewhat aloof, perhaps befitting his position as head of the school. We were all packed in like sardines on the bus, and it was difficult to pay attention to the landmarks that we would need to learn in order to come to school every day.

It will take a few days for us to sort out the details of my teaching- class hours, number of students, pay, etc. By Monday classes should begin. The bus ride back to our apartment was really crowded, and people seemed a bit more surly under the pressure of being packed in so that one could barely move. Apparently, buses come every half hour, but the schedule is

unreliable. One must wait anywhere from ten minutes to an hour for a bus, which suggests that dressing warmly is essential.

I'm fairly exhausted today, trying to keep up with conversations. It's too much all at once. I'm not sure if many people can speak much English. So far I've only met two people at the college even willing to try. Others probably assume I can understand everything, which I don't, and, of course, it's embarrassing when I have to have everything repeated more simply. Language barriers can be so frustrating.

After making our lunch, eating, and resting up, we made our first trip to the store on our own. The system for shopping is a little complicated. All items are stored behind counters and prices are marked on signs. You have to decide on each item, then go to a cashier and give the name of each item, or the quantity if it's a bulk item. The cashier adds up the bill. Then you pay and receive a receipt or receipts, that you then present at each counter to retrieve your purchases. Almost all items are severely limited in quantity and quality. Yesterday we failed to buy cheese and carrots, and today there were none in the store to buy, so our food purchases were limited to milk and bread. Hopefully, more vegetables will appear in the coming days. Until then we'll have to make do on the five-pound cabbage we bought yesterday, with bread, butter and milk and our own supply of dried soups, etc.

Conditions are considerably worse than during my student days in Leningrad in the sixties, when and where the stores sold plenty of goods of all kinds. We are told that much more is available downtown, but, of course, that would involve a long, crowded bus ride carrying heavy packages. Two items that I know must have been readily available in the past but are nowhere to be seen on the street corners of the Akademgorodok (Academic City) at present are newspapers and ice cream. (Russians traditionally enjoy their ice cream even in the wintertime). I had heard about shortages of sugar, but are there paper shortages as well? (One of the teachers at the college assured me that there were newspapers around. But she said the sugar shortage is for real.)

February 4

It's 18 degrees C. (0 degrees F.) this morning, but it isn't as cold as yesterday when it was 5 degrees F. with a stiff breeze. Yesterday, very cold air was blowing through cracks in the window caulking. Local and national TV news seems focused on economic problems-shortages, white collar crime, and the growing street crime. (The Academic City is quite peaceful and safe, I think). These things are difficult to measure, but I doubt that their crime can match what we have back home in the big cities of the U.S.

Sergei and a member of the English department at the college named Irina came over this afternoon, and Irina filled in some of the gaps where my Russian or my comprehension weren't quite up to the task of communication. We talked a bit about ourselves as well as college business and history and even politics. Irina is originally from Tashkent and misses the

warmer climate there. She and her husband wouldn't mind going back, but with the break-up of the USSR, Russians are not as welcome as they once were. She laments the fact that people of different nationalities who were once friends are now expected to live in separate places. Hopefully, after some of the ethnic groups who have felt lorded over by Russians in the past have had a chance to take control of their own lives for awhile, they will be more willing to establish friendly ties with their Russian neighbors.

Sergei is a Siberian-born Russian. He is an assistant director at the College of Informatics with a degree in history. He is separated from his wife, who now lives in Khabarovsk far to the east, with their four-year-old son. He has been our main link to the college so far. He visits every day and brings new items for the apartment such as cooking utensils, etc., and explains this or that detail about the daily life chores of our new life here. How and where to shop, post letters, catch buses, take out the garbage, and similar tasks. He is probably in his late twenties or early thirties. Sergei tells us he lives in a kind of hostel where he has a single room with access to a cafeteria for meals. He has an active mind, and he often provides us with interesting little details of language, history and Siberian society and frequently injects humor of a wry sort into his speech. He is rather unassuming. He is one of the few people we've met who wears an inexpensive stocking cap rather than a fine fur hat.

About noon Sergei returned to the college and Irina took us out to show us where and how to buy fruit and vegetables at a marketplace within walking distance of our flat. She led us along a series of packed-snow paths through birch and pine-forested tracts separating various scientific institutes and housing units in the Akademgorodok. Eventually we arrived at a large outdoor marketplace with vending stalls and an adjoining barn-like structure where about a dozen vendors had potatoes, carrots, apples, onions, and various meats and poultry for sale. We had brought along our packs in order to stock up on many items. We bought 22 pounds of red potatoes, 5 pounds of carrots, some onions and apples, and a couple pounds of beef, all for less than two dollars in rubles. (A good thing though, when you consider that our monthly pay will be about \$27, given the latest devaluation of the currency). Irina then guided us back by another route. The district surrounding the market was an unusual one, consisting of fairly large private homes with yards. She told us that these were the homes of leading scientists at the institutes, suggesting that the society has rewarded them well for their contributions. Irina got us a little lost in the maze of foot trails in the forest. These stands of trees are rather extensive. Some are even-age, maybe 30-year-old plantations of scotch pine, with occasional native birch groves; others are older, 50-150 plus, mixed-age natural groves of pine and birch. She seemed to know her way around the forest paths pretty well, mainly because, if you can believe it, she and her husband and eleven-year-old daughter maintain a St. Bernard that shares their apartment with them and requires daily walks in the woods. Upon returning home we made up a big stew and stuffed ourselves on it and the slightly sour but tasty wheat rye bread we've been buying.

February 5

After a brief morning foray out to purchase more food, a task which occupies many Russians for far too many hours each day, we hurried off to an early afternoon meeting with the English department of the college. There are eight instructors who teach some six hundred students. The teachers have varying skill levels in English. Most have adequate training, but instruction is severely limited by antiquated text books and large class size.

Sergei announced a very generous proposal for my own teaching. I will have two ninety-minute sessions three days a week. My classes will be around fifteen students each, and these will be among the best students in the school. Once a week I will provide a 90-minute session for interested instructors. In addition, I will proof read school correspondence in English when it is needed. Prescott has been asked to lead a discussion group in English for three two-hour sessions a week. She will acquaint students with the tools and techniques of her graphic arts work. It will be a kind of experimental project. She has also been asked to provide her voice for some language tapes. (I wonder why I wasn't asked?) After the meeting we had tea and pastries with the English translators and looked over some of the correspondence they would like to have proofread. I was struck by the fact that this is very important work. The school is trying to interest foreign businesses and educational institutions in supporting the work of the school. They understand the importance of computer science, and they are aware of their inability to provide instruction due to a lack of qualified instructors and up-to-date equipment. As the director, Nikolai Sychov, explained to me, the pay of one American instructor for one month would be adequate to purchase one personal computer. It would require the combined pay of the instructors of their entire school to achieve the same end. How does a society with such limited resources raise itself out of its poverty? As usual, wealth creates wealth and poverty perpetuates poverty.

We returned home and had supper after that, and then hiked across the Akademgorodok to attend a concert of the Novosibirsk Philharmonic orchestra at the Hall of the Scientists. It was a pleasant evening of works by Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. The cost is only 8 rubles (540 to the dollar.) Prescott and I were guests of Emma, one of the college's English instructors. Afterward we were invited over to her place for a late evening snack. She loaded the table with meats, vegetables, fruits and pastries, wine and beer. It was a bit too much. We left her apartment around 11 p.m. There were still a few people out on the streets at that hour, some couples, a few people walking dogs. Irina had warned us earlier that we should take a bus home, because we were liable to meet 'bandits' in the woods, muggers, I suppose. All we met on the path through the woods to our apartment house were harmless passersby. The potential for crime is so difficult to gauge anywhere. Someone else recently suggested that we buy a second lock for our door because thieves were targeting the homes of foreigners. We have so little worth stealing that it is difficult to persuade ourselves to take special precautions.

February 6

I went in to the college to teach for the first time today. Irina was there to introduce me to the class. The class of second-year students consisted of about seventeen 16-and 17-year-olds, more boys than girls. I introduced myself with a short autobiographical essay that I wrote on the board, and I asked each student to introduce him- or her self using the form I had provided on the board. Then I asked each student to ask me a question they wanted to know about me. The questions were interesting. What was my family background? What did I think of their country? What sports did I like? That took up the entire hour and a half, and then I asked the students to write an autobiographical sketch at home to be handed in next class session. I'll be very interested to see what they write. Their interests range from playing classical music to playing heavy metal, to playing basketball and soccer, to photography and home computer kit assembly. Nearly all of them want to work with computers in their future careers. They are likable enough, but I wasn't quite prepared for the possibility that I may have to be a disciplinarian on occasion.

After class Irina came home with me and had lunch with us. Prescott had prepared a beef stew, and we talked about a wide range of topics. Irina seems like a soulful and thoughtful Russian. She seems willing to express honest and deep thoughts about any number of subjects. I always enjoy conversations with such people. I don't mind small talk, but I prefer 'meaningful' and often "philosophical" musings of the kind I associate with the 19th century heroes and heroines of Leo Tolstoy's novels. Irina's conversations often remind me of some of that.

After lunch Irina and Prescott went off to shop for some of the harder-to-find items that we've been hoping to add to our diet. I stayed home and tried to do the dishes, but I kept getting interrupted, first by college director, Nikolai Sychov, who had decided to drop by for the first time. He is a somewhat reserved man. Our conversation revealed a sincere idealism about the goals of his college. I don't know how much of the new College of Informatics, founded out of the old polytechnic institute, is his brainchild, but he has been the director since its inception two years before. He was an assistant director of the old polytechnic for a couple years before that and a computer scientist for a number of years prior to that. He's probably in his mid- to late-thirties, and many of his staff are as young or younger. Arkady and his friend Pavel came over after that in order to pick up a package I had carried from Arkady's friends in Seattle and Whidbey Island. Arkady invited us to his "club" to listen to his bluegrass band play next Saturday evening. It should be fun. I've been watching TV and writing this evening. I'm a bit disappointed in shortwave radio reception. Radio Moscow is, of course, very clear, but otherwise I have been unable to locate the BBC out of London or even the Voice of America. I have picked up Radio Austria and Australia, as well as New Zealand, and Japanese, Korean and Chinese broadcasts on occasion. I suppose that our lives are, after one short week, beginning to fall into a lively routine of activities, and so far I don't regret the decision to come here at all.

February 7

Today we stayed home until 12:00 p.m., when Irina came by to guide us over to her place. She brought four chickens and several pounds of rice and flour for us. She said that they had plenty of food from special stores for the military. Her husband is an officer. She did let us pay her something for the chickens, but she wouldn't let us give her anything for the rice and flour. We immediately hung the bag of chicken out our window in a net bag. As you walk by apartment buildings here you always see bags and even boxes suspended outside windows. When you live in a natural deep-freeze, it makes good sense. However, we are having a mid-winter thaw. The weather is hovering around 32 degrees F. today. The snow isn't melting, but it is no longer powder. It clings to boots and pant legs now. Apparently, winters have been milder in the past few years than ever before. But, of course, human activity couldn't possibly be affecting the weather. Hah!

The visit to Irina's was nice. Their apartment was in a large complex with some sort of military training school in the center. The majority of their neighbors are part of the officer corps at a regional military complex. Irina thinks the officers drink too much, but she says the families are all on very good terms. Irina's husband, Oleg, was a nice enough guy. He seems a little conservative, but I'm sure that it goes with the territory. He asked a few questions. He wanted to know if life in Russia seemed better or worse than when I was here last in 1967. I equivocated a bit. Less food in the stores, but I was now able to travel and visit more freely. He also asked if there was a "line of people at our school waiting for the chance to come here." I said that Siberia had a bad name historically among Americans, and I doubt that many people were very interested in coming here, but that I also doubted that many of them were aware of just how pretty it was here. He asked if our officers lived very well. I didn't know. Then, I told him that Americans were afraid that Russia would sell weapons to relieve the poverty. He answered me, "America has always sold weapons." No arguing with that, but it's not very reassuring. We enjoyed playing with their kittens and their big friendly dog, a nearly full-grown St. Bernard named Sunday. The kittens and mother cat live with their daughter, Natalya, in her room and bed. Natalya, who is eleven, surprised her parents by deciding to attend the nearby church. The parents think she just goes for the songs and little sugar treats. I doubt that they appreciate the fact that there is also probably some sort of spiritual appeal to the experience as well.

We had a delicious meal of vegetable salads and a special Uzbek dish made with onions and meat wrapped in dough and steamed. We also had vodka, though it seemed watered down, which was fine with me. They are from Tashkent and seem to enjoy some of the native dishes. They showed us the vouchers that each man, woman, and child received some time ago, each worth 10,000 rubles to invest in the industry of their choice. They seemed to regard it as a bit of a joke, but they hold onto the vouchers in case they might some day have some value. We asked about the upcoming constitutional referendum in April, but they didn't seem to know much about it, though they assured us that they would try and learn the details and take part.

It was a pleasant afternoon. We also watched the end of the NEA basketball game that is broadcast every Sunday. It's very popular. Also some old Disney cartoons. They're also popular. We left a little before dark. A nice family, and they're trying to be optimistic even in these trying times. As a family whose livelihood depends on the military, they can't help but be a bit uneasy. The temperature is dropping this evening and the wind is howling outside. So I guess our chicken outside the window won't rot after all.

February 8

This morning I tried to mail letters, but while I was waiting in line at the post office, an elderly woman informed me that the entire post office was devoted to the disbursement of pension checks today, and I would have to come back tomorrow. I did my shopping, and for the first time I bought a bottle of vodka and a newspaper. We have been told that beer and wine are not very good, since it is so difficult to get the good imported brands any more. The label of the vodka bottle (1/2 litre for about \$1) doesn't give ingredients, but it makes claims that this product is very good for the heart and digestive system. No mention of the liver, probably for good reason. Newspapers still seem few in number and thin. I couldn't find a daily at all, but I found a weekly four-page paper from Novosibirsk. It contained the interesting statistic that since 1990 the death rate went from 10.1 to 10.3 per 1,000 population in the Novosibirsk region, and the birthrate went from 12.0 to 10.1 per 1,000 population, which means that they have had minus population growth, excluding immigration. However, immigration may be up, because I saw a number of ads by individuals or families requesting jobs in the region, because they would like to leave saw non-Russian republic, such as Uzbekistan, Kirgizia or Turkmenistan.

There was also an article about taxi drivers. They now carry guns or other weapons due to the rise in crime, and only the newly rich speculators are able to pay the fares. The average person must ride the overcrowded buses. This new newspaper, unlike papers of the past, is filled with help-wanted ads and contains advertisements for such things as job-finding services.

This evening I watched a program that was similar to an American dramatic TV series. In this particular show the hero is out looking for work. There was one particularly poignant scene where he is in a car and he passes his mother who is standing in a flea market area and is trying to sell his old hockey stick and ice skates. Sergei was telling me the other day that at present the average person here has to spend 80% of his income on food. Fortunately, housing and transportation remain cheap. However, an automobile is now way beyond the reach of the average person, and even a leather jacket could cost the equivalent of ten months' pay.

People are not used to the present poverty. It is much worse than most have ever known in their lifetimes. Only those who lived through World War II have known worse times. No one has had enough time to fully comprehend what has happened. The collapse of the old system

has thus far only caused misery in economic life for the vast majority. I ask people, "Are you optimistic about the future?" And most answer that they try to be. It could get worse, especially if hyperinflation occurs, as some have predicted. What would "worse" mean? Not much really. The government would have to subsidize and fix prices on certain necessities, which they already do to a great extent. What I have more trouble imagining is rapid improvement in the situation. It is terrible to think that an entire generation of Russians may be condemned to dire poverty. My greatest concern is that too much poverty for too long a period will breed all sorts of unpleasantness in the populace -a lack of generosity or cordiality, an unhealthy preoccupation with material goods, apathy, or bitterness.

Prescott and I learned that there is another American couple living in our building, so we thought it a good idea to introduce ourselves. They proved to be a somewhat younger couple who were sponsored to come here by an international evangelical Christian organization. We met the husband, Brian, who is in his mid-twenties. His Chinese-American wife has a degree in philosophy and is lecturing at the university through an interpreter. She speaks no Russian and he speaks it about as well as I do, probably, as a result of past Russian study at a university in Columbus, Ohio. His wife is four months pregnant now. They came in September and may leave before June because of her pregnancy. We'll probably get together once in a while to compare notes.

February 9

Prescott is starting to adjust and adapt. She went out yesterday on her own to take pictures in the neighborhood, and today she saw me off to work after we had gone to the post office together, and then she went off shopping on her own and succeeded in buying several items with her minimal speech. She is studying her Russian every day and has our apartment labeled with dozens of little paper signs that give the Russian names of things. I'm presently sitting in the armchair with the label "kreslo" in Cyrillic taped to it.

I met my second group students today. Both classes seemed less rowdy than the students were on Saturday. Maybe someone has been lecturing them after I admitted the other day that the students seemed a bit noisier than I had expected. They are 17-year-olds, after all, and really shouldn't be expected to behave as adults all the time. I was a bit surprised that most of the students hadn't done the autobiographical essay I assigned as homework on Saturday. Some said they forgot or they were busy, but upon further questioning, it appears that they were either at a loss as to what to write or were afraid of making mistakes. Hopefully, I can encourage them to do such assignments. They are all certainly bright enough. Television tonight included a rather erotic film, one part in a series, from Poland. I was a bit surprised that they would televise such nudity on prime time. It would have been too much even for American television, though not for Yugoslav or Polish TV. However, the Russians have a long history of puritanism, and I'm surprised that they are reversing this trend so rapidly.

There was also a brief, 20-second report, on the news about a significant number of people having been poisoned by a bad batch of "spirit," almost pure alcohol, normally mixed with water here and served as a drink. The bad spirit was imported from China. Apparently such disasters don't deserve the in-depth attention here that similar ones receive in the U.S.

I happened to see a book in a store today that looked like it might be interesting, and, as luck would have it, it is. It is a book of essays both by and about a writer and film-maker from the Novosibirsk area whose popularity and stature has grown since his death some years ago. He writes such appealing passages in his essays as the following (my translation): At one time I was a teacher in a village school for adults. I was, to be honest, not a very important teacher (without significant training or experience) but even now I can't forget how finely and gratefully they looked at me, the boys and girls, working during the day, and I succeeded in describing to them something important, interesting and in an interesting manner (I taught Russian language and literature.) I loved them at such moments. And in the depths of my soul, not without pride and happiness, I believed: here now, at these moments, I am doing a genuine, good work. Sadly, we have few such moments in life. It is from them that happiness derives. V. Shukshin.

February 10

This morning Prescott and I speculated a bit about the Russian or possibly Slavic character. There is a certain expansiveness of soul and vision, a genuine desire to do great things. However, there is often a lack of concern to detail, shoddy workmanship, and a lack of refinement in much of their work. Of course, individuals and even the entire society have at times fanatically devoted themselves to projects that appealed to them. Thus, there are Russian chess grand champions and world-class scientists and athletes, and the fanaticism of old "Holy Russia" and the idealists who created the great socialist experiment of the recent past. Yet, as a society, Russians and perhaps the Slavs in general, (I confess to having strong tendencies in this direction myself) are more interested in the grand plan, to the exclusion of many of the details that successful execution of any plan requires. For example, Russia has a world-class space program. But they risk their cosmonauts in craft that we would never risk sending our own astronauts aloft in. Some of their failure to pay attention to their work is also probably a result of lethargy bred by a system that failed to provide adequate incentives.

February 11

My students have written autobiographical essays that convey their individuality. Many students are mainly interested in science, particularly computer science. However, even these students expressed interest in such unusual things as horoscopes or classical languages. Many, as expected, enjoy sports or contemporary music. Others, however, expressed an interest in classical or folk music, dance, playing various musical instruments, or reading Russian or world classical literature. There are individual students with special, unique interests. One student is part of a heavy metal band and describes himself as a "thrasher."

They named their group "Dead Idea." Another student said that he was very concerned about ecology. He also mentioned that he believed in a god. Today I presented a lecture on religion in America.

I discussed the various religions and the presence of atheists and agnostics and the fact that the U.S. Constitution guarantees religious freedom while stressing that there must be separation of religion and state. I described the variety of religious beliefs among our families and friends in America. I then asked the students to tell me about their own experiences with religion. Some were not very interested, but most thought that it was natural that Russians were reestablishing their traditional Orthodox churches today. In some survey almost 80% of the population recently identified themselves as Orthodox Christians. The students wanted to know my opinion of the evangelical Christians who have been visiting in increasing numbers. I told them that I thought that their programs were probably useful when they helped young people acquaint themselves with the Bible, and its many stories, poems and parables. However, I told them that I do not approve of any religion that insists that all others are wrong and the practice of others is even sinful. Intolerance seems to me to be the great peril of religion. I also told them a few funny stories about our gentle but insistent Jehovah's Witnesses back home.

This evening, due to an accidental fire from cooking in a neighboring apartment, I made the acquaintance of a delightful university student who acts as a nighttime caretaker of our building. Zhenya, or Yevgeni is in his third year at the university. He is a little older than most students because he spent two years in the army. He is from the mining region called the Kuzbas to the south. His major is sociology. He works three to four 12-hour night shifts a week and attends class during the day. He admits that some days he is very tired because he is not supposed to sleep during his work shift. Zhenya is cheerful and optimistic despite the hard times that today even require students like himself to work long hours in order to attend college. I drank tea and sampled his mother's homemade strawberry jam with him until midnight, and we talked about a wide range of subjects, from the collapse of the old system, ushered in by such events as the disaster at Chernobyl, to ancient Greek civilization, which particularly fascinates him. Our American neighbors and one or two Russian or foreign residents of our building would occasionally stop by to join in our conversation or conduct a little household business with Zhenya in his kitchen/office post. (His office is the only one with an oven that I've seen, and people seem to like to come by and use it while he's on duty.) While the Americans, Brian and Paulina, were there, I learned that Chinese-born Paulina is quite the scholar. She lectures in philosophy on such topics as computer analogies to human brain function.

February 12

Prescott stayed up late to read and I was out late talking, so we both slept in this morning. It has been snowing again. It's about -5 degrees F. outside, still not particularly cold for this region at the height of winter. Despite the fact that it is only due to poverty and a lack of

goods that far fewer people are smoking or drinking here these days, I certainly appreciate some of the results. An evening such as last night would have, in the past, been conducted in a smoke-filled room with copious supplies of beer, wine, and vodka. I would not have risen from bed quite so cheerfully this morning either. Of course, some people do occasionally manage an old-time party, and we were kept awake by a noisy bunch of drinkers in the apartment above us a couple nights ago; but this appears rare. I'm beginning to feel a little like the poor Japanese-Americans who visit Japan. Everyone looks at them and sees a Japanese, until they open their mouths. One of the teachers at the college confided in me that the students were surprised that I didn't "look like an American," whatever that is supposed to be. And it seems like every day someone says, "Oh, I thought you were a Russian." Of course, they learn otherwise when I speak, with my accent and sprinkling of Slavic archaisms from South Slavic languages that must sound like someone sprinkling their English with speech from Chaucer's time.

Prescott has begun to do a little sketching. She has a rather nice sketch of the snowy woods outside our window started. She has also been taking pictures of the cute, little bundled-up babies pulled around on sleds here, as well as the colorful sparrow-like birds that are everywhere looking for bread crumbs and scraps. Prescott's program of Russian study has resulted in her learning a small vocabulary of useful terms already, though she is mostly in the dark around Russian conversation. I especially appreciate her regular use of the greetings and polite terms such as 'thank you' (spasiba). She may begin next week teaching a small informal group of students about graphic arts work. No one is quite certain what she should do, but the idea is mainly to expose the students to someone and something new. Prescott has been preparing some lessons to present. She seems to feel ready, though I am feeling anxious for her, I guess.

My own classes went well enough today, and I rode home on a bus with a number of the students. They're getting a little more confident about talking to me. They actually do quite well, considering what an old fogey I must be to them.

After classes and a quick dinner of beet-cabbage soup (borsht), Prescott's recipe, we hurried off to catch Arkady's blue grass band, "Golden Valley." It was bitter cold out today and got worse as it neared dark. We found the band's studio, called the club "Snezhinka" (Snowflake). It was filled with a lively group of about twenty-five 6-8 year-olds and their adult supervisor-teachers. The band was Andrei, lead singer on guitar and banjo, Arkady, on guitar, and three others; a woman who played fiddle and sang, a drummer, and a bass player filled out the band that evening. (At other times there are up to ten musicians and singers, we were told.) They played old-time tunes that would appeal to youngsters. I knew most of them--such songs as "She'll be comin' round the mountain" and "Bingo," and some nice blue grass tunes. For a while there I could have imagined I was at home again with our own island musicians such as Linda, Leonard, Paul, and Steve, Joanne or Cleveland. The musicianship was very good. The Russian accents were sometimes thick but not really distracting. We stayed and had cookies and tea with the kiddies and headed home. We really had cold noses by the time we

arrived home. We had some tea with Zhenya down at his office and heard a little about his life in the country outside Novokuznets and went off to bed.

February 14

It is easy to be depressed if one considers the extent of the environmental problems in this country. There is a city about 150 miles to the east of here named Kemerovo. It is a chemical industrial center. Most recent statistics show an eight-fold increase in infant mortality there in the past two years. Rather than finding solutions to their environmental problems, they are experiencing further environmental degradation due to a lack of funds for modernization. I wonder if the right-wing conservative backlash against the environmental movement in America would be quite so strong if such people understood how crucial a role the lack of environmental regulation played in the downfall of the Soviet empire. The unregulated pollution nightmare of such places as the nearby city of Kemerovo here in Siberia is slowly killing off such city's most vulnerable citizens and their future, the children. If one takes into account all of the places where pollution is killing plants, animals, and people and making life in general less a pleasure here, and then add that granddaddy of all environmental disasters, Chernobyl, it is no mystery why so few people here supported the old system when its hard-core supporters staged their last-gasp coup in the summer of 1991.

It is true that people everywhere value freedom of thought and action, but if a government really wants to offend people, then it should permit under-regulated business enterprises that result in the kind of misery that the Chernobyl nuclear power plant caused. As a result of that one disaster 500,000 people are sick with radiation poisoning. 100,000 people have thyroid cancer. 7,000 square miles of previously rich, fertile countryside is now a radioactive desert. And the nightmare is not at all near its end. Over a million people, including nearly 600,000 children still live within what is considered the danger zone, for lack of resources to relocate them. These people live with reduced medical care and with increased crime and drug addiction, and this is only the worst of many environmental disasters that have created similar problems elsewhere in the country.

Despite such gloomy thoughts that I began the day with, it has been a good day to be alive. We took a long walk through a nearby forest with some friends. We passed occasional skiers on the paths and a good number of other hikers--old and young, some with their dogs. How we all enjoy the fresh air and pleasing look and feel of a forest, no matter what the season. Our party returned after a couple of hours to a warm apartment to feast on all sorts of homemade treats and enjoy good conversation on a wide range of topics, taking particular advantage of the unique combination of the company to compare notes on the Russian and American experiences of life as we personally have known it. Later on that evening, after we had returned home, Prescott and I caught the best TV program we've seen so far here. It was an all-confederation convention of musical comedy groups from universities from all the former republics. Their humor was witty and contemporary, filled with political and social commentary, but not at all depressing. It was such a display of fresh, young talent that it

reminded me that for all that the former USSR may appear to be a basket case, it still has a tremendous resource to draw upon--its bright, talented, undefeated young people.

February 15

I think I'm beginning to understand some of the reasons for the economic collapse in the former Soviet empire. Any modern economic system is composed of complex interrelationships among various producer and consumer groups. The old Soviet system was created over the course of many years. Sugar from Cuba, wine from Bulgaria, buses from Hungary, and oil from the USSR were among hundreds and maybe thousands of commodities that exchanged hands. With the collapse of the old empire, various links in the old chain were broken. Bulgaria was unable to pay the new market price for Russian oil. Hungary began to sell buses in Western Europe for better prices, and the Russians still have tremendous productive potential; but it will take years for them to forge new, stable market relationships. And in the meantime there is a kind of domino effect that occurs as a such as Cuban sugar no longer is imported and links with new producers are not yet established. The previous importer suffers losses. The truckers that transported the sugar have less work. The stores that sold the sugar have one less item to market. Sugar-using industries decline. Multiply this by hundreds of item that once passed back and forth but no longer do, and you have the present depressed economy.

February 16

Unfortunately, neither the Russian consulate, nor the travel agent, nor anyone else thought to tell us that foreign visitors to Russia are now all required to have an AIDS test. We were lucky there were no problems at the border because our visas don't contain documentation of this test. So this morning Prescott and I got to visit our first Russian medical clinic to have our blood drawn for an AIDS test. The clinic draws blood once a week for one hour on Tuesdays. Fortunately, there wasn't much of a line. The nurse at the clinic was fairly experienced and did an efficient job. Of course, I was a little uneasy about the use of syringes here. I doubt that they are disposable, but odds are that we won't contract anything from the test. However, the poverty of this society has created a situation where all sorts of items are of inferior quality, poorly maintained, and generally a source of hazards that a wealthier society is not exposed to.

Our personal situation is actually very good here. I doubt, barring some very bad luck, that we will suffer severe hardship. We have a very comfortable apartment in a good part of town and sufficient wealth in American money to easily provide for all our needs. What is more troubling is seeing the plight of many of our colleagues here at the college. A few clever or criminal entrepreneurs in the private sector have accumulated relatively great wealth. However, the vast Majority of the population has worked in the public sector, and those who continue to do so, such as public college teachers are incredibly poor at the moment. Such people still enjoy

the benefits of subsidized public housing, transportation, health care, and subsidized basic food stuffs.

Yet, if they need, say, a hat or a pair of gloves, it may cost one week of pay. More than most can afford to spend presently. So we frequently see people, including friends from the school, walking around without gloves, carrying parcels in -5 to even -15 degree F. weather. (I took off my gloves outside yesterday for five minutes to address a letter and my fingers ached for the next half hour.) It may be years before the economy is again sufficiently strong to generate adequate funds to provide these often very crucial public sector employees with a decent livelihood. And in the meantime their subsidized benefits have also declined. Public transportation is antiquated and overcrowded and housing, health care, etc., must be suffering similar problems.

Sergei, the school vice director, stopped by this evening and we had a long conversation about history and literature, which is always enjoyable. He is quite knowledgeable, and my own Russian vocabulary is at its strongest in these areas. He also told us a little about his family from a village in the Krasnoyarsk region to the east. His mother worked as a school nurse and his father as a fisherman in the Yenisei River. He has a brother who has worked in the nuclear industry. There is a considerable uranium industry in that region, and it sounds as if there is a high incidence of cancer among the people. His own family has experienced some of these problems. Sergei seems to be very much aware of the enormity of the problems that his society is experiencing, and as a historian, he sees the long-term influence of the historical forces that have led to the present situation. He believes that Gorbachev may have saved society from another terrible civil war by the careful way he introduced liberal reforms. Yet there is still plenty of danger of further disintegration of the public order. Widespread illegal possession of weapons by criminals is particularly worrisome to people such as Sergei.

February 17

I've been reading student compositions today. Last week I assigned autobiographical essays. This week I assigned the theme "My Personal Philosophy," and the resulting papers have been quite interesting, if not always grammatically correct. Here are some excerpts:

I believe in the future of Russia. I love my mother country. I don't imagine my life without Russia, without Russian culture. Without Russian folk. I believe that God doesn't forget Russia. He helps our country.

I don't believe in people, but I'm a pacifist. I believe in love but I'm an anarchist. When I meet a bad, brutal person. I recall the words of the Russian writer M. Bulgakov, who told that there were not bad, ill-natured persons, there were unhappy ones.

Always to do all of my actions to the good of others (and me, of course) is my philosophy. Of course, others aren't only people. There are all kinds of living things in the world. In some situations I try to look at the world through pacifist's eyes. But some times pacifism is not so good for me. In my old school, where I was studying I met a bully who hated black people and (Jews)." I think that he was a racist. I'm not a racist.

As for me I prefer to be an optimist, because this philosophy is very good.

If I want to dress in these trousers, I have a right to do it; if I don't want to have my hair cut, I have a right not to do it; but if I want to kill anybody, I never had the right to do it.

I can do as I please, but I can't forget about surrounding people.

it would be possible to say that I'll be the "White Wizard." But with all my whiteness I don't deny the evil quite. I agree with Voland "Master and Margarita" of Bulgakov, who says-"Evil is like a shadow. And as there is no light without shadows, there is no kindness without evil."

in our country it is hard to be a man. People are often like animals.

I went into the big city--about an hour away by bus--with a young teacher from the college who offered to show me the main library. The city seemed really crowded. There were a surprising number of wooden houses with metal roofs. We rode the streetcar downtown to reach the library. After several hours of searching through medieval church books, I found the very book I have been searching for to complete my doctoral research. It was unavailable in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia or the United States. I'll spend additional days studying it.

It was bitter cold when we left the library, because the wind had picked up. By the time I had walked from the bus stop home, my nose had just about frozen. It was glowing red and stung from the cold.

Prescott got home about the same time I did. She had done some shopping, and had a typical meal here of cabbage, fried, sliced sausage and bread? February 18

The weather is bitter cold again today. The wind is blowing, and snow is not exactly falling but flying around, swept along by the wind. I'm teaching my students through a variety of methods. Today I gave them a written quiz on the use of the articles "a," "an," and "the." I had them read out loud. Then I told them the story of J.F.K.'s presidency and assassination, how Americans my age all remembered where we were the day he was shot, and the Oliver Stone film that some of them had seen. I also told them about President Bill Clinton's special connection to JFK, and then I sang for them and gave them copies of the portion of Don McLean's song, "American Pie," in which he sings about the assassination. Afterward I asked them questions about what they had learned. I ended with the question, "Do you have a special day in your lives that stands out in a similar way?" (The day before I had asked this

same question and a teacher, maybe 55 years old, who was sitting in on my class that day, had said that the news of Stalin's death had affected her generation.) These teenage students thought the coup attempt of August 1991 was probably the closest to such a moment that they had known.

Prescott did her first presentation of graphic arts skills this afternoon. It was presented as a two-hour, twice-a-week elective session. Her first class attracted maybe fifteen students, and I thought she did quite well at getting the students oriented to the subject and then proceeding on to a beginning exercise brainstorming a personal logo. I, of course, spent too much time fidgeting and worrying about how she would manage. I don't think I'll attend her future sessions. I have no doubt that she will do fine.

I occasionally meet our leader Nikolai Sychov. We live in the same building and wait for buses at the same stop. He is probably in his early thirties. He's tall and good-looking and has a dignified and reserved manner that one might expect of a leader, director or president. It probably works somewhat to his advantage on public occasions, and most of us give such people a fair amount of respect, especially if they prove their intelligence. But he seems a bit uncomfortable in social interactions. My butchered and archaic Russian seems to compound the problem. The one time he came by to check on us and see how we were doing, we had an acceptable conversation on the history of the school, but two guests arrived and I succeeded in forgetting his name and introduced him as Ivan Sychov. He left quite soon after that. Another day while we were both waiting for the bus, I thought it might help to talk about the weather. I knew he had been in Moscow recently, so I asked him about the weather there compared to here, and compared to weather in Seattle. He looked rather baffled and confused. And it was only later that I realized that I had used the South Slavic word for weather, vreme, instead of the Russian pagoda. Vremja in Russian means time. The poor man must wonder how he is going to put up with this crazy foreigner for the next three and a half months.

February 18

Sergei came by tonight to drill a few holes in the walls to hang up hooks in order to string a clothesline in the bathroom. As usual, he had a few witty observations about recent events here. As a history major, he is particularly aware of the discrepancies in the presentation of history here. He mentioned tonight that Western historians' works on the history of Russia or the USSR were always labeled "The Bourgeois Falsification of the History of...." Nowadays they are actually getting to meet some of the "falsifiers," and it can be a bit embarrassing when these Western historians find such entitled works here, especially if it includes a study one of them did. The study of history here is not altogether free of the legacy of the past. For example, the graduate student in history who teaches at the college, Olga, is writing a thesis on border conflicts on the Siberian-Manchurian border between the USSR and Japan in 1938. She recently visited archives in Moscow to conduct further research, but she was denied access due to security laws.

I've finally succeeded in finding the BBC at 10-11 p.m. on shortwave radio here, so maybe I'll be able to follow international news more closely now. February 19

This morning I met the history student, Olga, at the college and we went back down to the main library in Novosibirsk. I noticed more on the hour-long bus ride this time. There are "pioneer camps," children's summer camps, along the highway, set back in the pine forests. An occasional settlement of molded log houses with metal roofs and with decorative carved wooden window shutters would appear. Also, I saw stretches of what looked like hundreds of stove pipes with caps, some metal, some plastic, poking out of the snow, set about 8 to 10 feet apart. Olga told me that these were actually root cellars. Most people here grow a pea patch garden and many of them store their produce- potatoes, carrots, beets, rutabagas and turnips in such cellars. They visit their cellars occasionally and bring home the produce to feed themselves.

Today as I spent the afternoon transcribing a story from one of the rare, old books at the library, a book of religious morality tales printed in Moscow in 1644, I was struck by the beauty of such books. This one must have been printed on a moveable, lead-type letter press. The red and black lettering was almost as fine as that of the hand-lettered books of church scribes of only a few years before. (This was one of the earliest printed books in Russia.) The pages were as thick as three of our pages. The book was about 12" x 18" x 6" thick. It had a decorated leather cover over birch wood panels, about 1/4" thick, with a couple of bronze clasps. A copy of this book, produced during the early part of the reign of the Romanoff dynasty in Russia, somehow reached an Orthodox monastery on the Balkan Peninsula, where the Macedonian writer about whom I am writing my dissertation read it. He included his own translation of this Russian Church Slavic story into the Macedonian language in one of his printed books in the early 19th century. I can now compare his translation with the original. I had previously been unable to find this book anywhere. I'll be back to look for other old church books that my Macedonian writer may have used as sources for some of his works.

February 19

After working in the library I took the Metro (subway), a nicely designed and laid-out system downtown and bought Prescott's birthday cake from one shop and some Indian tea from another shop. Everyone keeps telling us not to buy Georgian tea, claiming it's really of poor quality these days. It certainly wasn't bad years ago. Perhaps this is one of the consequences of the war there. (Every evening we see footage of the several new wars going on in the former republics of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaidzhan and Tadjhikistan, and they also throw in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan for good measure.)

Tonight after supper we watched a benefit concert on TV to aid disabled veterans. It starred a cast of thousands--including ballet dancers and the Russian Army chorus. (It may still be the Soviet Army chorus, since I've noticed that soldiers still wear the old hammer, sickle, and red

star with USSR written on their insignia.) The acts ranged from new wave to conservative old wave. One of the more provocative acts featured a group of kids dressed in traditional young pioneer uniforms with little banners and bugles and an adult song leader who announced that they would sing pioneer folk songs. However, as their act proceeded, they cast off their pioneer suits to reveal colorful individual outfits and broke into modern disco song and dance. The audience laughed and smiled, but they were not altogether comfortable with the transition, just as they are not altogether comfortable with their society's transition. The program also contained many statements of gratitude by parents, wives, and children of soldiers who had died in Afghanistan. The program obviously is part of some process of public acknowledgement and mourning of their losses in the Afghanistan War, not unlike what Americans have tried to do through things like the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C.

February 20

I was inspired by a funny dream I had last night to encourage my students to write a couple of compositions on their dreams. Their first efforts in class today yielded a variety of interesting dream accounts. Students described catching big fish, flying, being chased by a tidal wave, fighting in a war, visiting beautiful places, various fears, and, less typically, two students described seeing a classmate who had died, and one student described how he had turned into a raven and visited various friends' homes.

After classes Prescott and I went out and did some more shopping toward the little party we're hosting for her birthday tomorrow. We also borrowed some dishes from the neighbors, though I doubt that we'll have more than eight or nine people- all of the people we've developed a relationship with from the college.

February 21

It strikes me that my students here are intellectually on a par and, in some respects, probably advanced compared to their American counterparts, but they are refreshingly sweet and innocent for their ages (16 and 17) compared to American teenagers of similar age. They remind me in their mannerisms of many of the American 12-year-olds I taught some years ago. American teens are under far more pressure to be "cool," "in" and "worldly wise". Of course, they have been exposed to a good deal more by the age of 17 than many of these youths.

A radio report this morning mentioned the disturbing fact that as many as 100,000 Russians, many of whom are highly trained and educated, are emigrating each year. This is an enormous loss to the society at a time when progress depends to a great extent on the availability of skilled workers. I, by all means, wish to expose the students to new ideas and a greater understanding of Western societies. However, it will disturb me if the net result is to motivate these students to eventually go away to where the action is in America or elsewhere rather than apply what they learn to the transformation of their own society. It, of course, will

be for them to decide to stay or go in the future. I can only hope that many will decide to stay.

We had a pleasant little party with several teachers from the college. I know that Prescott was a bit uncomfortable with the fact that they brought some gifts for her, but she was gracious about it. Everyone except one teacher among our guests has been at the college less than a year. There apparently has been a major overhaul at the college in recent times. There are attempts to create a new image and a new educational philosophy for the school. I've seen some very hopeful signs of this in new symbols such as a new logo, and new brochures advertising the college. There seems to be a certain amount of fresh enthusiasm among students and teachers that perhaps they are involved in a new and forward-looking institution. Attempts to attract partners for educational exchanges, availability of new computer courses, and, beginning this fall, an expanded English language program (eight teachers instead of one, plus their American-visiting lecturer) are all evidence of progress. However, these new endeavors come at a time of severe economic hardship that must weigh on everyone's spirits. Their buildings are in a run-down condition, the staff is grossly underpaid, and everyone spends far too much time shopping for food and waiting for overcrowded buses that can keep you waiting at a bitter cold stop for nearly an hour at times. Personally, I must say the good has still far outweighed the bad in my experience here. The vast majority of the people I encounter here are making the very best of their poor circumstances.

February 22

We spent a quiet day at home today. We've been trying to make some sort of sense out of the debate over the upcoming constitutional referendum, but it's difficult. I can appreciate the importance of a set of established rules and principles for the state so that people feel a degree of confidence about the rules under which their society operates. What is more difficult to appreciate are the day-to-day conflicts over the constitution between the presidency and the assembly or parliament here. Most Russians don't have much understanding of it either, and they have tuned out the debate; recent polls suggest nearly half the voters don't intend to vote in the upcoming referendum in April. I hesitate to be very specific myself, because I'm beginning to doubt my reliability as an informant, since I reported last week that 100,000 people had thyroid cancer as a result of the Chernobyl disaster. I recently heard what instead sounded like 1,700 cases. Today is the Russian Orthodox pre-lenten celebration called Maslenitsa, when the Orthodox get their last taste of meat and animal fats for a number of weeks.

February 23

This was my very worst day waiting for buses. I stood out in the 0 degree F. cold for at least an hour or more before my bus appeared. I was about a half hour late for classes. Of course, I got no sympathy from anyone, since it is such a common problem for everybody. Toward the end of my ordeal in the cold I was thinking, "Somebody wants a revolution out there I'll join

em' cause I'm getting angrier by the minute." Upon cooler reflection, I felt like the spoiled American who is getting a bit cranky because conditions aren't up to his standards.

Today was a former armed forces day, now renamed "Day of the Protectors of the Fatherland." It has become a kind of men's day, when women buy the men presents. The school had a little gathering of the faculty where the women presented their male colleagues with little gifts- mainly useful household and particularly kitchen items. I received a plastic mixing bowl. These gifts were probably intended to encourage male participation in household chores. Sergei was kidding me afterward, suggesting that my joining in their celebration of "Protectors of the Fatherland" meant that I was now obliged to volunteer for military duty in the Russian army.

February 24

Prescott made her first trip into Novosibirsk today. She took the bus with Irina and her 12-year-old daughter Natalya, who now insists on being called Natasha. Apparently Natasha hates being crammed on a crowded bus even more than I do. It really can be awful. A group of citizens who have been waiting too long in the bitter cold will try to bull their way on board an already crowded bus. You end up packed in so that you can barely move.

Then a stop comes, and people try to push their way to an exit. Tempers often flare at such moments. I've missed my stop before because the bus was simply too crowded for me to reach an exit until the crowd thinned a bit. I've also learned to let an overcrowded bus pass by rather than add to the general misery. However, an hour in the cold makes one long for even an overcrowded bus.

We attended another concert of the Novosibirsk Symphony Orchestra tonight. It was once again very good.

February 25

Today, both Prescott and I again taught at the college. Depending on their schedule, there are seven to twenty students each time in Prescott's class. Many are enthusiastic. My students in the first hour, Jerry's old class, are not working very hard. I blame myself, but I'm not used to such young students, and I'll need to reconsider my teaching methods in order to better motivate these children (16- and 17 year olds).

I had one rather strange experience today. One of the English teachers asked me to look at a letter she had been asked to translate by a company she freelances for on occasion. The letter was a request by a Nigerian that the Russian company allow him to transfer funds to their bank account and he would fill out a false invoice claiming purchase of various goods from them. They would receive 35% of the money, in the millions, for essentially helping him get it out of the country, undoubtedly, illegally. If this company doesn't succumb to the greed this

man is trying to tap in Russia, I suppose some other firm will. There must be any number of shady characters trying to use the poverty here to advance some scheme to get rich quick. I was telling Prescott tonight that I see more crass materialism being flaunted via television here. Every night U.S. and other companies project crass images of material wealth in cars, computers, etc., in advertisements and then the people are subjected to mediocre soap opera fare, such as a show called "Santa Barbara" that depicts life among the neurotic well-to-do in Southern California. Is this really what over 100 million Russians who now buy their cigarettes by the cigarette at the kiosks on the streets would like to see?

February 26

Some of the students were telling me yesterday that there is a genuine J. R. Tolkien cult among them. Those who are really infatuated by the Lord of the Rings are called Tolkienuti; however, there are others, called Tolkienoti, who are so crazy about the books that they spend long periods of time out in the forest, dressed in costumes to fit the parts, acting out scenes from the trilogy. February 26 We went out today and did little errands and visited a small library at the House of Scientists that has an English language section. Everywhere you look in this society you see signs of the old order. At the entrance to the library there is a large bronze plaque with Lenin's head on it. (I mentioned to Prescott that the society might save themselves a lot of trouble by simply renaming all of these something like "Uncle Vlad", for Vladimir Lenin, kind of like a Russian Uncle Sam, instead of slowly removing such monuments.) There are numerous signs that remind one of the old order as well. I noticed one yesterday on a building that translated to: "The aim of science is to serve the people." Not bad sentiments, but these often simply rise to the level of unimaginative sloganeering.

Most buildings are rather run-down by American standards. Almost all of the stores or public buildings are drab-looking with bare, often cracked cement or grey tile with weather-beaten wooden doors and window frames. Nearly all of the buildings of The Academic City are concrete slab or block or brick with metal or tile roofs. There are some tastefully designed and well-constructed buildings, but many are apartment buildings with block-like tiny apartments that people refer to as Khrushchevtsi, after Khrushchev, who began a drive to provide such cheap housing for the many who were crammed in crowded and antiquated housing at the time.

Irina's apartment is probably typical of much Russian housing - a vast high-rise (20-story) apartment building with grim-looking concrete stairwells and cement grey exterior. The apartment is packed with their possessions and these spill out onto the balcony as well. The kitchen and bath are very small. Irina claims that the building was very poorly built by soldier labor and she sometimes worries that if she has too many visitors over, dancing, that the place could collapse. Our own apartment is new and is quite roomy and light with pleasant wooded vistas. The grey concrete public halls and stairwells will no doubt begin to take on a run-down look soon. But, for now, it's all very pleasant. Many of the tenants are busy fixing up their apartments. Almost every evening we'll hear a certain amount of hammering or drilling.

Most tenants are respectful of their neighbors, but there have been occasional nights when some neighbor will host a noisy party.

February 27

Lessons went well today. My description of the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, with statistics and a personal account, went over well. I always ask the students questions afterward, so I usually know whether they understood my talk and whether it sparked their interest or not. Some lessons have been far too difficult, such as a sung version of Walter DeLaMare's poem "The Highwayman". Though I did have more success when I presented Hemyehost Storm's story of "Jumping Mouse" from the Sioux Indian tradition.

Some of the students invited me to watch their team play basketball this afternoon. The game didn't come off, because the other team didn't show. They were a bit disappointed, but I told them it wasn't their fault that their team was so good that the competition was afraid to meet them. I did get to see some older team from the scientific institutes play. They were actually pretty good for old men (many as old as myself, as I told my young students, who were not so impressed.) There is a skating rink attached to the sports complex, where it is possible for us to rent ice skates. I haven't skated in years, but maybe I'll talk Prescott into trying it with me someday.

Prescott did some painting today, besides laundry and shopping. She does quite well for someone who is language disabled or disadvantaged, or should I say challenged. She bought eggs, milk, Kefir and a prepared meat dumpling dish called montee. All of the people who operate registers or package or serve up foods in the stores, a group that from past experience can be quite surly, are patient and sometimes downright kind to her. (Store personnel here in Akademgorodok seem generally better-natured than I expected.) Probably the trickiest item to bring home intact is eggs. (What I wouldn't give for one egg carton.) Prescott and I have always prided ourselves on our hardy rural lifestyle. However, a quarter-to a half-mile daily walk with a satchel of groceries is the norm here.

This evening Prescott painted and read and I went downstairs to visit with our young night watchman Zhenya. He was busy coordinating use of the phone in his office for long-distance calls by various residents. In between calls we talked and I made the acquaintance of a Chinese professor of Russian who is here for six months to improve his Russian a a Georgian (let's not kid ourselves, it's really the Caucasian republic Gruzija) who is here completing his doctoral dissertation. He calls home occasionally because his family is in a region where fighting has been occurring.

The Chinese professor told us that there were hundreds of Chinese students and scholars here in Novosibirsk, mainly attracted by the scientific institutes. He was not very happy about the recent requirement that Chinese students pay \$1,000 in Western currency for a year of study here, but I assume that the money crunch has encouraged a policy of favoring those

foreigners who can pay higher rates. This has also caused some problems because the Chinese students, hard-pressed to survive here, take to free-lance marketing on the streets, where they come into conflict with Russian competitors.

We also listened a bit to Mayak. Everyone we meet tells us we ought to tune it in on the radio. Mayak, which means "lighthouse" or "beacon" is the name of a Moscow-based station that provides music, news, sports and commentary. It has been operating for many decades as a state or public radio station. For a couple of dollars you can buy a wall receiver that plugs into electrical sockets and allows you to receive this one station.

February 28

We visited Nikolai Sychov's friend Valerian today. While we talked in English, Nikolai read computer magazines, and Valerian's wife, Ida, and son, Ilya, and daughter-in-law, Oxana, all equally charming and nice people, served us up a delicious meal of borsht, rice, pork and some home made treats, tea cakes and hamburgers and strawberries in cakes. We also drank some vodka with Gruzinski wine (call it Georgian if you must). Then we watched some of Valerian's video films of visits to Seattle, Mt. Vernon, La Conner, Bainbridge Island, and Washington, D. C.

It was interesting to observe what Valerian focused on in American homes, classrooms, businesses, shops or on the streets. His hosts were generally prosperous middle c Americans whose homes contained video recorders, microwaves, fine woodwork, etc., all set in pleasant suburban or rural environments. Valerian liked to focus on personal computers and microwaves and tasteful decorations in homes. And he also took a good deal of footage of our clean, bright, well-stocked markets and stores that, I must confess, emphasized the sharp contrast to the stores of Novosibirsk and Russia in general. However, Valerian is very optimistic about the vast opportunities of the present.

He showed us the paperwork of a friend's recent deal to lease and buy some prime farmland and beautiful forest and lake, about 150 acres in all, near Novosibirsk. He is probably in as good a position as anyone here to prosper from the new economic opportunities, but in contrast to many others, he believes that a majority of the people are having, or will also have, expanded opportunities as they rely more on private sources of income and less on unprofitable and unproductive government provided work. only time will tell if he is correct or not. On the walk to and from Valerian's apartment I had my longest talk with Nikolai Sychov, and it was our most comfortable conversation.

March 1

There is a certain change in the air. The wind is not quite so bitter cold and the sun warms things to the point where icicles are beginning to form on the eaves of buildings that drip for an hour or two in the afternoon. I spent part of the morning searching for elusive food stuffs

that I had enjoyed in past weeks but they appear to have disappeared from every store shelf in the city. These include canned salmon and a particularly tasty tea cookie. People tell me to forget it. They may not show up again for months.

This evening we were invited to a free concert of what are referred to as "romances." These songs with romantic lyrics are sung in a sentimental, sort of operatic, style. I know that I've heard similar songs from the past century in America. Prescott even recognized one song as a favorite of her grandmother. The one singer, a retired medical doctor who is a friend of the college English teacher and her husband who invited us, had a good voice, as did his female partner. But the program didn't really appeal to me. What I did enjoy was the enthusiasm of the crowd. Almost everyone knew each other and the performers. They were from a generation, that of the 1960's, that had a particular fondness for these songs. -27- The couple who had invited us, Avieta and Nikolai, are particularly appealing folks. They're both of an age when they could be pensioners, but they still work. They're among the first generation in the Academic City. They arrived here in the mid-fifties. They live in an apartment, but they also have a dacha about seven miles away in the forest where they also grow a garden. They're educated people, but the down-to-earth type, who enjoy simple pleasures and express simple kindness, who seem to be without artifice. We've been invited out to their dacha when the weather warms, and I'm fairly certain I'd enjoy it.

March 2

I taught a lesson today on the founding of the United States. The history of the original thirteen colonies, the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and some of the key figures from that period in our history. I've spent so many years being so critical of so much in my native land that it felt rather odd to present the innocent and appealing version of our nation's birth that I was taught as a child. But, it also felt good quoting from the Declaration of Independence, praising the founding fathers for their wisdom, and reciting some of the virtues of the political system they established. I've asked the students to write a short paper on their understanding of the coming referendum on the new Russian Constitution. I'm curious to hear how they view it. A recent newspaper poll suggested that 1/3 of the people intend to vote in the referendum, 1/3 intend to ignore it, and 1/3 are still undecided.

There is some excitement among the teachers at the college, because it appears that we have been granted some sort of pay increase by the state that is considerable enough to make some dent in recent losses. we personally have never really been hurting. The money we've received, about 15,000 rubles, has been more than adequate to feed us and pay for the stamps for the letters we write. However, if we ever needed some article of clothing, small appliance or household item, depending upon the item, it could cost our entire month's salary and then some.

I've been watching television again this evening. There is a fairly decent talk show out of Moscow that I like to watch called Tema (Theme). They bring authorities on some subject before a live audience and they seem to do a fairly respectable job of illuminating their subject. The tv shows I've seen were both quite interesting--one on public attitudes concerning dictatorship and democracy and one on sex education.

I occasionally have thoughts of home. Unfortunately, these are too often just pointless anxieties about the condition of our vacant house. Has it been trashed and plundered by those who do that sort of thing on the Island? I wish I could put it out of my mind until the day we step back into our home.

March 3

About three inches of snow fell in the previous 24 hours and everything is glistening white again. During the bitter cold a few weeks ago, the snow almost behaved like fine sand. The wind would blow it around so that three to four foot drifts would contrast with patches of bare frozen ground. Presently, there is a fluffy layer of snow on everything. Trucks carry away much of the snow that accumulates along the sides of the roadways as a result of plowing. Front-end loaders and dump trucks also occasionally haul away eight- to ten-foot piles of snow alongside buildings after workmen have cleared the roofs. This much snow requires some serious management.

I visited Novosibirsk University's main library today. I had hoped to find a foreign magazine or newspaper. I was told by a librarian that they indeed did have an extensive collection of foreign journals but no newspapers, and she directed me to a large card file of journals. Unfortunately, they all proved to be scientific journals for physicists, chemists, engineers, etc. When I asked if there might be somewhere that I could read a western newspaper or magazine, she said the main public library in downtown Novosibirsk might have some. What surprised me was that an academic community of 40,000 well-educated Russians, many of whom have studied German, French, or English, have no ready access to such common western international news sources as The Manchester Guardian, The New York Times, Der Spiegel, or The Christian Science Monitor. Russians have always lived, for the most part in isolation, both under the Tsars and the Communists. Recent Russian television reflects the greatest reversal of this trend under the new conditions. Non-electronic media lags much further behind. Newspapers and even TV news provide what I would consider very meager coverage of world news. Perhaps the weight of tradition and simply the physical distance of much of the rest of the world continue to make such news of minor importance to most people. More disturbing in some ways was the lack of up-to-date information about the rest of the world in the reference section of the University library. There was not one single world atlas. There was a dated set of Soviet encyclopedias and a very old set of Britannicas from the late 1940's. If you were to look up Washington state, the Boeing Corporation would still be building prop planes and the population would be somewhere around one million. This sort of lack may have been deliberate under the Soviet regime, but given the present lack of funds

and the absence of experience with world reference materials, I doubt that people here will have many opportunities to be better informed any time in the near future. It should appall many Russians, though perhaps it wouldn't, that a Russian university with thousands of students has far fewer general world reference materials on hand than small village libraries or your average junior high in America.

March 4

I visited the college library today. Once again I saw only Russian newspapers and magazines with very limited world news. I read through a week of back issues of the Moscow daily *Izvestia*, and I was somewhat reassured by the extent of what I was able to learn about current world events. Each day had a couple of decent reprints of translated articles on timely topics from London or New York newspapers. However, the only set of encyclopedias was a dated set of Soviet ones, and they had only one old world atlas. When I asked if they had a set of *Britannica* encyclopedias, the librarian said she didn't even know what they were. I wanted to look up information for a possible talk next on Abraham Lincoln and the U.S. Civil War. The only information they had was contained in a single article in the *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Enciklopedia*. I think I can do far better looking up some equivalent episode from Russian history, such as the Revolution or Civil War, in an American library. In order to see if Russian students were, as a result, exceptionally ignorant of world geography, I gave my class a little quiz today. Actually, most of the students did quite well. Most knew that Dublin was the capital of Ireland, Superior was the biggest lake and the Mississippi the largest river in the continental United States, and that Paraguay is in South America and Puerto Rico is not one of our fifty states. Nearly all knew that Mexico City was the capital of Mexico. They also knew the name of the highest mountain in the Caucasus range in the former USSR--Mt. Elbrus. I was surprised, however, that not one of them knew the capital of Croatia, Zagreb, though it was more understandable that none could say for certain whether Sacramento was the capital of California. I doubt that most American 17-year-olds would do as well on the same quiz, though perhaps they would.

March 5

Today we attended the college International Women's Day celebration. It was a little party organized by the men of the college administration, much in the same spirit as the men's day a few weeks ago to honor past, present, and future defenders of Mother Russia. Our friend Sergei gave the opening address in which he tongue-in-cheek informed the women of how vastly improved their lot in life had become since the downfall of communism and the advent of the new American capitalist system. They no longer needed to struggle with heavy bags of groceries and other goods (since no one could do much shopping anymore with their pitiful wages). And he made other remarks in a similar vein. We all ate cake and drank tea, and a few of the men sang songs, accompanied by guitar and piano. Then there were a few silly contests for which various women were awarded little prizes for guessing the correct answers. There was, for example, a set of spaces for letters in a phrase to be guessed letter by letter

with the hint that this was what a husband would likely say to his wife if she came home in the early hours of the morning after a night on the town. The answer was something like, "I made sure that the tea would be warm for you." Prescott guessed an answer in one contest and received a little salt bowl, lipstick and chocolate.

After the party we caught the bus that goes by the House of Scientists. We met our fellow teacher, Emma Alexandrovna, there for the evening's performance by the Novosibirsk Symphonic orchestra. The orchestra was conducted by a visitor named Mario Di Bonventura. They played Mozart, something by a 19th century Swedish composer I'd never heard of, and Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. The entire concert was very good, as usual, but I thought that the orchestra played the symphony by their own native composer with the most spirit. Listening to their talented musicians reminded me that whatever their present material circumstances, this is still a nation with considerable skills and achievements, and no one should ever dismiss them as a force in the world.

March 6

Today I tried to diplomatically explain to my first-hour class that they were lazy and undisciplined in their study of English. I don't doubt that this same group worked enthusiastically a year ago when Jerry from Skagit Valley College taught them. They seem to think that I should repeat what Jerry did with them rather than move them on to more challenging advanced English study. What they don't realize is that Jerry only taught them for four sessions a week. He restricted these classes to oral exercises and assigned no homework or writing assignments. That may have been appropriate at the time, but I expect more from them now. I want them to practice conversations, read, write and listen to stories and respond to questions about the stories. Thus far only two students out of seventeen regularly do their homework. Many of the students tell me it is too difficult for them. Perhaps I would be more sympathetic if my second-hour class (same age, same level of English study), but without preconceived ideas about what they should be doing, didn't consistently complete the same assignments. It doesn't seem to make any difference to them that I've repeatedly said that they will not be graded on these assignments, but I will give them credit for making an honest effort. I've tried to be objective about this. I've discussed this problem with other teachers, and I've considered my own contribution to the problem.

This evening Sergei came by and we had tea and talked about history and recent events. Sergei is always interesting to talk to. He gave us a fascinating book a while back, an English translation of a Russian travel journal by the Frenchman, the Marquis De Custine, written in 1839. De Custine came here in search of evidence that an enlightened monarchy was preferable to the chaos of representative democracy. He states that he returned from his visit "a partisan of constitutions." As the American translator and a former ambassador to Moscow declares in the introduction, there are striking parallels in the Soviet system - "The exercise of sovereignty through fear, the omnipresence of the secret police, the operation of the bureaucracy, the absence of personal and public liberty, the uprooting and banishment to

Siberia of whole populations, the suppression of non-conformist artistic endeavor, the sudden imposition of drastic monetary reforms, the subjugation of the Church, the conquest of foreign lands; above all, the secrecy, deceit and hypocrisy"- and the Tsarist regime of the past, as reported by De Custine. Sergei, who recommended the book, however, believes that the many parallels can also blind one to the important differences.

The Soviet system imposed itself much more deeply and fully over the people. The absence of private ownership and the wholesale interference in the daily lives of all the inhabitants, even in the most remote Siberian villages, has no parallel in Tsarist Russia. De Custine also visited Russia prior to the remarkable period of cultural, social, and political achievements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries--a period that all Russians now look to as their rightful inheritance and the basis upon which the new Russia will emerge. Sergei explains much of the success of the communist revolution on the tremendous economic, social, and cultural gulf between the 85% of population who were dirt-poor, uneducated peasants and the educated and more prosperous class or classes.

It is strange, though, that after Sergei has pointed out the evils of the old system, he almost always begins to talk about how much better off they were a few years back under the old system. They couldn't find such items as personal computers and video recorders in the stores, but all of the basic and essential items--food, clothing, shelter, medicine, transportation, etc.- were more than adequate, or so they seem today in retrospect. The present economic and social class has created a good deal of anxiety and some real hardships.

Sergei recounted again this evening how he used to be able to buy all he needed and even visit good restaurants occasionally on a student scholarship and part-time work. Today, however, as a full-time working professional administrator, he has trouble providing his basic necessities, and he can't imagine visiting those same restaurants, or in some cases, visiting the districts in the evening where they were located, with the dramatic increase in street crime. His own situation, however, cannot be nearly as dire as that of pensioners who receive about a quarter of his wage, and the lowest paid unskilled workers who receive an eighth or even a tenth of what he does.

What a contrast it is to talk to someone like Valerian, the enthusiastic new entrepreneur, after a conversation with someone who is wholly dependent on state-subsidized work, such as Sergei. Unfortunately, the Sergeis presently outnumber the Valerians by about 200 to 1. Prescott said that Sergei's visit made her sad, and I can share that feeling, but most of Sergei's misery is the result of great forces far beyond any individual's control or responsibility, and it is a widely shared misery. The vast majority of the people are in this together, and they will slowly sort things out together, hopefully, without out further declines or cataclysm.

March 7

Today we visited some friends of Irina's during the afternoon and it was an enjoyable visit. Andrey and Iva, a couple in their mid to late thirties, and their nine year old daughter Sveta, live in a somewhat small but bright and pleasant apartment on the edge of the Academic City. Andrey and Iva are both graduates of the University in Tomsk, one of the oldest cities in Siberia with many beautiful wooden homes. Elaborate carved wooden lacework trims windows and eaves on houses there. Both had interesting stories to tell of their families' pasts. Iva's grandfather had emigrated to America in the 1920's and had returned in the 1930's because the communist experiment appealed to him. As Iva put it, after marrying her grandmother, starting a family and working in the city of Magnitogorsk, he was "repressed." I hate this word because it is a euphemism for the Stalinist policy of the late 1930's of sending anyone whose past actions (such as having lived abroad) could arouse suspicions of their loyalty to the regime, to prison work camps. Many of the millions of people sent to these camps worked under brutal conditions, if stories such as Solzhenitzen's "One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovitch" are at all representative of their experience. Many died in the camps.

I didn't ask Iva if her grandfather was among those. She did tell us that his story was only revealed to her very recently, since such knowledge was not something even family members shared with each other in the past. And is the son of World War II veterans. He showed us a picture of his mother as a young partisan soldier. She fought in the decisive battle of Stalingrad, where a large German army was defeated and captured after a brutal winter battle that raged house to house. It was a decisive turning point in the war. Andrey told us that his mother, who worked as a librarian but was now retired, never talked about her war experiences because they had been so unpleasant. Both of his parents had been understandably patriotic, and this had caused some friction in his family in 1968 when some younger members like Andrey expressed their disapproval of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Both of Andrey's parents are university graduates. His father taught history. Andrey has the equivalent of a Ph.D. in chemistry, and both he and Iva worked in one of the research institutes. He showed us several of his research papers in chemistry that had been published in Western journals. In 1991 he attended a seminar in Bremen, Germany- his first trip outside Eastern Europe- and he anticipates opportunities to work abroad in chemical research facilities in the future. Presently his research is being subsidized by the SOROS international fund. American philanthropist George Soros has been subsidizing the research of selected Russian scientists in order to encourage them not to sell their expertise to the militaries of various interested countries during this period of economic hardship in Russia. What they actually receive is some small fraction of what they might earn abroad, \$50 to \$100 a month, I believe, but it is an incentive not to be the tool of death merchants abroad.

Iva and Andrey both speak some English, though their lack of practice was obvious. They enjoy British and American 1960's rock music, They showed us some of his record collection that

contains a considerable number of bootleg Russian manufactured albums of songs by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and others. He has also managed to increase his collection through purchases of German releases such as an Elektra Records album of music of The Doors. Compared to most Russians, this family has rosier prospects for the future and a relatively secure present. However, they, too, share many of the anxieties of their countrymen. They worry about economic and political chaos here. They worry about whether the food supply is safe today, because there is less inspection and an influx of dubious products from third world exporters. Andrey wants to believe that the upcoming referendum, if it occurs, will help stabilize the situation, but he shares the fear that worsening conditions could lead to some ugly form of nationalistic socialism here, i.e., fascism. I sense that this family is looking abroad for their future security. They could easily fit in among the educated professional sorts among our friends with their enthusiasm for records and books and broader interests and curiosities than most people.

Yesterday I received several papers on the constitutional referendum and the present structure of the Russian government by my students. After reviewing these papers it is clear to me that these students understand the basic principles of their recent representative government, but they are as uncertain about the details of how the system works as most American 17-year-olds are about our own system. They all agree on the general forms of their political system, but their individual descriptions of the details of how the system works vary considerably, so that I would hesitate to draw any conclusions about the specific functioning of this system based on what the students have told me.

March 8

It is International Women's Day today. Women are receiving little gifts all around us today. This is a very big holiday in these parts. It may be a product of the Soviet period, but I don't hear anyone suggesting that it be abolished. It is the source of a considerable number of parties, ideally prepared by menfolk. All stores, public institutions and offices and probably most private ones are closed down for the day. I was informed by Irina at school the other day that this morning I should prepare breakfast and coffee and bring it to Prescott in bed. Zhenya, in the background, said that this was Irina's fantasy ideal for March 8th. Ironically, I woke up with a mild cold today and instead poor Prescott got to prepare various things for me.

Probably the highlight of the day was when we watched a very popular Soviet film from the early 1980's, "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears," on television. It is a very well-done movie that follows the lives of three women who become friends in Moscow as roommates in a dormitory in the late 1950s.

We were invited to a party that evening, but I decided to give my cold a rest, and Prescott didn't want to go by herself.

March 9

Today I told my classes about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. I tried to impress upon them what a terrible war it had been, since some 600,000 Americans died, more than in any war before or since. However, citizens of a nation where several wars this century- World War I, their Civil War, and World War II- all resulted in the deaths of millions (possibly as many as twenty million in World War II, what they call "The Great Patriotic War", it is hard to impress them with the loss of a little over half a million people.

I've continued to receive papers from my students about their understanding of the present Russian system of government. There seems to be no clear understanding of the details of this system, but as one student pointed out, the most up-to-date reference book he could consult was the 1985 Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Some students add their personal comments. Some say that politics don't interest them, or that they're getting a little tired of living in a country where every day brings "historic changes" in the system. One student said that one thing he did know was that the last president, Gorbachev, was bad for his country, and the present president, Yeltsin, is worse. Another wrote, "In August of 1991 we had a push. Some ministers wanted to make a [counter] revolution in our government, but the patriotic Russian people did not give [let] them to make this dark deed".

We received our pay today. It was a good month for all of us. Our pay was doubled. (People tell us that each month it varies, so not to be surprised if we receive half of this next month). I received 38,400 rubles (about \$60) and Prescott 19,000, so our combined pay was nearly \$100, which is enough to actually supply us with saw luxury foods and other items in the coming month.

Prescott has been working hard enough on her little elective class on graphic arts skills and also volunteering to visit English classes (Sergei, upon hearing this, wryly remarked that there is a long-standing tradition of this so-called volunteer labor here in Siberia) so that she has certainly earned her pay. Her students have been enthusiastically creating calling cards for themselves. She has led them through all of the steps of brainstorming an idea, rough layout, choosing elements- type, color, etc.- and it would be nice if they could somehow have them printed. Next, Prescott has proposed that they create a bulletin board "newsletter" with student graphics, stories, cartoons, etc.

We also received our first letter today. It is from our friends Steve and Diana in Refuge Cove, a little community between Vancouver Island and the Canadian mainland. The letter is dated February 6 and we received it March 9. With such slow mail service we will need to warn correspondents not to send any letters after mid-April, or we may never receive them before we leave. Our first letter, even with all of its dated news, was pleasant to read after almost six weeks of no news from back home.

March 10

This was one of the strangest days, weather-wise, that I have ever seen. It started out cold and clear. At about 11:00 a.m. it began to cloud up, and then thick snow flurries fell for a couple of hours. We went out to shop and Prescott went for a Russian lesson at Emma Alexandrovna's house. By the time Prescott arrived home in the early evening, the temperature had risen above freezing and the wind had picked up. By about 10:00 p.m. it began to rain, and the rain continued until two or three in the morning. Big chunks of ice and snow began to break loose from the roof of our building and crash noisily to the ground.

Today was the first day of a session of the Russian Congress of Deputies. It was televised and broadcast by radio as well. Apparently, there was a good deal of disagreement, and President Yeltsin's proposals for the up-coming constitutional referendum were not well-received by a majority of the Peoples Deputies. President Yeltsin is now calling for some arbitration process to overcome what is being called the "constitutional crisis" here.

March 11

The snow was hardly dented by last night's rain, but I wouldn't doubt that there is an icy slick on everything out there this morning. It's gusty as well. Not exactly inviting weather. However, the trip to the college went well, despite the cold wind and fine, gritty snow. The grainy snow acted as a kind of grit that made the icy paths less treacherous. Prescott said that there was a major accident on the driveway up to our building later in the day, but traffic flowed smoothly and without incident where I was.

This morning I asked students to write a short essay on someone they admired- a hero. The response was interesting, as usual. One punk rock heavy metal band member said that he admired Jesus for sacrificing himself for the good of others. Another student admired Tsar Peter the First for having introduced the potato to Russia, and for having created the first Russian naval forces. Someone else thought Columbus was a hero for his daring discovery of America, while a student next to him thought Leif Ericsson was the real hero for having reached America long before Columbus. Other students chose their favorite authors--V. Shukshin, Leo Tolstoy, Griboyedov and J. R. Tolkien. Four students said that all of those they once admired had proven a disappointment and they no longer believed in any heroes. Some students had more personal heroes. One student regarded his sports coach as a hero. Another student considered a friend who had died years before to be a special hero to him. The most surprising choice, in my opinion, was the last Tsar, Nichols II. One student, with considerable enthusiasm for the Russian Orthodox faith, thought that he had been a kind and good man who had worked for the Russian people, as church authorities now said, rather than an evil tyrant, as she had been taught by Soviet authorities. I named John Muir, the American naturalist, who worked so hard to preserve some of the most beautiful of America's wilderness as my favorite hero.

Two more letters arrived today- a letter from my parents and a packet of our mail from the first week of February sent along by our friend Darcy back in Greenbank. The postmarks are February 10 and 11, so it appears to take mail about a month to reach us. I hope that no one attempts to send us anything after mid-April, because we may not receive it before we leave. It's nice to have a little news from back home, but it is a little less exciting when I realize that the news we're receiving today was written only a week after our departure.

March 12

It is such an improvement to make the acquaintance of Russians on their own territory and in the new, freer atmosphere. I would attempt this with the Russians I met at seminars in Yugoslavia or Bulgaria in past years, but the people at those gatherings were reluctant to "fraternize" with Western colleagues. As Valerian told me, they had been obliged to sign a statement saying that they would report all contacts with foreigners during their trip abroad to the authorities. No wonder that they were less than cordial back then. However, even without this police state mentality, there is a considerable degree of xenophobia among Russians. One conversation I had with our friend Avieta illustrates this. We were talking about our mutual travels to Bulgaria and Avieta told me about how startling it was for her and her fellow Russians from Siberia to encounter such a wide variety of unfamiliar flora, the various plants, shrubs and trees native to that Mediterranean region. When the group came upon a grove of birches that reminded them of their home, tears came into their eyes at the sight of these familiar old friends.

Russian mistrust of the foreign and foreigners will undoubtedly continue to be an important factor in the course of development in Russia in the coming years. Despite the obvious problems that have occurred in the past as a result of their closed society, many Russians will resist efforts to 'westernize' them today, just as they resisted the Tsar Peter I, the Great's, efforts to introduce new ideas nearly 300 years ago. Their suspicions are not entirely groundless, though. The hundreds of representatives of western corporations who have poured into Russia in recent times are not here to do anyone any favors. They simply see the potential of vast, untapped markets for their products. While this could in many cases be a source of good here, without a certain amount of careful supervision we require of businesses in our own society, exploitive and abusive practices could occur that would undermine efforts to transform Russian society from the old Soviet system.

This society has already become a dumping ground for many products no longer considered desirable in the West. Among the most obvious of these are the old Marlboro and Lucky Strike cigarette ads designed for television. The other day I bought a can of meat imported from Western Europe. It seemed like a good deal at about forty cents in rubles, but after I thought about it a little, I began to wonder, since I knew I could never get anything like this so inexpensively back home. Why was this company selling their product so cheaply abroad? Had their product been banned back home for some health code violation? I know of numerous cases of United States corporations selling harmful, banned pesticides in foreign countries, or,

in one case, of selling children's sleepwear abroad, after having been banned from doing so in the United States due to the presence of a carcinogenic fire retardant.

Of equal concern to me is the widespread work of Western evangelical Christian groups here. While I welcome the free flow of ideas, including those of the rich Judeo-Christian religious philosophical tradition, I am wary of those who may be fostering religious bigotry, intolerance, or primitive, anti-scientific superstitions. To my mind, in our own country, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's personal saviour has sometimes become associated with socially destructive behavior. These include intolerance of the religious beliefs of others, opposition to birth control and family planning programs, prejudice against homosexuals, rejection of the wealth of scientific knowledge of human evolution, a lack of concern for the environment because of some belief in man's dominion over nature or an apocalyptic vision of a glorious Second Coming after everything goes to hell on earth, or such ideological baggage as an absolute faith in a totally unrestricted, free enterprise system. Perhaps it is no wonder, given my strong preconceived notions about evangelical Christianity, that the two poor American evangelical Christian missionaries living in our building have appeared to try and avoid me. I thought my mention of association with that free-thinking old sect, the Quakers, may have initially triggered this response. Of course, I may be reading far too much into the situation, considering the fact that I really don't know these people at all.

We learned this afternoon that we passed the Russian HIV blood test, so we won't be deported, at least not for violating that particular law.

There was another concert of the Novosibirsk Philharmonic Orchestra at the House of Scientists this evening. This concert featured works of Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky was as enjoyable as past performances of university orchestra we've heard, and the price is always right at 25 rubles (less than a nickel).

March 13

The power struggle between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian Congress of All Peoples Deputies continues. Most people seem to expect some sort of compromise agreement to eventually be arrived at. It does make sense that they should eventually accept a compromise given that a bloody civil war could be a result of continued failure to reach agreement on constitutional powers of the several branches of government. The proceedings of the congress itself, that have been televised and broadcast on radio over the past several days, have not contained many moments of high drama, though. I have probably followed the proceedings more closely than the average Russian. However, the debate here is not over fine points, but it involves the fundamental nature of the governmental and social system. If President Yeltsin cannot find sufficient common ground with the Congress of Deputies, he proposes a public referendum to determine whether there is sufficient support for the continuation of the process of reform. He has proposed that the people vote on whether they want an elected representative assembly and a separate chief executive called the president

(also elected), whether they favor the ownership of private property, and whether or not they want a constitutional convention to hammer out the details and ratify a new constitution. This is very basic stuff, indeed. Cynics, like our friend Sergei, think President Yeltsin is just playing games, rallying people around the obvious that only an idiot would oppose. On the other hand, it would be risky to proceed on the present painful course of reform unless a substantial majority are willing to publicly declare their support for it.

I asked my third-hour class to write short essays about someone they admired, similar to those the second hour wrote. I again received some interesting responses. There was again a certain amount of harkening back to a more glorious Russian past. Two students in this class also selected Peter the Great as their favorite Russian leader. A couple of others named American computer wizards Peter Norton and Bill Gates as their most admired figures. More surprising was one student's selection of Boris Yeltsin because of his efforts to reform Russia, and another student's selection of Mikhail Gorbachev, a man more often maligned than even Yeltsin these days, for ostensibly destroying the Soviet Union and its former power. This student credits Gorbachev with opening up their closed society and extending freedoms. Another unusual choice was Andrey Sakharov for his brilliant scientific work followed by his brave public denunciations of the nuclear arms race, the war in Afghanistan and restrictions on freedom. This student only regretted that Sakharov didn't live to receive the public gratitude he deserved.

March 14

Irina met us at 10:00 a.m. and we visited the Orthodox Church in the Akademgorodok. It is a rather simple but attractive wooden church built only two years ago. The interior was natural pine with rough-hewn beam construction. The place was so packed when we first arrived that it reminded me of one of the Novosibirsk buses. People tend to drift in and out of an Orthodox Church during the rather lengthy services, so it wasn't long before the church-goers thinned out enough for us to make our way to the interior. Compared to the Orthodox services I had attended in Macedonia, this one seemed relatively informal. The people and the priests joined in singing church hymns together rather than observing a strict division of solo singing by the priest with an answering chorus. One of the priests (the three I saw seemed younger than most) delivered a somewhat lengthy extemporaneous sermon based on a brief passage he read from the Bible. Sermons involved more formal readings of texts of old church fathers in the Macedonian churches I'd attended. This reminded me more of a Protestant minister's sermon. The church itself contained only the simplest iconostasis and a few simple icons and frescoes fastened to the wood-paneled walls. People stood, crossing themselves and visiting various parts of the church during the service, much as one would expect to see in other Orthodox churches. But the youthfulness of the building, the priests, and even of the hundred and fifty people that were in attendance, all combined to create a more youthful and less tradition-bound version of the Orthodox faith than I have known from the Balkans.

We met one of the students from the college at the service. This seventeen-year-old, named Tatyana, is an enthusiastic member of the church. She told us that her parents also attended. She was strictly observing the forty-day Lenten fast prior to Easter. Irina, a thirty-one-year old product of the Soviet system, has a feeling for humanistic spiritual philosophy, but no feeling for the more mystical religious tradition of the Orthodox church. I'm afraid that tradition all looks to her like a lot of primitive hocus-pocus. I personally enjoy the elaborate ceremonial pageantry of an Orthodox service, but philosophically, I favor the ultra-simplicity of a Quaker meeting.

On the way home Irina told us about the furor in her family when her believer grandmother secretly took Irina to church and had her baptized. Both of her parents were loyal, dedicated believers in communism, who worked sincerely to try and create the new socialist man and woman. She told us that her parents welcomed many of the changes that Gorbachev initiated; however, the final result, the break-up of the USSR, appalled them. Irina regrets now some of her own irreverence towards her parents' strict communist beliefs, because she now realizes how it must have hurt them that their own child did not value the work of their lifetime. Today, now that her parents feel a good deal of humiliation at the collapse of the socialist way of life, she tries to be more sympathetic. However, I don't think that Irina is aware of just how much she herself believed in the old system and how much she herself feels let down today. Occasional things she says to us indicate this to me.

Irina also told us today that her husband Oleg, an officer in the Russian army, has been staying up late watching the special session of the Congress of All Peoples Deputies. He is in agreement with the majority of the deputies, who have declared their lack of confidence in the program and proposals for reform of President Yeltsin. He has apparently persuaded Irina also that Yeltsin's proposed referendum is meaningless. They have accepted the argument of Yeltsin's chief opponent in the congress, Hasbulatov, that the referendum is a costly waste of time. Supposedly, there was an earlier referendum on whether the USSR should break up into independent states, in which a majority voted no (I assume the majority of Russians, but not others). Yet, look at the result. So why bother with a referendum on the constitution? What concerns me though is the danger of a withdrawal of financial aid and economic investment in Russia by the West if the political situation appears too unstable or if conservative old-line socialist forces manage to stall the reform process.

I just watched a program on TV sponsored by Western evangelists. This show is apparently a weekly show by an American evangelist named Rick Renner. His sermon was translated phrase by phrase. Such sermons always leave me with some mixed feelings. I approve of efforts to encourage people to show more love and understanding, but I always grow uneasy when the speaker insists that all such expressions must be regulated by Judeo-Christian teachings contained in the Bible. Some of those ancient rules offend my sense of what is just and right today. I must, however, defend the right of others to freely and openly express their beliefs. In this respect, it may be progress to see tele-evangelists broadcasting here. By the way, the old Marlboro and Lucky Strike commercials, we saw when we first arrived are no

longer being aired, and three times this week I saw brief public service announcements on the health dangers of smoking. Very interesting.

March 15

I occasionally get a glimmer of insight into the mechanism by which a violent social upheaval could occur here. As one waits for an overcrowded bus or in line for any number of shoddy products or services, the thought sometimes occurs that this is no accident of nature but the result of carelessness, indifference, irresponsibility or possibly even malevolence on the part of those in charge. When I say those in charge, I mean those who decide how much money from the public budget to allot to transportation, make the decisions concerning how to organize public transport, etc. If enough people get angry enough there will be explosions. But who will various people direct their anger at? Most likely such anger would end up being vented on scapegoats of one sort or another. This is a very polarized society, and as conditions worsen or fail to improve, the factions will inevitably heap blame on each other with increasing venom.

Maybe there is some hope, though. Our pay doubled this month, keeping pace with inflation. Some new goods are appearing in the stores and among street vendors, and most people are being given land, houses and other property with real value that they had only the use of until now. The more I hear about crime, the more I fear it, but even so, it doesn't appear nearly as bad as your average big city in America.

March 16

For a little variety I asked the students to write down some jokes for me. I told them a few jokes I knew, with mixed results. (It's hard sometimes to know in advance what will translate linguistically or culturally). Here are a few of the students' jokes that I thought translated fairly well:

A teacher was telling her students about the seasons. She asked them "What time is best to gather fruit in?" And a student replied, "When the dog is chained up."

Some monks were eating pelmeni, a Russian stuffed noodle dish, when some visitors arrived, who asked for some of the meal. The monks, who didn't want to share their supper, asked if they would be willing to eat pelmeni cooked yesterday. When the visitors replied that, yes, they would, the monks then said, "Well then, come back tomorrow."

After an American astronaut landed on the moon, Premier Brezhnev called in the head of the Russian space program and told him, "You must land a man on the sun in the near future. The department head told him that it would not be possible, due to the extremely high temperatures the cosmonauts would encounter there. To which Brezhnev replied "What kind of fool do you take me for, you'll send them at night!"

A Russian who had visited London was asked "Did you have any difficulty with your English there?" To which he replied, "No, I didn't, but the English people did." "Did that new play have a happy ending?" "Sure, everybody was glad it was over."

A Siberian went to the Black Sea coast for his vacation. The very tanned people on the beach asked the pale white newcomer where he was from. When they heard that he was from Siberia, one of them commented, "You probably don't have any summer there, do you?" To which the Siberian responded, "In fact, the summer was hot and sunny, but, unfortunately, I had to work that day."

Two bandits knocked at the door of one flat. A voice from within asked, "Who is it?" To which they replied, "Not to worry, it isn't guests."

On the bus, a man asked another passenger -"Are you getting off at the next stop?" The other answered that he was. Then the man asked if the people in front of him were getting off as well. To which the other passenger replied, "They're getting off, too. They just don't know it yet."

March 17

Today we went into the big city to downtown Novosibirsk. It was about 8 degrees fahrenheit outside and the wind was blowing. At times I thought my nose might suffer frostbite. At one point in our shopping trip we sought out a public restroom. Most downtown big city public toilet facilities are pretty rank, but this was one of the foulest smelling, dank and unsanitary facilities I have ever been glad to locate. We picked up saw gifts today for folks back home.

Nikolai Sychov stopped by this evening. He had a letter that needed a little fine-tuning by a native speaker of English. These are the moments when we often feel the most useful here. He also asked about our lives, and I had a chance to ask a few more questions about the working of the college. He reaffirmed that the increased pay in March may not be matched in April. He also said that if we don't get adequate funds, he will make another trip to Moscow. It seems that all financial control is in official departments in Moscow. This centralized system is part of the problem for social and economic development here. It discourages initiative. It also compels heads of state institutions such as Sychov to make regular trips to Moscow to plead their case for greater funding. I suppose the same thing goes on at home, but there is less national centralization in our system and far more stability that translates into greater predictability.

March 18

It was a routine day at the college, I suppose. The kids were a bit rowdy, but I attributed it to the inviting sunshine streaming through the windows, their nervousness about examinations

next week and anticipation of their spring break, which begins on March 28. Prescott's class will possibly land in hot water by this time next week, when they present their April Fools' Day issue of a poster newsletter. They're all excited about putting together fake interviews with President Sychov and similar ruses that could easily run amok. Unfortunately, the only way students of this age discover their limits is by overstepping them. Actually, of more concern to Prescott is the possibility that some of them will devote too much time to this project at a time when they should be studying for exams.

Today I read a letter in the newspaper Izvestia that urged a rejection of the course in foreign policy favored by the head of the Congress of Peoples Deputies, Ruslan Hasbulatov. It suggested that he was among those who blamed external enemies, not internal forces, for the break-up of the Soviet Union. The letter raised the spectre of a return to the isolation of the Cold War if Hasbulatov and company get their way. It ended with the question, would Russia prefer to be a pariah like Serbia or Iraq, or continue to be integrated into the world community? Personally, I think even if Hasbulatov and others decide to play on nationalist feelings, the process of integration, with economic reform, privatization, and other new rights and freedoms, is far too popular, despite the many problems, for anyone to dare oppose it publicly.

March 19

This evening Sergei Valereevich came by and had supper with us and we talked until 10 p.m. about history and politics. I always enjoy these conversations. Because Sergei's special interest is history, he often has a good deal to say about the subject of recent (and more distant) Russian history. I am always amazed at the incredible pace of some of the economic, social and political changes here. It was only three and a half years ago that the first Congress of Peoples Deputies was elected. It was only one and a half years ago that an attempted coup led to the break up of the USSR. As usual, I learned a good deal more about the intricacies of the system and the significance of various events. Sergei always has some good stories as well. He declared that the most cynical view of the formation of the new Confederation of Independent States was his father's, when he described it as a meeting of several alcoholic ex-communists who signed something at a drunken party.

I've concluded recently that the recent breakup of the USSR has resulted in the kind of polarization we saw at the end of the Vietnam War. One camp believes that traitors at home worked with enemies abroad to bring about the break up. Another camp believes that the break up was part of the rectification of the tragedy that was the Soviet period in their history. This plays out in the political arena much as polarization around the Vietnam War has in the U.S. Traitors at home are blamed for our failure to defeat the communist guerillas in Vietnam by one camp, while the other declares the whole U.S. involvement a tragic mistake.

Sergei also told us more about the disturbing increase in crime. There are protection rackets operating throughout the country, and local toughs even extort money from the students at

the college. The police would like to do something about all of this, but, of course, their resources are limited. Once again, I find these reports disturbing, but I am still inclined to believe that the actual scale of dangerous crime is nowhere near that of the U.S. However, If we come home someday and discover that our apartment has been plundered, as happened to a friend of Irina's recently, I might change my opinion of crime here.

March 20

After all of the talk about crime and thugs harassing students the day before, I thought it might be of interest to share with students some of my knowledge of the theory and practice of the Japanese defensive martial art Aikido. They were duly impressed, though I am on somewhat shaky ground presenting a martial art that I haven't actively trained in for over ten years. I do enjoy, though, presenting information and ideas to them that suggest that there is a whole world of fascinating things to be learned about by those with a will to learn.

Prescott had prepared the "fine, imported," Dutch canned meat bought last week. We both agreed that it was pretty awful. It has occurred to me that the perception that the West dumps shoddy goods here could extend to imported college instructors. Of course, we know that this is far from the truth, right?

We went out this evening to the musician Arkady's, where his bluegrass band was practicing for an upcoming concert. Unfortunately, we only caught the end of their practice session but enjoyed it all the same. They are all quite accomplished musicians. At the moment they are concentrating on old Beatle tunes for a Beatles retrospective concert planned for April 7. The band has added a couple new members since we last heard them over a month ago. At present the group consists of a couple guitarists, a violinist, bass player, a flute and recorder player and a couple additional vocalists.

After our visit we attempted to catch a bus home, but we ran into the usual problem. Some 40-50 people were waiting for the infrequent and already nearly full buses at the nearest stop. They would wedge themselves into a bus in what I regard as a suffocating mass, and by the time the next bus arrived there would be enough of room again to repeat this packing process. We finally walked home. Prescott is more willing to be packed in like sardines. It makes me a bit claustrophobic and I guess I simply don't like such enforced physical closeness with a bunch of strangers. Very American attitude, I'm sure.

March 21

Yeltsin has proclaimed some emergency executive powers to the Russian presidency. These were almost immediately condemned by congressional leaders who have the most to lose (power-wise) from this. The question really is, will the vast majority of Russians back this move or oppose it? He has, in fact, suspended certain constitutional rights, claiming it will be

only until there is agreement on constitutional powers here. (That could be a while, though this could act as an incentive for all parties to work toward an agreement.)

Only time will tell whether he will succeed in tapping the great reservoir of feeling that firm and decisive measures by strong leadership are needed at the moment, or whether his opponents will succeed in their portrayal of him as a dangerous violator of the new democratic principles of the new Russia. There is possibly truth to both positions. I don't believe that Yeltsin should necessarily be trusted with too much power, but then there is no reason to necessarily believe his opponents when they claim that they will govern more wisely if allowed to replace him. More important to my mind than who will govern is the question of how they will gain power. They had better make every effort to achieve power through democratic means that will serve to prevent civil war here.

This afternoon we had a visit by one of the college English teachers, Ludmilla. We hadn't really talked to her in the past, and it proved an interesting conversation. She has been divorced for a number of years, and like so many single mothers, she has had a somewhat difficult time, with little or no help from her ex-husband. She and her eleven-year-old daughter have lived in a cramped room with only a bath and shared kitchen facilities. They hope to move into a new apartment that they have been paying on for several years in Novosibirsk, which should be ready by summer. She has worked at a number of jobs over the years, in a library, a publishing house, several schools and most recently at the College of Informatics. I suppose, like so many other people, crime and poverty concern her most. She seems to feel most acutely the fact that a good education is no guarantee these days that a person won't be poor or even be able to use her/his education fully.

Ludmilla is a rather serious and thoughtful sort of person. She seems to put a good deal of time and effort into her teaching. I must admit that I somewhat misjudged her, since her very precise English made her seem rather rigid to me. In fact, she seem to be more ready and willing to examine her teaching and child-rearing with an eye to improve it, than others who appear more easygoing and flexible but who, in fact, fall into lazy undisciplined habits in teaching or child-rearing, or life, in general. I hope, with the encouragement of such teachers, that it might be possible to organize a workshop during the student break on teaching methods, since we are apparently expected to do some work, where we would share our methods, ideas, and experiences.

March 22

There are signs of spring. The snow is still rather deep in the forest, where the sun doesn't penetrate quite so much, but the paths and roads are slowly melting, so that it won't be long before we'll be walking on bare ground in places, unless of course, it snows again. No one seems to particularly like this time of year with its combination of wet slippery ice, slush and mud.

Sergei told us the other day about a tourist train that makes a two and a half-day journey down to the mountainous Gorna Shoriya region and back. It leaves from downtown Novosibirsk on a Friday afternoon and returns on Sunday. We're debating whether to take it next week or wait until the end of April when the countryside would be green.

Mail service has been incredibly slow. It takes over a month for letters, and I have no idea how many of our letters are actually making it at all. I would like to believe that all will eventually. If there is anyone considering writing us, they should know that any letter sent after April 15 is liable to miss us, particularly if we make a trip to Macedonia during our last week here. The last letter we received was from Linda Good in mid March, sent in mid February. Thanks for the news, Linda, and the always cute picture of your granddaughter, Faye.

Prescott has found some time for artwork at home. She has done a number of studies of the snowy woods outside our window. I like to display some of this work, partly to adorn our somewhat bare walls, and partly because I think that some of her paintings and sketches are rather nice. She goes around, particularly if guests are expected, and removes these pictures from the walls. Always the unsatisfied perfectionist, she seems to want to wait until her work is worthy of the walls of the Louvre before allowing anyone else to see it. (My biased opinion here, of course.)

Prescott is also taking some Russian lessons from one of the English teachers. She should be able to develop a simple vocabulary in order to communicate many of her wishes or needs, but it would require intensive study to achieve much more than that.

My own Russian has undoubtedly improved, though I would still like greater opportunities to have extended conversations with people. I can always make myself understood. (if not the first time, in some rephrased way.) However, two Russians engaged in rapid conversation can still lose me, and the more literary or technical the language and I'm lost. Curiously, I usually understand the speeches of the President or members of the Congress of Deputies on TV, because as politicians they often speak slowly and carefully, and many of them speak in boring cliché's much of the time. I suppose that I get most frustrated when something was said that everyone else thought was very funny but I somehow missed.

I had hoped that some of my students might be able to correspond with students at SVC. I haven't ruled out presenting the idea to some of them and encouraging them to send letters to the college that an interested student might choose to respond to. However, the students here are a bit younger than SVC students, on the average 16 and 17, and with the present hard times the 70 ruble cost to send a letter abroad is a significant investment for many of them. The decision, of course, should be theirs to make, so the college may soon receive letters from my students.

The debate over the legality of President Yeltsin's move to rule by decree until a referendum scheduled for mid-April continued today. Demonstrators have appeared in front of government buildings to express either support or opposition. The focus of the news, however, is the on-going debate among the members of the Congress of People's Deputies, who view it as a direct challenge to their own authority. Evening television was dominated by the on-going special session of the presidium (or leadership of the Congress), which is apparently seeking a decision of the high court to rule on the legality of Yeltsin's actions, and there has also been talk of impeachment. Yeltsin's speech that precipitated this crisis was actually quite vague about the particulars of his rule by decree, and apparently nothing was written or signed to that effect; the power struggle seems to be moving toward a more decisive showdown either in the courts or more likely in the referendum, which will very likely be a vote of confidence or no-confidence in Yeltsin's government.

After having been mauled again today by an unruly mob of desperate commuters trying to board the bus I was attempting to exit, I can only feel increased hostility for every politician in the land. They have no idea what it is like to be one of the vast majority of average citizens who are dependent on public transportation or any of a number of increasingly unreliable public services. It would probably come as a surprise to them that most people view their public speeches and posturing with repugnance. From this distance it looks like they are all engaged in games to promote their own self-interest, their power and prestige, all at the expense of the average citizen who desperately needs government action to combat crime, improve inadequate public transportation, health care, etc. Does this sound at all familiar?

March 23

I picked up a little newspaper that focuses on crime in the Novosibirsk region. It is probably popular since it appeals to popular fears. This crime report had little stories about incidents such as a mysterious explosion that shattered windows and left an 80 centimeter wide by 30 centimeter deep hole in the road in one neighborhood. Several rapes and attempted rapes are listed. One article claims that 30 people died as a result of violence or accidents in Novosibirsk (a city of one million) during the March 8 holiday. A feature article focused on the activities of car thieves. One particularly sad article described a young soldier's impulsive desertion from his unit and eventual return after drifting around the countryside for a few days. He was sentenced to five years at hard labor at a military prison.

One rather odd little article consisted of a letter from a pensioner in Akademgorodok who had been conned out of 2,000 rubles by a some little old lady from a nearby village. The pensioner had invited this woman into her apartment to rest and have some tea before her bus ride home after a day of selling goods in the yard outside the central department store. The woman had promised to bring her host a little washing machine on her return trip the next week. The woman failed to appear, and after some inquiry she learned that the woman had given her a false address. Beware of grandmothers selling washing machines on street corners is the moral of this story, I suppose.

I asked my students about their television watching. How many hours did they watch and did they think it was time well spent? The reaction was mixed. Only one student out of 25 does not watch television at all. About one third of the students reported that they watched about two to three hours a day (some days more, some less.) Almost half reported that they watched about five hours a day, which is still somewhat below the incredible number of hours many American kids watch. A few told me that they watched five or more hours a day. Those who watched the most television were the least inclined to believe that there might be any harmful or negative effects or simply to regard the experience as a waste of time.

March 24

A student brought me some new jokes today. These were Army officer jokes. Apparently army officers are the favorite group for many here who want to tell jokes about incompetents and fools. Here's an example:

Two Army officers went to the train station. The one asked if he could buy a train ticket for Moscow from this station. He was told, "No, it's not possible." Then the other officer asked the ticket seller, "What about me, can I buy a ticket for Moscow?"

I had a rather interesting conversation with the college psychologist and "image-maker," another Ludmilla yesterday. She and I often talk when I have a break between classes. She is one of my opportunities to use Russian, since she doesn't know English, and she is always curious about my adjustment to life here and teaching. However, yesterday she shared an interesting situation in her own family with me. Her 22-year-old daughter, Olga, a medical doctor, has been "going with" an American student for a couple of years. This graduate student recently asked if Olga would marry him. Ludmilla and her husband have gotten to know this young man fairly well. He's intelligent, likable, good-looking, comes from a well-off family, (This, of course, is a relative concept.) and he has a promising future ahead of him. When her daughter asked her thoughts, however, Ludmilla advised her to think it over carefully. He is, after all, a foreigner. He may speak very good Russian, but there are enormous cultural differences that can make a marriage difficult. Ludmilla mentioned, for instance, his inability, even after three years here, to understand much of their humor. She suggested to her daughter that she think this over with her head as well as her heart. This young American returned to the U.S. alone the week before. This doesn't mean that Olga may not yet decide to marry him; however, she clearly has some doubts about the wisdom of this.

What struck me was the dilemma this girl must be in. She is an only child from an educated Russian family. She must see a lot she likes in this fellow or she wouldn't have spent so much time with him. However, her family, her parents, have in some ways made it clearer to her that a foreigner would never quite be able to be a close family member, and I can't help but think that her parents must fear that they'll lose a daughter to America rather than gain a son who could become a Russian. (Ludmilla told me that they had lost a son, who died of

appendicitis, when he was three.) We're invited over to meet her husband and daughter and have dinner with them. I almost feel as if I know too much about them, or, at least, I won't be able to avoid thinking about their relations with their young friend from America. Her decision to invite us over, however, made it necessary for her to say something about all of this in advance, I'm sure.

March 25

The present power struggle in Russia might best be described as a contest between those who fear that the coming changes will worsen their lot in life. What is good for one person is not always good for another. In a democracy it is hoped that the common good will prevail. It is very unclear who represents the will of the majority here. Elections of people's representatives based on a clear understanding of the policies such elected officials support would seem in order. Perhaps, as Yeltsin has proposed, a vote on the fundamental goals of the society at this time might also be in order. How power is achieved here still seems more important than the policies, in my opinion. People who are suffering due to bad policies might disagree.

My students had winter term exams today. I was a little disappointed by the results. They apparently did not spend much time studying for this exam. All of them made progress though, and I suppose this is the most important thing. My first-hour class continues to not take the subject seriously. At least their behavior in class has improved since I said something about it. I expect the third-hour class will, as usual, do much better.

The weather has been mild, but when the wind blows it can still be chilly. It is below freezing at night, so the ice and snow are still substantial, though bare patches are appearing in places. There is a lot of sneezing and coughing on the buses. Of more concern, however, are the people who contract more serious but somewhat mysterious ailments. The English teacher, Emma Alexandrovna, has been hospitalized after two weeks of fever. There are more reports of tainted food, and I always see signs of poor sanitation in public markets, so it is really no wonder.

The physicist Vladimir Viun visited yesterday for his first English lesson. He struggles considerably to make himself understood in English, but he has a good basic vocabulary to build upon. He has two months to prepare for his American visit. He seems like a good example of what I was trying to tell my students recently--get a good education and make yourself valuable and you will receive invitations to visit or even stay and live, from all over the place. Hewlett-Packard is paying for everything for Vladimir's visit to talk about his work with semi-conductors. There are also a couple of universities that would like him to visit. He asked me how he could pay for lessons and I suggested potatoes and, maybe, cabbage. His family, like many others, has a large garden and a good supply of root vegetables in storage.

March 26

It was a leisurely day at home. We made a brief trip out for supplies. Otherwise we rested and ate our way through the day. We've been trying to finish up a kilogram of frozen pelmeni that I bought a couple days ago. We were advised to avoid this prepared frozen variety of this meat and noodle dish. It's not great, but I've eaten worse. We've found some decent imported Bulgarian jam and wine and Polish grain beverage, so I'm content.

I watched some of the emergency session of the Congress of Deputies today. Televising these events could be risky for their democracy. Early on there was a debate over whether to make up new voting cards for the dozen or so deputies who had forgotten or lost some special voting card that each one must have in order to participate in the electronic voting in the Congress. I wonder how some of the folks back home in their districts felt while watching all of this. I realized after a half hour or so that as an outsider, I couldn't make head nor tail out of the debate even when I understood the words. Everybody supports democracy and reform and the constitutional process, but then they each make proposals that only insiders understand the significance of. I could not distinguish one faction from another. An uninformed outsider would have the same problem watching our Congress at work. Later in the evening a satirical program on the work of the Congress did some good spoofs on the politicians. The show ended with a phrase, "Bog ne vlast, Svinja ne Sojezda." ("The government authorities are not God, the Congress are not swine.") Every day the crisis always ends inconclusively. I think there is progress, but it's frustrating to watch on a daily basis.

March 27

I went down to the college and gave my second hour class their exam. This class always delights me with their interest and enthusiasm. If I have a problem with this group, it is a problem I welcome. A number of them linger after class and pester me with endless questions about the English language and literature.

Persistence of sorts has paid off in our efforts to get to know the musician Arkady and his friends better. This evening we went to listen to their band practice again, and we had our first opportunity to really get to know them all. It's truly a delight to listen to musicians who love what they are doing as much as this group does. They favor American bluegrass and related tunes. They could easily remind one of the enthusiastic soul band in the Irish movie "The Commitments" without, thank God, their craziness and disasters. Arkady is the live-in coordinator of a teen club that offers young people after-school and week end activities such as music, games, scouting, etc. In addition to his maintenance income, 10,000 rubles (about \$18) a month from the state for this important work, Arkady pursues his music and his main professional interest, video production. He has done a number of educational videos for classes at Novosibirsk University. He would like to pursue further video production studies at Everett Community College, and he is in the process of applying at the moment. His

background is in theater. He has a degree in theater studies, but his interests have gone beyond this.

March 28

I think that the teen club that Arkady coordinates was once what was called a "Krasniy Ugolok" or "Red Corner. " These were Soviet socialist youth organizations where groups such as the "Young Pioneers" would meet. Today the Boy Scouts meet there. The children probably don't find this as strange as some of their elders. Change is much more a part of the lives of the young, I suppose.

A disturbing but somewhat predictable development was the appearance of a notice on the bulletin board at the university announcing a film about the life and beliefs of Reverend Sun Myung Moon. It is another sign that they are receiving everything the free world has to offer. I hope that for every dubious import like the weird and somewhat scary moonies that there is some truly welcome import that was never available during Soviet rule. I suppose, though, that I will now feel obliged to share what I know of the right-wing militant Moon organization. It has drawn many young people in the U.S. into a life of labor on street corners, work that has made Moon a rich and powerful man. I was not aware of just how insidious recruitment into Moon's church could be until our young friend, Dane, a sensible and good a person as any I've known, fell in with the Moonies. Fortunately, he had parents who did their homework and then proceeded to help him extricate himself from their group by sensible means. Others have not been so lucky, however, and I would like people here to know about the dangers.

It rained yesterday afternoon after the temperature rose above freezing. It must be colder today because it has been snowing most of the morning. (There is still two feet of snow.) We went out late in the afternoon to visit the family of one of our colleagues at the college. Ludmilla, the college psychologist and her husband, Lev, an engineer who specializes in laser research at an institute, and their 22-year-old daughter, Olga, a medical doctor, are long time residents of the Akademgorodok. Like many people here, they grow a large garden and preserve a considerable amount of food. We ate several varieties of berries, small yellow and dark blue berries ranging from sour to sweet in taste. These, and strawberries, had been frozen last summer. We also ate pickled or preserved vegetables--cucumbers, onions and peppers. In addition, we had potatoes, carrots and cabbage from their root cellar. It was all very good, though the combination with vodka and wine, was a little hard for me to digest. Prescott never seems to have problems with strange foods or combinations of foods, which is a very good thing if you intend to be a world traveler.

This family, with their professional backgrounds, would be quite well off in the U.S. Here they have a one-bed apartment, an aging car, and catastrophically reduced incomes that, at present, do not allow them to take vacations, eat in restaurants, or buy more than a minimal number of consumer goods such as coats, boots, radios, etc. Ludmilla told me that it has been about two years now that their family (along with about 90% of the population) have been

reduced to such poverty. I wish our conversations didn't so often have to dwell on such subjects.

The Russian Congress almost impeached President Yeltsin today. 617 deputies voted for impeachment. If 689 had done so, the motion would have carried. Apparently, a considerable number of the deputies thought the President was drunk when he addressed the Congress on Friday. I watched the speech. He looked a little ragged, but more sympathetic viewers thought he was just in a bad way after the funeral of his mother. (There's a fair chance that there was a good deal of drinking at the wake.) Speaker of the Congress, Hasbulatov, was almost recalled as well in a close vote. So who do the Deputies like? A lot of Muscovites still seem to like Yeltsin; more than 100,000 showed up in Red Square to show their support today. Most people we met don't seem to have strong feelings about politics. I attribute this to years of non-participation in the political process. There may be other reasons, however, that I am not aware of.

Well, I'll toss this in the mail and try to be optimistic about its chances of reaching you. Our friends here tell us that a lot of letters just disappear. We've only received three in two months time.

March 29

We received several more letters today. Prescott also found a new shortwave station- Radio Netherlands, in English, that comes in quite clearly and has much more Western news than most. Sergei stopped by this evening and we talked about history and the current political crisis here. He seems to think that if the present power struggle continues we could see the return of civil war here. He seems to have no confidence in Yeltsin. Others have told me that he is a good orator, but he is incompetent as a chief executive, and they miss Gorbachev's expertise and competence. Sergei wouldn't be surprised if the communists, who are still the largest organized group in the society, attempted another seizure of power similar to the coup attempt of August 1991. He believes that a more decisive and determined group of conspirators could possibly regain power for the communists. Not a pleasant thought. Some of the conspirators from the previous coup attempt were soon to be put on trial. It would be wise, in Sergei's opinion, if these old men, many of whom are considered heroes of the Great Patriotic War, were amnestied rather than made into martyrs.

March 31

Today we visited the English teacher Avieta and her husband Nikolai. They are observing the Lenten fast, so they served us fish and various dishes that contained no animal fats or dairy products. Avieta's mother's family were forced to move to Siberia because her grandfather was a priest, and her grandmother a member of the upper class. Nikolai's father first came to Siberia in the 1930's to escape the famine in the Ukraine at the time. Both of them had parents who were "repressed", meaning that they were among the some 12 million people who

eventually got sent to prison camps for various questionable offenses against the regime. This was a very convenient way for Stalin to force industrial development. Slave laborers do not require pay, nor do their masters have to bargain with them over working conditions, and, from all accounts, these workers suffered terribly as a result. Perhaps, as some argue, the country became a formidable industrial giant as a result. However, I believe that such labor did more to poison the spirit of cooperation to build a socialist utopia than any other single practice of the state.

This infirm foundation only proved to be useful for the construction of a highly centralized totalitarian military machine. It rarely succeeded in advancing the quality of life of most people. Cramped, poorly constructed public transit, housing and medical services, shoddy consumer goods and increased indifference to the suffering of one's neighbors, human and others, are the result, in many cases. (Also, according to Sergei, up until the late fifties nearly 400 million rural village people, organized into collective farm labor, received subsistence wages and, as a result of an internal passport system, were bound to the land upon which they labored nearly as tightly as the unemancipated serfs of the early 19th century and before.)

This brings me to to the present. It will be a tremendous task to restore faith in society. Take, for example, the postal system. The vast majority here are convinced that the sullen, underpaid postal workers delay the mail and lose or destroy a considerable part of it. Therefore, sensible people send their correspondence via reliable couriers, friends or acquaintances who will be visiting the city, region or state where one wishes to send a letter or package. I don't doubt that the delay or loss of mail is greater here than at home, and it will be interesting to see how many of my once a week journal-letters actually make it back to the U.S. But I suspect that the vast majority will arrive, just as I suspect most visitors or even residents will not be the victims of crime, despite the widespread fear caused by the reports of what I would still call isolated incidents, by Western standards.

This lack of faith in one's fellow man (or woman) has all manner of consequences. How can business and trade operate and expand, for example, if everyone is afraid to trust their correspondence to the chief mail carrier, the state-run postal service? Prescott has also made me aware of my own increased paranoia here. I spend far too much time dwelling on the dangers of poorly grown, treated and handled food here. Yes, there are problems with the quality of the food supply, but fears, at least my own, have grown out of proportion to the actual dangers. It must mainly be fear of an uncontrollable unknown, fed by reports of isolated incidents of tainted wine, fish, rice or whatever. (Large shipments of certain of these items from China were, in fact, the cause of illness and some deaths.) Unfortunately, paranoias of various kinds appear to be a widespread problem here. Their sources, I suspect, are similar to that of my own increased paranoia. If people don't believe that the people they depend upon to grow food, deliver mail, etc., are reliable, and especially if they don't believe that progress is being made to rectify the situation, and they feel powerless to take any action (vote, write

letters, organize demonstrations or activities) to help rectify the situation themselves, then they'll be increasingly paranoid.

Today the weather was clear, which meant that everything froze up solid at night and then proceeded to thaw out again during the afternoon. Kids were out of school, so there were a considerable number of the younger set splashing around and dragging sticks and other things through the muddy puddles. The messy spring thaw is always a nuisance for adults and a source of special fun for youngsters of a certain age.

April 1

It was a particular delight to travel to the college this morning. New buses are finally arriving on the scene--big comfortable buses with plenty of room for everyone. There was some good news at the college, too. Nearly a dozen letters, including a recent copy of the Christian Science Monitor were waiting for me. Apparently the college president's recent trip to Moscow has been highly successful as well, and we're all in line for substantial pay raises that could make our wages comparable to that of teachers in Western Europe or the U.S. All of this appears to be the result of the new spirit of cooperation among the several branches of government that has triggered an explosion of public--spirited enthusiasm among all of the vast corps of state service workers. Later on this morning I'll venture out and see if any of my fantasy has by any chance materialized.

April 2

There was a letter today from SVC, including a book that will be very useful in my teaching. According to the short letter from Debra Lancaster, who I assume works in the administration in Mount Vernon, it has been exceptionally dry there. We all know that could have changed with a vengeance by now.

Sergei visited again this evening. He, as usual, provided us with a delightful rambling account of history, politics and society in the former USSR. He, himself, expresses shock at the harshness and brutality of much of even more recent history. His own mother came to Siberia as a teenaged member of a youth work brigade, one of many people who were trying to flee the harsh conditions of early post-war European Russia and the Ukraine. Little information has been available in the West about the extent of the famine that followed the Second World War. I saw a television interview with President Kravchuk of the Ukraine the other day in which he said that he first learned the details himself when previously closed files were made available in 1989.

One interesting statistic Sergei told us was that the Soviet paper Komsomolskaya Pravda holds the Guinness book world record for the largest daily circulation of a paper (25 million) and weekly (33 million). This was during the days of perestroika when this paper was one of the chief venues for the debate over reform. Apparently, change in Russia has long been

introduced in mass publications, dating back to the early 19th century. In the current economic conditions, mass publications are struggling to survive. Most people are relying on television for news, commentary and entertainment.

April 3

Today we're planning to visit Emma Alexandrovna in the hospital. She has been sick with high fever and other symptoms for several weeks. She has been in the hospital for over a week now. It is not quite clear what has caused her illness. Her friend Avieta told us it was possibly complications following the flu. In any case, it has resulted in the cancellation of her planned visit to Moscow and, probably, a planned intensive teaching assignment in April.

The visit to Emma Alexandrovna was positive and depressing at the same time. Positive in that she was on the mend. No fever for 3 days. She said she was a bit tired, but mainly she was feeling bored in the hospital, which is always a good sign in a hospital patient. They may release her by Monday. She showed us a recent letter from Jerry, the previous American English teacher at the college, a retired Skagit Valley College instructor. He mentioned his visits with the Russians in the U.S., who, according to Jerry, have some trouble adjusting and enjoying their time in America. Beyond the usual misery of being an alien, I can imagine that many Russians must feel a certain amount of guilt about enjoying the pleasures of America's luxurious automobiles, restaurants, supermarkets, housing, entertainments, etc., that are unavailable to family and friends back home. And today it is no longer a matter of fleeing an evil dictatorship but probably feels a bit like abandoning your mother (Russia) because she is shabby and poor. It can be depressing though to be reminded of Russian poverty. Unfortunately, the visit to the hospital did just that. The main hospital of the Academic City, like so much else here, is terribly run down. There is cracked plaster, peeling paint, missing floor tile, dirty hallways and a general atmosphere of neglect in the building. Like so much in this society that depends on public funds, the health care system appears near collapse. There is a lack of equipment and staff. Whole sections of the hospital appeared almost deserted. I doubt that fewer people are in need of care than in the past, but such under-staffed, under-financed facilities are probably simply not treating any but the most serious cases today. The poverty here is always a bit shocking to me as it further reveals itself over time. I am not at all obsessed with material things, but even I can sometimes grasp the terrible plight of the average person here. Try to imagine what it would be like if your income were reduced to about 1/10 of what it is today. What would you continue to buy? What would be way beyond your means that you once enjoyed? Here, many car owners have sold, failed to repair a vehicle that broke down or put their car in storage and begun using public transportation. They have put off buying new clothes or products for their homes such as carpets, irons, pots and pans, etc. The largest part of ones income goes towards the purchase of food. One thinks twice about sending letters to friends overseas. The cost of a letter is about 70 rubles. A month's bus pass is 140 rubles.

An average income is probably 10,000 rubles. That would make a letter abroad cost the equivalent of about \$7. Irina remarked to Prescott the other day that the 90% of the population who are living in poverty are beginning to resent the 10% who are doing very well today. I wouldn't doubt it, and I wouldn't be surprised if some of this resentment doesn't spill over on to foreign businessmen who come here in search of big bucks. I would advise American businessmen to invest in the wonderful opportunities in Russia today, but if you flaunt your wealth and power here, and especially if you get greedy and take away a good deal of wealth while generating very little for the Russian people, you can bet that there will be a potentially violent reaction to the introduction of the free enterprise system here. It is very important at this time that all of the people of this society receive a share of the action and better social services. This means swift and fair division of public property during privatization and some foreign aid to prop up medical, social and other public services.

The college president's most recent trip to Moscow yielded fair results. Prescott and I received a combined income of 45,000 rubles (about \$65), about 12,000 less than last month but a real improvement over the month before that. Inflation of 1% - 1 1/2% per day can eat up any raise rather easily.

This evening we attended a modern dance program at the House of Scientists. It was the company of Natalia Fiksel. It reminded me of the dance performances of the talented amateurs on South Whidbey. This is actually a compliment to favorably compare them. After the performance we met a very interesting boy and his dog. He overheard us speaking English with Olga, the daughter of our colleague Ludmilla. This young French-Canadian, Bernoire, is on a two year odyssey bicycle trip with his dog, Misha. He rides a mountain bike with a little trailer for Misha and his supplies.

He has been traveling across Northern Europe earning money at odd jobs, street singing (French-Canadian folk songs) and receiving something from the CBC for occasional reports on life in various lands he passes through. He contacts mayors and radio and television stations, where he exchanges his own public charm as a French-Canadian goodwill ambassador with stories, songs and observations for video footage to be sent to his CBC sponsors and in exchange for shelter and usually friendship and goodwill.

He is living proof that a young man armed only with an adventurous spirit, a good soul and goodwill can roam our world in relative harmony and safety. In Russia, as well as elsewhere, people go to great lengths to make his journey a good one. When he became bogged down in the mud outside of Perm, a Russian truck took him and his dog all the way to Novosibirsk. He will bicycle on to Krasnoyarsk soon. At present he is in the Akademgorodok, staying with a scientist family, whose youngest son is crazy about his dog Misha.

April 5

The Vancouver summit has received widespread news coverage here. Clinton's and Yeltsin's speeches sounded ok to me. I share the pessimism about whether aid will reach the people who need it most but may, in fact, fall instead into the hands of the same people who successfully funneled 30 billion in aid in the past into Western bank accounts in their names. Yeltsin may be doing all he can to bolster his popularity prior to the scheduled April 25 vote of confidence. If the summit of the seven leading economic states in the world on April 11 comes through with some effective aid, he may actually squeak through in the referendum. A poll yesterday suggested that if the referendum were held now, he would receive 40% of the vote. (Only 20% would vote against him, 20% would not vote at all, and 20% are undecided.)

Time to go out and do a little shopping and mail this. Hope all is well there. Hello to all our friends.

April 6

We're back at school after a week's vacation. Another packet of our letters, collected by Darcy Sinclair, arrived today, renewing hopes that much, most, maybe all of our correspondences have arrived safely. However, as of March 10, the postmark of her packet, no one had received anything from us. I now have a new and improved source of English lessons in the book I requested from Skagit Valley College that arrived during the vacation. I tried some lessons out on students today. If I could copy some pages, it would be a more effective tool for teaching. Unfortunately, this isn't easy to do here. (I'm still not quite prepared to totally honor laws regarding copyright privileges. The bottom line for me is how to most effectively provide students with knowledge of a given subject. When only one copy of a valuable book is available, I tend to favor making photocopied portions available.) Today I made the acquaintance of the new astronomy teacher at the college, Igor Petrenko. Igor invited me after classes to visit the youth club where he works in the late afternoons. It was an impressive place. It was a four-story building with extensive facilities for various kinds of activities. There were entire workshops devoted to model airplanes, model boats, radio and electronic equipment, amateur radio, and astronomy. Igor's astronomy lab had computer programs for the kids to engage in interactive learning, lots of gadgets, film equipment, and an excellent telescope in an observatory on the roof. We looked at a few sunspots and a film on sunspot activity with the kids, and then Igor showed me around the other workshops. Igor is also very interested in solar power.

I think our old friend on Whidbey Island, Leonard Good, should apply for work here. It all reminded me of a larger-scale version of Leonard's rather extensive hobby shop at home. He would find many kindred spirits among the staff of this facility. (I'll try and pick up an application for a U.S. exchange teacher and if that's not feasible, you ought to at least consider stopping by if you're in the area, Leonard.)

We may soon spend an evening viewing the stars through the observatory telescope, and maybe, we'll try and get someone in the amateur radio club to try and contact our friend Jack Bock at his short wave station on South Whidbey. Their call sign at the club is UZ90WE and they're often active between 1:00 and 4:00 GMT.

April 7

My adult students visited again today and continued their English lessons at our place. I like this atmosphere for conducting a small class. We sit around sipping tea, discussing topics in English, and reviewing exercises in books. Arkady has another friend who may join us in the future.

We have been watching a premier television series that addresses some of the misery of Stalinist times. This show, based on a novel published in the mid-eighties, portrays the complicated situation for a group of Soviet agricultural researchers in the early fifties. They want to do legitimate scientific work, but they are confronted by a "Correct party line" at the time that requires adherence to the crackpot theories of a Soviet geneticist named Lysenko. Soviet agricultural research failed to make much progress during these years due to the persecution of legitimate scientists and adherence to this erroneous genetic theory. The series is very well done, which further highlights the fact that many Russians are indeed aware of the fact that the Mexican and American melodramatic series that are being imported these days are not very good. They probably can't afford to import some of the best of what our film industry has to offer, but it is so embarrassing to have a series like one called "Santa Barbara" represent American film art here.

April 8

Speaking of low quality, we just heard the news this morning that a nuclear waste storage tank exploded in Tomsk, about 200 miles to the northeast. About 2,000 hectares of land were contaminated and there is concern that when the snow melts this contamination will be spread further. There was also apparently a radioactive cloud that floated off over the taiga. It didn't--according to authorities--pass over populated areas, so if these authorities are to be believed, it is more of a crime against nature than people that occurred this time. Later reports are suggesting that the environmental destruction was worse than authorities first claimed. An area nine-by-twenty kilometers, 180 square kilometers, was contaminated with highly toxic material that probably also endangered the lives of the workers who were exposed while responding to the explosion. It is believed that it will not be possible to clean up such widespread contamination. A nearby village was exposed to radiation, but not the city that lies to the south.

There was some mixed good news on other fronts. The legal status of the breakaway former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where I have many relatives and friends, has been normalized in the U.N. This Switzerland-sized Balkan state was officially voted into the U.N.

under the peculiar name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This name was decided upon because Macedonia's name dispute with neighboring Greece remains unresolved. The Greeks effectively blocked any attempt to have the state accepted under the same name as the northern Greek province of Macedonia. This name has long been used for this Yugoslav, or South Slav, republic that lies to the north of Greece. War is still quite possible, and further disputes with neighbors are inevitable, but there is more hope now that normal relations can be established with other states. I haven't totally abandoned the idea of visiting Macedonia at the end of our time here, maybe the last week of May.

Prescott visited her first Russian banya, or steam bath today, along with Irina and some of her friends. Her descriptions made it sound both somewhat exotic and familiar. They spent several hours apparently alternating between a steam room, a cold and cool bath and showers, and an oatmeal, and other facials. They also rubbed salt and salt with a cream all over themselves, and at one point they also switched themselves and each other with birch switches. This apparently stimulates blood flow. They wore light stocking caps and wrapped themselves in sheets and towels between cold dips and saunas. They also included an onion-skin hair rinse at one point. It all sounded somewhat entertaining, though Prescott has suggested that she personally could take it or leave it. She has been invited to go again on subsequent Thursdays if she would like. It costs about 100 rubles an hour. I've also been invited to visit a bath by Valerian, the businessman who has visited the Seattle area several times. I'll probably take him up on the offer some time.

One other interesting experience today was a visit to a meeting of the English club at the House of Scientists. We were attracted by a notice that said that they would be discussing personality formation in Russia and the U.S. in an open round-table discussion. There were about 25 English-speaking Russians, four Americans and an Englishman. The discussion was lively and informative. We all agreed that U.S. and Russian parents want their children to be happy, and we also agreed that most people are guided by some fairly universal ethical and moral principles, and mean well. However, it became clear that most Russians are not comfortable with individualism, particularly individual business or commercial activity. For example, one older Russian man mentioned the controversy it sparked in his household when a ten-year-old granddaughter suggested that she wanted to gather wild flowers and sell them on the street. Some of the Russians thought that they would not interfere if one of their children wished to do such a thing, but it was clear that in contrast, the American attitude towards such activities was nearly universal support. We Americans all agreed that we thought that it was a valuable learning experience for a child, and not to be discouraged. (Prescott brought up environmental concerns.) There seemed to be a certain belief, which I also shared, that while the Russian passive collective thinking of the past was not adequate preparation for membership in a modern industrial society, the American stress on individualism seems rather excessive as well. We'll probably attend the next meeting, in a week, that will discuss the health care systems of the U.S. and Russia.

April 9

I called the home where the young French adventurer Bernoire is staying, and I was told that Bernoire had been sick and had even required hospital care, at least temporarily. (We stopped by the hospital to visit our friend Emma Alexandrovna, and I inquired after Bernoire, but they didn't have a patient by that name, so, hopefully, he is out of the hospital.) It's disturbing to hear reports of illness, particularly when there is so little the doctors or hospitals can actually do for anyone these days.

April 10

I was frustrated in my efforts to find detailed accounts of the nuclear accident or the Macedonian entry into the U.N. Novosibirsk doesn't receive issues of the Moscow dailies, published nearly 1,500 miles away, until nearly four or five days after the fact. On April 10 I was unable to find a newspaper published after April 6. Maybe by Monday the 12th I can read about events of April 8th.

After my classes, which are going much better now that I have a familiar and more up to date textbook, (The Russian textbooks are all based on somewhat antiquated British English). We visited Emma at the hospital near our home. Maybe it cheers her up a little. She isn't in a bad way though. It appears that she has a persistent infection of some kind that is mainly a source of tiredness. She may be there another week, during which time Prescott may take over her classes. Emma confirmed my observation that the hospital looked rather run-down. She said that there was little medicine or treatment available, in contrast to a few years ago, when their own medical industry was still functioning.

It is still difficult to understand how the economy simply collapsed. I suppose this is a lot like the depression of the 1930's in the U.S.

Prescott's students' newsletter was released today. It is an interesting (particularly if you happen to be 16 or 17, I suppose) four page paper with interviews, a story about Madonna, comics and a crossword puzzle. It looks fairly good graphically; Prescott has contributed as technical Adviser. The student artwork, cartoons and graphics are also of good quality. Prescott had only the vaguest idea of what the content was until Emma and I translated much of it for her. I think that despite Prescott's feeling that she can't be actively enough involved in the process due to the language barrier, it was a genuine contribution to the college to revive a college newsletter. (They apparently did have one in past years, but not very recently.)

At about 10 p.m. this evening Nikolai Sychoy, the college president, knocked on our door and told me to come upstairs to take a phone call from the states. My first reaction was a bit of anxiety that something had happened to someone back home, but the phone call was a much-appreciated call from Carol Huber from the South Whidbey branch of Skagit Valley College. I was delighted to hear that five of my letters had already arrived at the college. Our mail has

been sparse enough (five letters as of now, I believe) that I was having a few doubts about the mail service. Carol's concern about us and the Tomsk explosion was appreciated, though I assured her that we were in no danger from this disaster. Not to say that it wasn't serious. Carol said that she would try and send a few small items we might appreciate -- some books, a magazine, an egg carton, etc. As I told Carol though, the main thing was the call. Although we're certainly well-treated here, after two and a half months we're finally beginning to feel a bit more isolation as foreigners. I suppose we have too deeply rooted ourselves on the island to easily live for an extended period in someone else's country. The time is passing quickly and we'll be home all too soon, in any case, I suspect.

April 11

We spent the day strolling about the Akademgorodok. The sun was shining and many people were out doing the same. The snow is melting and there are muddy patches beginning to appear in places, as well as numerous little puddles, ponds, and rivulets. If the weather remains in the 40's and 50's the snow will all be gone within a week. (It still freezes at night though.) We mainly looked for some of the colorful new birds that have begun to arrive from the south. I saw what looked like cedar waxwings yesterday, as well as some other species that I couldn't recognize.

April 12

I'll go mail this letter this morning. Prescott is going to the college to help Irina with her English classes. I'll prepare for my own classes today. I'll probably only write one or two more letters, since further letters will only arrive after we do.

April 13

The ice and snow continue to melt and by afternoon one is comfortable in a light jacket or sweater. Bus service has improved slightly. A few newer buses have appeared in the Academic City. It may be another herald of spring or just a government move to soften up the population before the referendum.

I think there are a number of signs of efforts to incline the population to vote for Yeltsin in the upcoming election. The premiere television presentation of the adaptation of the book Bjeliye Odezhd, is one of these. This seven part series, which has airman in recent weekly episodes, highlights some of the most evil days and practices of former communist rule. It stars some of the Soviet Union's most popular movie stars, and it is very well done.

We attended a concert at the House of Scientists this evening. It was a set of piano duets. The Russian pianists performed some lively Russian classical pieces followed by an American couple who played some modern American works. The master of ceremonies warned us ahead of time that the Russians were more passionate and flamboyant, the Americans more

subdued. The Russians were urged into an encore; the Americans were politely applauded. Their performance was very good, but Prescott and I thought that their musical choices could have been better. Their best piece, an adaptation of an excerpt from a Gershwin work, would have sounded better to us in a "cleaner" version of the original. I suppose I'm just reacting to a desire to have American culture put its best foot forward here. It may not be possible to thoroughly please a Russian audience at the moment. At a time when they are suffering so much humiliation because of the old system's collapse, every opportunity to demonstrate Russian expertise in some field is leaped at. This was demonstrated recently in efforts to make the Day of the Cosmonauts, April 12, a source of national celebration.

April 14

We visited Igor Pyatkov, the astronomy teacher at the college, in his laboratory at the Club of Young Technicians again today. He has a wide range of interests, and he appears to be an original thinker with a number of papers published in various scientific journals. He wouldn't mind translating some of his projects into a money-making business, but, like many people here, he isn't quite certain how to proceed. There are some confusing regulations still in effect from Soviet rule that discourage many people.

Yesterday I asked my students to write a short essay describing what they hoped their lives would be like in ten years. Maybe half the students wanted to be rich someday. They hope that computer science, in particular, will be their ticket to success. A considerable number of the students would be content to be middle class, to be the owner of a private home with a small yard and have a good wife or husband, a couple of kids and a dog or cat. (It struck me recently that the exclusive, private homes of some of the leading scientists in the Academic City that most people, crammed into big, crowded apartment buildings, regard as their dream homes, are about the equivalent of what your average Yugoslav villager enjoys today.)

Other students were more individual in their dreams. One student wanted to own a greenhouse and have a small vegetable farm with produce to truck to the city. Another student thought she wouldn't live that long but said she wouldn't mind since, in her opinion, the most interesting people were all dead. A third student wanted to live in England and be an authority on Celtic traditional culture. Another thought he would make a good future president of Russia. It was interesting that only two of over twenty-five students thought bachelorhood would be preferable and only two wanted to live outside Russia. Recently I heard that nationwide, younger-people (under 30) are mostly optimistic about the prospects for a good future as a result of economic reform and privatization here. The over-60-year-old citizen is predictably, perhaps, far more pessimistic. We'll see what all this means for the future of Russia as many of these people go to the polls on April 25, the day of the referendum on economic reform and the Yeltsin presidency.

April 15

Prescott has been teaching Emma Alexandrovna's class on Tuesday and Thursday in addition to her own graphic arts elective class on Tuesday and Friday. She may have been launched in a new career as a teacher, whether she intended to do so or not. She seems quite conscientious. For example, she has been spending considerable time this week arranging a video showing at the college of some of Valerian's footage of the U.S., which includes printing technology and some scenes of Skagit Valley College and Mount Vernon.

Today my students probably went home and told their parents that the visiting American teacher had them practice lying today. The assignment was to compose an excuse to explain why they weren't in school yesterday. Then I asked each of them why he or she didn't come to class. Each one read or recited an excuse. Some were quite entertaining, such as the student who was visited by space aliens. I tried to make it more interesting by questioning them further as if I were a skeptical teacher being fed a dubious line by some student who had missed my class.

We went over to the observatory at the Club of Young Technicians this evening to look through the telescope, but, unfortunately, clouds had rolled in and it wasn't possible to do any star gazing. We did have an opportunity to visit the amateur radio club and talk to a young ham radio operator there. Alexei will be trying to contact our friend Jack coming days as conditions permit. Contact with America is best in the late evening and early morning here. He may try again on Saturday night.

We also met two more Americans living in our building. Sara and Philip are a young Lutheran missionary couple who are here to try and establish a Lutheran church. I suppose that formerly Godless Russia is considered fertile ground for missionaries. I think that they will have some limited success in forming a congregation. They intend to establish a permanent Lutheran mission here. I regard Lutheran mission work here as far more benign an influence than the more radical fundamentalist evangelical missionary activity. This is my own bias, but I base it on personal experience with Lutheran organizations back home that have provided useful social services.

April 16

Prescott's presentation came off well today. Apparently, the real highlight was the footage of an American supermarket. Irina also remarked to me that she was very impressed by the scenes in an American elementary school. It was somewhat of a model school, though, with computer terminals in every classroom. Valerian's daughter Katya and her boyfriend "Bobby" are feeling particularly discouraged by the lack of opportunities at home. When they watch her father's videos, they begin to fantasize about how much easier life would be if they could only emigrate to that land of plenty.

April 17

We had a visit today from an English-speaking physicist, Anatoli, whom we met at the English club. He is a democratic faction activist and a Yeltsin supporter who puts posters up and collects signatures on petitions in support of Yeltsin, among other things. His scientific work includes some interesting work on environmental monitoring systems. It will certainly be a good opportunity to get another perspective on Russian society as we get to know Anatoli and his circle of friends a bit.

Later in the evening we went off to the radio club to see Alexei again. He told us that he had relayed a message of greeting from us to friends of Jack among the Russian radio amateurs, and we talked about trying to arrange a conversation with him. Perhaps it will happen in the coming weeks. Alexei has, of course, tried to call North America while we were there, but the timing of our visits hasn't been so good for communication with Jack. It has been interesting to talk to Alexei, though. He is about 17 or 18, and he is in his last year of a program in a polytechnic (technician's high school) which will qualify him to be a professional operator. He says he wouldn't mind working at a weather station in the Siberian far north. He is a typical zealous radio operator who can be content sitting at his set for long periods. He says that he often stays at the club's radio for periods of 24 to 48 hours. Jack would enjoy talking to him, and he may, if we have any luck. Of course, Alexei doesn't speak any English so we would need to translate for him.

After we left the radio club we spent a miserable hour or more waiting in cold, windy, rainy weather for a bus. We could hear church bells in the background. The Orthodox Easter is April 18, and it was nearly midnight, when the faithful would gather for a service. We were too cold and wet- to want bed do more than hurry home to bed.

April 18

Orthodox Easter--The rain must have turned to snow some time during the night so we were greeted by a lovely white layer on the surrounding forest this morning. It was a particularly pleasant sight after several days of rain and mud that has made trips out much less appealing. It will be more in keeping with the joyous atmosphere associated with Easter to make our way to an Easter meal at Irina and Oleg's today through a forest with clean, white, freshly fallen snow.

As we might have expected, there was a big spread of tasty dishes. There were the usual shredded raw carrot, cabbage and beet salads. The main dishes included a meat-, potato- and egg-filled pastry; fried hamburger and potatoes; and the meat-, and in this case, squash and onion-filled, steamed dough dish called montee. There were also appetizers and dessert pastries. It was probably to be expected that a meal with an army officer's family would include a good deal of alcohol. There were three families represented: Renat, an Uzbeki, born in Alma Ata, and his wife, Olya, a Russian-Uzbek pediatrician; Sveta, a Ukrainian

mathematician, whose husband Sergei was on duty that day; and Oleg and Irina. The group was probably representative of the broad ethnic makeup of the former Soviet army. I particularly enjoyed the Uzbeki family. Renat brought his guitar along and sang several Russian songs--old love songs and at least one old World War II partisan song.

This was probably the first gathering I've attended where it was not possible to limit my vodka consumption. The two officers drank copious quantities of this firewater and insisted on endless toasts that I felt obliged to participate in. Despite sincere attempts to stay sober, I didn't. However, it was Oleg who spun a bit out of control, babbling on and annoying everyone a bit. His political opposition to Yeltsin had been hardened earlier in the day when the vice president, Alexander Rutskoi, had resigned and revealed on national television what he said was documented proof of widespread corruption within the Yeltsin government. It was good timing to try and influence the election. Most people probably won't know who to believe. Hard-core Yeltsin supporters probably won't be convinced at all, and opponents such as Oleg will be further confirmed in their opposition.

It was probably a good microcosm of the society in the room; the guests were somewhere in the middle, favoring democratic reforms, but not certain of Yeltsin as the one to carry them out. Oleg and Irina were the most at odds, risky business for the long-term prospects for harmony in the family. Oleg went much too far, though, prompting others to half-jokingly declare him a Stalinist. The tension, unfortunately, is real and exists within many families and circles of friends. The terrible economic and social conditions are leading some to the conclusion that the old dictatorship wasn't all that bad after all, though I believe that most people are resisting such a solution to the society's problems. Oleg was fairly well-behaved toward the American guests, being probably predictably loosest with his tongue with his wife, our fellow teacher Irina.

He couldn't resist, though, telling me about his resentment of U.S. military adventures around the world and the fact that the U.S. citizenry has finally gotten around to honoring and providing support to Vietnam vets, something that has not yet happened to as great a degree among Russians regarding their own Afghan vets.

April 19

I don't feel quite myself this morning. It is cold and the landscape is snow covered again, much like it was a month ago. It could change in a few days again, I'm sure. So we spent most of the day at home, and in the late afternoon we went food shopping. The fresh snow in the forest (our shopping trips always require a half-mile walk through the woods) reminded me again of how beautiful the snow has been for most of our time here. Prescott later went to visit one of the teachers from the college. I stayed home and watched game shows on television. Actually, I did some preparation for my classes while watching the evening game shows. The game shows differ from our own in that they involve teams. Either children and parents, or school or university teams, ranging from bright ten-year-olds to learned scholars.

There is a pride in intellectual activity in this society that Americans might do well to imitate. The contestants problem-solve or recite facts and the winners receive small gifts by our standards (walkman transistor radios, cassette players, etc.), and the older the contestant, the more token the reward.

April 20

After this day of classes, we went in the evening to see a one-man performance of a "Little Theatre." This show consisted of a table-sized stage set with little dolls and an "actor" who spoke the lines of each character as he manipulated each one in turn and focused a small spotlight on the one whose lines were being delivered. The play was an adaptation of the Dostoevsky work "Poor People." The lines were delivered with convincing dramatic effect and the overall atmosphere of the theater was sufficient to create the magic of the theater. After the performance, we joined the actor, Slava, and his "stage crew," Igor, and some of the young audience members in a gathering in a nearby dormitory.

It was our first time in a dormitory. The students and young working people who lived there shared bedrooms, two to a room, and had communal kitchens and baths. There were a number of children and pets and a general atmosphere of crowding and clutter. But there was nothing depressing about it. Because the population was young, it seemed to make some sense that they would be obliged to spend a few years in a crowded dormitory, paying their dues, so to speak. At that age it seems less a hardship, too. The dozen or so people who crowded into one of the rooms seemed comfortable with all of the improvisation of finding chairs, utensils, etc., and space to sit. The atmosphere reminded me of the pleasant communal gatherings of my own student days--good music, a cheerful youthful crowd sharing food and drink, jokes and stories. It was all very familiar. No one was particularly concerned about not owning much of anything or being a success. Anxiety about making something of oneself usually sets in later.

April 21

We didn't have to teach today, so I spent the morning at the Club of Young Technicians with Igor and his astronomy club. The kids were playing with the computers, and Igor and I talked about astronomy clubs in the United States. He had several back issues of an astronomy journal published in the U.S. Igor wanted some clarification about some of what he had read. The advertisements were of particular interest to him.

In the evening we attended another concert of the Novosibirsk Philharmonic. It was a lively performance of works by the 19th century French composer Berlioz. A young classical music fan whom we met at the piano duets the week before told us that the American couple we heard perform had received some scathing criticism in press reports. Other musical commentators, however, objected to this, arguing that this event had been an invitational performance, not a competition, and that such criticism was inappropriate. After the concert,

we stopped by Arkady's, where we watched his recently completed video film "Sedoi dozhd" or "Gray Rain." It was a quite beautiful sequence of scenes of human interaction with nature. Children and adults were shown working or playing with earth, mud, sand, and in fields of grain. Arkady also focused on spheres and tunnels, tennis balls, the sun and rain, round children's tunnels in sand castles, etc. The video will be shown at the Earth Day celebration at the university in the near future. Its human and nature interactions seem to make it an appropriate offering.

If it had any significant weakness, it was probably lack of a strong central theme. It appeared a bit too general and unfocused. It is clear to us though, that Arkady is a talented student of video art, and it would be very good for his further development if he could study at Everett College, as he hopes to do in the near future. He encounters enormous obstacles in his pursuit of this art at present in Novosibirsk and Russia. There is only one film art school available in Russia at the moment, in Moscow, and its enrollment is limited. He doesn't own his own video camera either, so he is obliged to save his money, and for one day about every three months, he is able to rent a camera to film. The twenty four-minute "Gray Rain" took about a year to make under these circumstances. Unless he has made some remarkably helpful friends in the U.S., however, it may be very difficult under the present circumstances for him to realize his ambition in the near future.

April 22

We attended an Earth Day lecture sponsored by the Novosibirsk University Ecology Club. Two knowledgeable local scientists talked about the nuclear hazards in the former USSR. The subject is particularly relevant here because of the serious accident at the nuclear research facility at Tomsk, about 150 miles away, earlier in the month. One of the speakers said that there had been 22 serious nuclear accidents in the former USSR since the beginning of the year, and over 200 in 1992. She acknowledged the seriousness of their problems with antiquated nuclear power plants and mentioned interest in the conversion of some to natural gas-run turbine electric generators, after some Dutch model, but she declared that the chief danger was from secrecy-laden military installations such as Tomsk.

She told about how she had called authorities in Tomsk after news of the recent accident and how unwilling these authorities had been to reveal the details. Her colleague mentioned how such a lack of information had resulted in the serious illness of many children in the Chernobyl accident, because their exposure could have been significantly reduced if attempts had even been made to keep the children indoors during that period. He also urged the student organization to write letters to governmental authorities demanding further information and a public accounting of the actions of the nuclear regulatory agencies in their country. He stressed that their club could make a difference. A very good message, I thought. The other speaker claimed that the present head of the Russian environmental protection agency was receptive to suggestions for changes in the governmental policies and regulations concerning the environment, and she urged them to communicate with him also.

That same evening we also attended a meeting of the English Club, where a Russian doctor talked about the medical system. Doctors are grossly underpaid, even by present Russian standards, and there is little state money available to improve their lot. The person who does such important work as removing an appendix to save a life here may receive only \$12 a month or 10,000 rubles. It was almost embarrassing to describe our problems at home in the U.S. with medical care. I am most disturbed by reports of infant mortality here. It is extremely high. (I made the mistake the other day of asking a colleague at work why her son and daughter were so far apart in age, and she told me about the two children she had lost in infancy.)

Another disturbing bit of news recently was that a number of people in Siberia had died as a result of drinking Russkaya brand vodka. The report said that it appears to contain some very high concentration of some oil. I've been looking at my latest bottle of Russkaya. It does have a particularly pretty bluish cast to it. I've already used some of the bottle without any apparent ill effects. I go through a half- litre bottle every two months, so I suppose I don't get anything that might be in it in the kind of concentrations some of my thirstier neighbors do.

April 23

Maybe I spoke too soon about not being poisoned by tainted vodka. I've been having indigestion and a headache all day. Prescott came home from the college after a somewhat frustrating day trying to communicate graphic arts skills to her students with her scant Russian and their barely functional English. Some days she wonders how she let herself be talked into teaching this class. Personally, I think that she has made a real contribution. She's also provided creative outlets for some students who are not future computer programmers. (I fear that a couple of the boys may be flunking out, because Prescott recently learned that they have enlisted in the army.)

April 24

I'm feeling better today, but not great. I think I'll dump the remaining vodka down the drain.

This was one of our busiest days. I taught from 10:45 to 2:05. Then we met our colleague Ludmilla (not the school psychologist) and had lunch with her and her eleven-year-old daughter. Afterward Prescott shopped for food and I later met her at the university to attend a concert by Arkady's band. The entire concert was videotaped, and I suspect that we will be asked to take a copy back to the U.S. with us in June. I'm sure that all of Arkady's musical friends will thoroughly enjoy seeing and hearing the Golden Valley Band's performances. We certainly enjoyed the concert. A few songs might sound a little corny to Americans, but the majority were in the best blues and bluegrass tradition and usually very well played and sung.

Finally, after about three months, a visiting scientist from the Krasnoyarsk region was able to stop by and pick up the package that we carried here for Jana's mother. (Jana is a young Russian who is in the U.S. now, hitched to an American friend, for better, we hope, and not worse.) So much for speedy delivery of parcels through the personal courier system. It's better than a lost and discarded parcel, I suppose.

April 25

I went to a great talk as the final event of Earth Week activities at the university today. A prominent scientist, a Mr. Dimitriev, gave an inspiring talk to a sparsely attended meeting. His message was one I could appreciate, and most of the students seemed to as well. Essentially, he said that news of the latest scientific evidence that human activity is disrupting and damaging whole life support systems on earth must receive wide public dissemination. He was disturbed by the fact that the main topic in U.S. news during the great storm this last winter was whether gays should be allowed to serve in the military, when he thought it should have been the devastating effects of certain human activities on the weather. He gave some rather detailed information on the effects world-wide of present energy usage. Then he concluded by urging the students to learn all they could and then try to live in a way that would not constitute any further parasitism on the earth. In other words, take from the earth only what you need, and take pains to give back or restore whatever you have disturbed in nature's web. He also advised students to look with considerable skepticism upon the recent plague of evangelists, moonies, hare krishnas, etc., who wish to sell them a simple bill of goods.

We spent the evening visiting a delightful family who demonstrated that certain Russians are quite conscientious and thoughtful in their daily lives. The artist-illustrator, Igor, his wife, Asya, a researcher in genetics, and their three-year-old daughter, Eva- Marie, live a simple but considered life. Igor does fine quality illustration, graphics and poster art. Some of his posters are quite thoughtful statements about the human condition and aspirations. Asya has stayed home with their daughter (3 years maternity leave) but will soon return to her work, which she values. Though she did have some doubts about genetic research here, (Her professor has moved to the U.S.) fearing some of the potential consequences of some genetic experiments. They share child care and domestic chores and grow a large garden without chemicals in order to contribute to their vegetarian diet. They express some doubts about the recent evangelical activity here, fearing a return of some of the abuses of state-sponsored religion prior to the revolution. But mainly, like most other people, they expressed fear about feeding, clothing and sheltering themselves under the present conditions of the great Russian economic depression. However, it appears that some significant number of Russians, according to the referendum results, will support Yeltsin. I'll probably send my last letter next week.

April 26

It's the seventh anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. There was a brief program on television that focused on the difficulties of the survivors. It lacked the depth I had hoped for, but at least the continuing tragedy was not completely ignored.

We visited a family of Yeltsin supporters after the referendum. Anatoli had actually served as a party observer at a polling place from 6:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. He said that he and the right wing opposition exchanged insults. They called him a Jew-lover or worse and he called them fascists. Many people who are active in politics, such as Anatoli, are nervous about the potentially violent nature of the new right wing patriotic front. These people apparently take names and addresses of the opposition in order to harass and intimidate them later. Their anti-semitism is particularly disturbing, because it suggests that they may have a good deal in common with racist hate groups in the U.S. who have proven to be violent.

Our new friends were pleased that Yeltsin had received strong support--58% of voters supported him. They certainly don't think that Yeltsin has not made mistakes, but a majority of the hard-pressed population believe that he is sincerely doing his best and is working in their genuine interest. I asked Anatoli, his wife, Valeria and brother-in-law, Sergei, what they liked about Yeltsin. Their responses included the fact that he was among the first leaders to break fully with the discredited communist party and its ideology. He has been consistent in his policies of reform of the system. They also liked the fact that he hasn't been living the luxurious and isolated life of the former communist leadership, the Nomenklatura, as they were called. He has lived rather simply and unostentatiously in a Moscow apartment, much as many other people do.

April 27

It is a bit disturbing for me to think about those who extracted tremendous wealth from this society and now sit in luxury homes in Western Europe or America. They are former communists who had control of the nation's riches--its large gold bullion reserves, its foreign currency from exports and the German payments of many billions to "buy back" East Germany. When they concluded that Soviet socialism's days were numbered, they began to calculate how best to use their positions to plunder the public riches in their care. If it was perhaps not the chief cause of the present impoverishment of the many here, it certainly increased their misery. How must it feel to live in luxury abroad while the vast majority back home can no longer afford to buy more than their daily bread and suffer from poor sanitation, transportation, health care, etc. ? Maybe many of them never felt anything more than contempt for the "masses," and so it was easy to plunder the wealth these people had produced in one last big rip-off. I certainly won't welcome such people to America and our island. (I wouldn't be surprised if some large, new luxury homes are being built there with such stolen money). And I would rather be here for the rest of my life sharing evening meals of simple peasant bread, cabbage, cheese and tea with these decent and good, impoverished

scientists and educators, with their vast intellectual riches to share, than have to spend a single minute in a luxurious mansion of an unscrupulous Russian emigre now residing back home.

April 28

Today Emma Alexandrovna introduced us to her eighty-two-year-old friend, Moisei Rizhsky. Moisei is a humanities professor at the university whose special interest is the history of religion. He is from a traditional Jewish religious and cultural background. His knowledge of the Bible and Torah and Hebrew, among other languages, helped to launch his career. He has written a number of scholarly works on aspects of Jewish history and religious tradition. Moisei gave me a copy of his latest book, a study of the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. When he heard that we were associated with a Quaker group, he was delighted. He said that the Quaker disinterest in ritual and stress on the doing of good works and belief in unmediated communication with a "God-force" was closest to his own personal religious philosophy.

April 29

After classes today we attended a discussion at the House of Scientists. English-speaking Russians met with Tony Stevenson, secretary-general-elect of the World Future Studies Federation. Stevenson is visiting as part of an International Week program designed to replace the old May Day celebration that always emphasized international solidarity among communists. In place of Third World liberation representatives from such groups as the PLO and countries like Cuba, the university has invited French, German, Finnish, Japanese, British, Australian, American, Ukrainian and Russian social scientists and businessmen. The theme is global awareness and visions for future international cooperation. Tony Stevenson has spent a good deal of time thinking about such things, and he had some very interesting insights to share with the group. For one thing, he suggested that the debt-ridden societies of the industrialized West and the impoverished East European and Third World nations would soon need to reorganize and realign monetary systems to avoid major economic disasters world-wide.

When I suggested that this would probably involve a loss of some income in the West and a transfer of some wealth to the Third World, he seemed to agree. Apparently, however, western social scientists who jet into a Siberian academic center for a week are liable to overlook some of the depth of the economic depression in the former USSR today. When one Russian mentioned the economic situation here, Tony Stevenson responded that they were having similar problems in Australia today. He almost immediately retracted this, but later when I tried to explain to him that the average scientist in Akademgorodok earned about 20,000 rubles, which was barely enough to feed himself, he seemed to want to believe that this was some sad exception to the norm here, affecting only the educated scientists. I was somehow unable to impress on him the fact that the vast population of pensioners live on even less, and the blue-collar workers who are earning several times more still only have about \$80 - \$90 a month income, and the extravagantly paid coal-miners may earn all of

\$300 per month, and manufactured goods cost about what they would for us. Ninety percent of the population is impoverished here, and I am surprised at how difficult it is to convince a well-read and intelligent social scientist on a short-term visit that this is truly the case. I just hope that Clinton's advisers on Russia are better informed.

One other particularly interesting comment was in response to Stevenson's question, how do Russians view Americans. One Russian responded that their openness struck her as somewhat child-like. What I took this to mean was that, in general, we are, as a result of our relatively easy and secure lives, less inclined to caution in our dealings with others. We are relatively optimistic and cheerful and expect to encounter mainly good people and interesting experiences in our travels and journey through life. Is there an innocence and trust in the "typical American" that others, who have experienced a harsher reality, lack? I think so. However, all agreed that the American government is viewed as arrogant.

April 30

Russian pessimism can sometimes seem like it knows no bounds. I spent the afternoon at a session of the International Week that was billed as a discussion of today's economic and social conditions and long-term prospects for Russia. The Russian participants were all doom and gloom, insisting that the Russian mentality made it nearly impossible for businesses to operate on the Western model. They seemed to defy all efforts by the Western participants to suggest that economic and social progress after the collapse of the old empire might be possible. They seemed to think that ethics and morality needed to be strengthened before any good could come from free enterprises, and they suggested that without such a strengthening of moral values the scientists of Akademgorodok, and elsewhere, would create an "intellectual Chernobyl" by using their knowledge to produce harmful products for purely economic gain.

A topic I had meant to raise, but didn't manage to fit in, was the issue of military conversion. A brochure I read recently stated that the industrial activity of Novosibirsk is about 80% military. Considering how many North Whidbey residents in our home region have howled at suggestions that the naval base on North Whidbey should be closed, it should not surprise us to hear that the Russians cannot easily dismantle their massive military industrial complex either.

May 1

This morning I went out to meet a Macedonian journalist who is here as part of the Interweek program. On my way to our meeting I came upon the communist party's May Day parade. There were about 300 people gathered in the center of the Akademgorodok. Most were quite old, though some were in their 30s and 40s. There were a couple of people hoisting the old red flag with hammer and sickle of the former USSR up a flagpole, while another took their picture. They were smiling a bit sheepishly as if they were aware of the fact that they were doing something a bit silly, and at the same time slightly defiant of the prevailing mood in

Russia. There were loudspeakers blaring traditional May Day parade music and a parade leader with a portable megaphone. It was a somewhat pathetic affair, rallying a mere handful of the thousands who once took part. It lacked the spontaneity, color and imagination of an American parade, and its deficiencies were more pronounced due to the diminished participation. Yet, I suppose many of these folks were trying to recapture some of the old exhilaration they must have felt in the past when mass participation had given the parade an air of dignity and importance, when many people must have felt themselves part of a vigorous and purposeful world movement. Today it all looked more like the odd little May Day parade put on by the tiny American left wing socialist and revolutionary communist parties in downtown Seattle.

My meeting with the visiting Macedonian journalist, Natasha Todorovska, was a real pleasure. I was able to learn in some detail about conditions in Macedonia today--economic, social and political. Natasha is an articulate and clear-thinking young intellectual. (A lot more people I meet these days seem to get labeled "young" in my mind.) I enjoyed hearing her perspective on events and prospects. There are plenty of dangers, but she painted a somewhat hopeful picture, and I don't feel quite so concerned for relatives and friends there now. I discovered that my Macedonian is still better than my Russian, but I have developed in recent times a new appreciation for the refinement and elegance of Russian compared to its humble southern cousin, Macedonian.

Later in the day Prescott and I visited the physicist Vladimir and his wife, Natasha, and their four-year old daughter, Katya. They are a nice family, but language barriers and simple unfamiliarity made us all a bit restrained or reserved. The food and drink and conversation were pleasant enough, and I suppose it is only my own high expectations of a visit to friends--the lively conversations we often have back home--that made the afternoon a bit unsatisfying for me. It is times like these that I feel my own foreignness here most acutely.

May 2

We learned today that the May Day parade in Moscow turned ugly. Over 150 people were injured, about half of them police, in a riot in Red square--the first shots in a civil war or the last gasps of dying movements, right-wing nationalist and left-wing socialist? No one can say for sure. From the results of the referendum and the prevailing attitude of the people we meet, I would say it's the latter. We visited Andrei and Ina again this afternoon, and our conversation seemed to confirm this view. The economic collapse has been terrible, but the same people who believed simply, or simply believed, in the old system, know too much today. Even if the majority of people could be assured of a return to the relative prosperity before perestroika, I doubt that they would wish it if it meant a return of the lies and restrictions imposed by the Soviet regime. Some rather original mix of socialism and capitalism with democratic institutions is my best guess for what will prevail in years to come.

Our visit to Iva and Andrei's got interesting when I showed them a book I had bought of Vladimir Vysotski's songs. That's when they pulled out a big pile of his old albums, and they laughed and giggled through a series of witty, irreverent, anti-establishment songs by the Soviet Union's greatest folk singer of the 70's. Vysotski achieved a level of fame and notoriety during those years unequalled by any comparable singer in the West. His songs were never permitted on TV or radio (with the exception of earlier film sound tracks). Nor could records or tapes be bought in stores. Yet millions of people risked public disapproval to obtain and listen to his protest songs. He himself suffered loss of work and income. (He was an actor by profession.) He was no longer permitted to travel freely and he was hounded by the secret police. When he died at the age of 42 in 1980, (alcohol and drug abuse were supposedly involved) his funeral drew a vast number of mourners who paid their respects in open defiance of a Soviet government that did everything it could to discourage attendance. Andrei called him a national hero whose music touched people in all walks of life--from miners, to soldiers, prisoners, students and scientists and intellectuals.

May 3

Today we went out into the country with our fellow teacher Avieta and her husband Nikolai. Nikolai drove us out to their dacha in their car. The road there was in miserable condition. We've been having rain, and together with the spring thaw, it made the road a muddy mess. Even the main roads have a good many potholes. Russians are always fond of repeating the phrase of Gogol, I believe, that "Russia has only two problems--its fools and its roads."

The dacha district was about five kilometers into the forest on the edge of the Akademgorodok. Perhaps a hundred or more dachas were scattered along a winding road, clustered around an old village center. The dachas are usually quite small. Avieta and Nikolai's is probably typical. It is one room, about 17 x 20 feet. A brick structure with a metal roof. It has a large brick cook and heating stove--though not as large as traditional Russian stoves, and no running water, but there was electricity. Their dacha is about 30 years old. Their first dacha was torched by some unknown party and they built again some 20 years ago. The dacha is surrounded by fruit trees, various berry canes and bushes, strawberry and rhubarb patches, a potato bed and plastic sheltered beds for peppers, cucumbers and tomatoes.

Their dacha also includes a banya that Nikolai very much wanted to fire up for the first time this spring. Neither Avieta nor Prescott were very interested, but I volunteered to join him, and so we set about heating up the sauna. Once it was sufficiently hot, after burning a wood and coal fire in the stove for about an hour, Prescott and Avieta joined us with tea and cake and food in the cozy little annex, and Nikolai and I made a number of trips into the sauna to broil and alternately cool off and then sit and sip tea. The part of the Russian banya that usually surprises the newcomer is the somewhat, in my opinion, sado-masochistic whipping or switching of one another with birch switches. It's all good clean fun though, and I actually enjoyed the three or so hours of our banya visit.

During our banya, snow began to fall and it got quite heavy for awhile. But since it is May, after all, and plants are beginning to bud and in some cases even leaf out a bit, the snow was wet and began to melt almost immediately, though it did look almost like March again for a few hours.

May 4

There is ice on all the puddles this morning. I hope that my potatoes out on the balcony are alright. This is the coldest it has been in nearly two weeks. I suspect that with clear skies the afternoon will be warm, but I will have to carry my heavy coat this morning in order to be warm enough while waiting for the bus. I suppose that we also have such weather occasionally back home.

This is my last letter home, and I hope that it arrives before I do. It is strange to think that a letter written nearly a month before may not reach you before I do. I hope that these letters have been interesting, if not always to the point, and sometimes I'm sure that I've misinformed you about something, because that is how I saw or heard it at the time.

The latest report on the radio makes it sound as if hundreds were injured at the May Day riot. Accurate information is difficult to get here. The official results of the April 25 referendum, for example, will not be announced until tomorrow. I suspect that one won't be able to say that Russia has truly joined the rest of the world, i.e., is in full communication, until a letter can be delivered to the U.S. reliably and in less than ten days. Like the mail, this may take awhile.

We should be home by June first, if all goes well. Being away for four months can seem like very little or a long time. I think it is about my own preferred limit. Unless we have some very bad luck, I would probably say, all in all, it has been a good experience, but I, for one, am not comfortable in someone else's native land for extended periods. Indeed, I do enjoy getting to know foreign lands and cultures, and I believe that one ought to try and sit still for awhile in one place and try to get to know the local language, culture, environment and society, in order to come away with something more than superficial knowledge.

What an incredible time to visit this society. Russia is today a lot like an individual who is trying to pick up the pieces after having been used and abused during an extended period of participation in one of the weirder cults out there. And, as usual, when it rains it pours. Their ideology, then their state, and then their economy all failed in rapid succession. Avieta said it all the other day when she declared, "If anyone had suggested a few years ago that we would be as poor as we are today, I wouldn't have believed them."

Would I recommend this country to the travel-minded? Perhaps not, unless you are a hardy soul, with a taste for somewhat rough adventure. The young will thrive here better than the old. There is still a good deal to interest exchange students, and scientific and scholarly exchanges with well-established and organized groups in places like the Akademgorodok of

Novosibirsk can be useful and satisfying. Tourists should probably choose destinations elsewhere until things settle down a bit here. There are university teaching positions that could be satisfying and rewarding, and, of course, the College of Information of NSU, if you enjoy teaching and interacting with 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds.

May 5 - 10

Instead of providing an increasingly repetitive and decreasingly interesting daily journal account of our final four weeks in Siberian Russia, I've decided to record only those events or impressions that stand out in my mind from the previous week. One of these is the recurring question that everyone keeps asking--if and when will this country dig itself out of economic depression? The violence that erupted in this year's May Day demonstrations in Moscow is a sign of the growing frustration here. This is a land of great political extremes at the present time, and the longer that the vast majority here languish in poverty, the greater the likelihood of political violence.

The recent referendum, however, demonstrated that there is still a deep reservoir of support for the democratic and market-oriented economic reforms of the Yeltsin government, despite the widely-held belief that it was mistakes made by that government that caused drastic worsening of the situation in the past year. Personally, I can't imagine conditions worsening further here because I believe that the present impoverishment, with the majority of people receiving incomes of \$35 - \$95 per month, is close to rock bottom for an industrialized nation with vast resources in peacetime. Change could possibly come very slowly though, and most people may not be able to take a vacation, eat in a restaurant, replace worn-out goods or renovate or buy an apartment or buy or repair an automobile for some years to come. But how many--5, 10, 15 years? It's anybody's guess. And the consequences of too little progress, too late? Bitterness, disappointment, lethargy, indifference? It's also hard to say. I suppose there will be those who will remain active and energetic, no matter what their circumstances, while others will resort to scapegoating and latch on to simplistic theories espoused by opportunists who dream of the wealth and power that could be theirs if enough people buy their message. It is all too big and there are too many contingencies for anyone to predict the future of this country as a whole with any degree of accuracy.

Having said this, my best guess is that there will be slow steady progress over the next decade. Yeltsin and other reformers after him will continue to hold the course, and slowly but surely the small elite of the former communist nomenklatura, who still possess enormous power and wealth, will lose ground, to the increasing benefit of the majority here. This is the best future I can see for this country at the moment, as I try to blend realism with a hopeful vision worth holding on to.

It snowed on May 8th again. The day began with an ice storm and by evening we had about four inches on the ground that appears as if it might stick around for awhile. It is still carpeting the ground as evening approaches on the 9th of May.

Perhaps, due to the ongoing struggle with those who would reintroduce communism, there continued to be new made-for-television dramatic films about the injustices and suffering so many people endured during the Soviet era. The most recent of these was the dramatic series-- "Tishina, the Silence". In this series a family suffers Stalinist repression after the Second World War. The father is arrested and sent to a prison camp. The son is expelled from the university and flees to the provinces to avoid even worse. The film ends with Stalin's death and a depiction of the terrible scene that followed (an actual historical incident) when nearly all of Moscow's five million inhabitants poured into the streets and tried to make their way to the Kremlin where their leader's body lay. Over a thousand people died that day, mainly children and the elderly, crushed or suffocated by the sheer mass of the crowd.

One of the best new programs on television is a gardening show. It provides useful information and advertises various products useful to gardeners--everything from fencing material to soil amendments to nursery plants. Every week they perform various tasks associated with gardening and give useful advice concerning the particular project they are doing. It sure beats the crude advertising of candy bars and cigarettes that viewers are often subjected to.

May 11 - 17

We had a couple of young people, 20 and 23, over to visit. Katya and Boris provide a very different picture of Russian society than that of their parents or the 17-year olds at the College of Informatics. They are anxious to get on with their lives, but they feel terribly frustrated by the lack of opportunities for people their age in present-day Russia. Nearly all work opportunities pay a pittance. Housing shortages mean that they have no choice but to live in crowded dormitories or with their parents. They admit that this has led many of their age group to turn to criminal activity. Besides being the perpetrators of much crime, they are among the chief victims, because of the hours and company they keep, and the generally freer and more careless rambling done by their age group. People of their age group are more likely to harbor rather impractical dreams or have only a very vague notion of what they want. Katya would like to train dogs, and Boris would like to study the psychology of color in some school in the U.S. Considering that my own ambition at their age was to foment revolution, I suppose I shouldn't be too judgmental.

One unsettling experience I keep having is that I meet people who have traveled abroad, who describe their meetings with unsavory Russians there. It seems that a considerable number of the criminal element--former secret policemen, nomenklatura and successful crooks of one sort or another comprise a good percentage of those with the resources to go abroad these days. In the long run this can only hurt the image of Russians in the world, the ugly Russian. It's too bad, particularly because we've met so many fine and civilized Russians during our time here.

On Thursday a young American representative of a U.S. Educational Advising Center at the university came and spoke to my students and my class of teachers of English. Marianne Ruane, a 24-year old former teacher of Russian in the U.S., has a position as an educational adviser out of offices in Moscow and Novosibirsk. She has a collection of books and pamphlets on study and scholarship opportunities in the U.S., and either the applications for admissions and scholarships or information about how to obtain them. Russian students with sufficient English skills and a good deal of initiative (since it takes considerable effort on a student's part to obtain recommendations, transcripts, and fill out applications) can succeed in studying in the U.S. Because so few actually carry through on the process, there really is sufficient funding and places in colleges and universities for those who actually go to the considerable trouble of applying. Relatively few Russian students have the necessary self-motivation to apply, because their system has generally guided them rather mechanically into various educational institutions. She stressed that our students and teachers, therefore, had genuine opportunities if they were willing to go through all of the hoops in the application process. She also stressed that Siberians were exotic enough to receive some special consideration.

We all enjoyed listening to her excellent Russian. The students and teachers were all very much taken by her mannerisms, gestures and inflections, which some thought were very similar to Prescott's. She also offered some interesting observations about life in Moscow and Akademgorodok, complaining about the big city atmosphere of Moscow. She thought that the crowds, chaos, coolness or indifference of the people to foreign guests, etc., reminded her of a place like New York City. I certainly share her opinion of life in the big city. I feel somewhat the same about the big city of Novosibirsk. After over a year in Russia she seemed to think crime was still over-rated here. She thought that Russians were generally honest and law-abiding, but she did complain that public drunkenness, particularly on holidays, resulted in some very rude behavior.

There were snow flurries yesterday afternoon; and this morning, Monday, May 17, there is ice on puddles. Even the Siberians are commenting on the late spring this year. Few plants have leafed out to any significant degree, and the ground is obviously too cold to do much gardening yet.

May 28

Spring is finally arriving with blooms and greenery appearing more pronounced each day. It really will be beautiful here in a few weeks. We are making final arrangements to leave. We need exit visas, and we had to have our tickets changed because our return flight to Moscow had been previously cancelled. There are fuel problems at the airport and many flights are delayed. There is a 50-50 chance ours will also. We have a great deal to do now-- buying last-minute items, cleaning up all of our clutter here, mailing books to the U.S. and having last-minute get-togethers with various new friends.

There is much that is good here. Good people, beautiful places to visit. (We saw their lovely botanical garden and research station on the edge of Akademgorodok recently). Fine entertainments such as the opera, ballet and symphony orchestra. We had the opportunity this last week to visit the opera house for the first time and watch a performance of the Novosibirsk ballet.

I talked to one of the young people here from the campus crusade for Christ. She had just returned from a visit to the city jail, where she and her friends had shown what she called, "The Jesus Story". Although I don't share her exclusive focus on Jesus as a model for human conduct, and I don't have a feeling for sacred worship of a man-god, I did appreciate hearing that she and her friends visit some of the people with the hardest lives here. She Also told me that they were providing medical supplies and may even sponsor a clinic. These are activities I can wholeheartedly support.

May 30 - 31

Several parties and a chaotic day and a half of travel later, we have arrived home. People on the streets don't appear very friendly here, but the lush greenery is a welcome sight, as I'm certain friends will also be. Some final highlights on the way home were a visit on the plane from Novosibirsk to Moscow with a Ukrainian Russian journalist from the far north. In Moscow we had a good evening visit with a former student of mine who now lives in Moscow. We ate at McDonald's, and, I must confess, that it is a model for Russian businessmen.

To sum up what we have been doing for the past four months here I would say that we have been sharing who we are and trying to understand the Russians whom we've met. To understand Russia and the Russian people today has not been easy. They are no longer who they were for nearly seventy years under Soviet socialism, and they, as a nation, are not at all certain who they would like to be; though in many respects they are becoming integrated into the Western industrial society that they opposed and isolated themselves from for so long.

I have found a few moments to write a bit more about our last few days in Russia. Our visit on May 28 to the botanical garden on the edge of Akademgorodok was quite a pleasant surprise. A mere thirty minute walk from our apartment was a lovely landscaped botanical preserve encompassing several square miles of wooded rolling hills overlooking the Ob Sea, the vast artificial lake created by the damming of the mighty Ob River. Several greenhouses held a wide variety of exotic tropical and sub-tropical plants, while the extensive grounds were home to wild native as well as numerous domestic trees, shrubs and plants that researchers were investigating for their practical value or adaptability here on the edge of the vast central Siberian taiga or forest primeval. We tagged along on a tour of the greenhouses for a while, and then strolled out onto the preserve, eventually making our way back to Akademgorodok.

Our last week in Akademgorodok also contained one other delightful surprise - that was our discovery of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet. This discovery was actually the inevitable

consequence of numerous recommendations that we experience their opera and ballet company. It is a cultural institution of which the natives are rightfully proud. We were fortunate enough to be able to buy tickets through our colleague at the college, Nadia, whose sister dances in the ballet, because performances are often sold out.

We were accompanied the evening of the performance by our fellow teachers, Emma and Avieta. We had some time before the performance, so Avieta took us by the little wooden house on a nearby tree-lined avenue where she had grown up. She remembers when construction on the grand opera house, among the most impressive buildings in this city of one million, was begun in 1938. It was completed during the final days of World War II, and she remembers vividly her first visit there as a teenage girl during that first of some fifty seasons of performances.

Our own visit, for the first time, held almost as much fascination as Avieta's must have, so many years before. The magic of the ballet was alive and well at the Novosibirsk Opera House that evening. The performers were first rate, the dancers and the orchestra, and the great hall with its ornate columns and woodwork and central dome all aglow from a large and elaborate chandelier, enhanced the spectacle on the stage. The magic of the evening was, unfortunately, marred by a rather difficult trip home by bus. As darkness came on, it grew quite chilly, and by the time we arrived at the river side stop where we were to catch our bus, a cold wind was blowing from the river. It had been a warm day, and I hadn't imagined I would need my heavy coat. During the forty five minutes we waited at that bus stop I managed to feel colder than I had in the four months of winter.

Our next to last evening in Siberia was devoted to a going away party. All of our best acquaintances and friends of four months came by that evening. The musicians from the Golden Valley Blue Grass Band, Arkady, Katya and Andrei, and his son and their friend Pavel, came by with a cake. Then, our fellow teachers from the College of Informatics, Emma, Avieta and Ludmilla and Irina, and the psychologist Ludmilla and assistant director Sergei arrived with food and drink. The crowd was congenial and combined some of our favorite people of Siberia's Akademgorodok. As civilized and decent and warm and good people as you are liable to meet anywhere. It should be pointed out that for all its many faults and faulty products, the Soviet socialist society had also produced these people. The most memorable moment of that evening came when we were discussing how fearful the average Russian had been during the Soviet period in meetings with foreigners. Soviet citizens traveling abroad had even had to agree to report all contact with foreigners to the authorities. In looking back upon those strange days with her new foreign friends, Avieta finally exclaimed - "We were such fools."

The flight from Novosibirsk to Moscow got off to a somewhat bad start when airline personnel declared our baggage 20 pounds over weight and demanded \$55 from us. I handed the airline official a traveler's check, which she examined curiously. Then, it dawned on me that this representative of Russia's international airline, in a city of a million people, had never before seen a travelers check. She didn't know what to do with it. She wasn't sure that it could be

redeemed for cash. Thus, in the end, they settled for the \$10 in rubles I was carrying. Their loss, but it just points up the enormous difficulties this society is having trying to open up shop for business with the rest of the world. Banking is still in its infancy here. Wiring money or even using checks is all but impossible in the outlying provinces such as Novosibirsk. I had wondered why the college president paid us each month with freshly minted (usually they were still in their original wrappers) money he had carried home with him from Moscow in a briefcase. Now I thought I understood, but business and commerce cannot thrive under such circumstances.

The flight to Moscow was made more enjoyable by the acquaintance of a journalist, poet, folklorist named Anatoli from the far northern city of 30,000 called Dudinka in the Taimir region, bordering on the Arctic Ocean. He showed me books he had co-authored about the Taimir region and its people, and he invited me to come visit some day. It sounded like a fascinating land. When we parted, he presented me with a beautiful book of Siberian folk tales that contained some stories that he had collected.

We spent the afternoon in Moscow sightseeing in Red Square. I hadn't been here in 25 years, and the changes were dramatic. When I was here last, the long lines were out front of Lenin's tomb. Everyone wanted to get a glimpse of the mastermind of their socialist society. Now the long lines were out front of McDonalds, where people came to get a taste of what American entrepreneurship had to offer. Red Square was also now the scene of a large and colorful tent city of food and craft fair booths.

We ate at McDonalds with a former student of mine, Geoffrey, who now lives and works in Moscow, and two of his friends. The food was good and the service was efficient. It really is a useful model for future entrepreneurs of Russia on how a service industry can be made to work efficiently in the framework of a free enterprise system. The computerized cashiering, the cleanliness, courtesy and efficiency of this restaurant stood in stark contrast to the dingy shops with inefficient personnel) unenthusiastically selling low quality products and calculating your bill on an abacus that we had regularly encountered in Siberia.

Despite their own pessimism at what a long hard road lies ahead of them to achieve anything approaching the quality of life in much of the industrialized world, their potential for a rich quality of life seems good. Their rich intellectual cultural tradition, now that they no longer live in the enforced silence of the communist dictatorship, could easily result in a new burst of creativity. James Billington, the author of an excellent interpretive history of Russian culture in the mid-sixties called *The Icon and the Axe*, though he wrote his book decades before the collapse of the Soviet Union, perceived many of the currents of Russian culture that may continue to carry the Russian people into a new era. For example, he predicted that there might be a rich cultural blossoming out of their silence, because as he says, they may discover "a depth and purity that sometimes comes to those who have suffered in silence".

Billington also foresaw the great wave of rebellion against totalitarianism that has swept across Eastern Europe. He comments on the fact that: "It is ironic that the USSR should succeed where most thought it would fail: in defeating the Germans and conquering outer space. It is perhaps most ironic of all that the Soviet leaders should fail in the area where almost everyone thought they would automatically succeed: in the indoctrination of their own youth".

He speaks most directly to us today, particularly those of us who are actively engaged in interaction with post-Soviet Russia, when he says: "Russia may well develop new social and artistic forms presently unforeseen by either East or West which will answer the restive demand of its people for human freedom and spiritual renewal. If the West has anything authentic to communicate and has any direct and unpatronizing ways of doing it, it could almost certainly play a key role in this process".

Have we personally, has Skagit Valley College, and will we in the future play a positive role in this process? I certainly hope so, and I hope that this journal has somehow helped to document some small but meaningful part of the history of American and Russian relations.

MY FRIEND by Ivan Ilnitsky

(This is an essay a 16 year old student at the College of Informatics in Novosibirsk, Siberian Russia, wrote for me this winter. Simple and artless, perhaps, but read it, and see for yourself.)

I don't want to boast of it, but I have enough friends. Therefore, I will tell about my best friend. I met him for the first time when I was five years old. He was five and a half years old. So we were almost of the same age. I was living in Novosibirsk. I mean Akademgorodok (a town near Novosibirsk), and he was living at the same time and at the same place. I mean we lived in the one and the same many-storied house. I lived on the fifth floor and he lived on the first floor. I, he and my other friends played games together, as any children.

But my friend left Novosibirsk for Kiev, Ukraina. So from this time he began to travel throughout the country (Soviet Union in those days). Yet, his grandparents still lived in Novosibirsk, and he arrived in Akademgorodok every summer during the summer vacation. That is why we met every three summer months in the year.

In 1986 he lived near Kiev and on April 26 there was a big explosion at the Chernobyl atomic power station near Kiev too. My friend, as a child, was evacuated to Novosibirsk. His parents stayed in Kiev. After six months he went back to Kiev and he lived there with his parents for two years.

Last year he came again to Novosibirsk, and his mother arrived with him. He was very sad. Sometime later he told me that his mother had a cancer. Of course, I was sad too. It was a

great grief for him, because in August his mother died. But it wasn't all for him. Two weeks after his mother's death his father died too. I and all of my friends tried to calm him, because he became very taciturn and gloomy. We felt that he was in a very big depression.

Now he lives with his other grandparents near Moscow. This summer he wants to come to us again.

In the end I want to say that people should be very very careful with the atomic power. In the Ukraina people have been dying up to now of radiation