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Memoirs about my Soviet Adventures

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These memoirs refer to my personal experiences as an American in the Soviet Union, especially in Moscow. They concern only my unusual “Soviet adventures” and not ordinary experiences such as visits to concerts, plays, ballets and museums. I also will not touch upon visits to Leningrad or to several Old-Russian cities which played a fascinating role in Russian culture and history. I probably have made mistakes in my recollections since some forty years have passed and the Soviet Union is no more.

Sputnik, the satellite that the Soviet Union shot up to spin around the world in 1957, frightened Americans profoundly. One of the results was a cultural exchange agreement between the US and the USSR. Part of this was an exchange of graduate students. I was among the first selected and spent the school year 1958-1959 at Moscow State University (MGU). That was the hardest year of my life in part because the locals had been told that “all Americans are spies” and many had come to believe this – and there I was: an American. The exchange was set up by an American organization that later became known as IREX, the International Research Exchanges Board. We lived in the new building of Moscow University — one of those Stalinist sky-scrappers which consisted of several sectors. Four of us lived in sector G on the seventh floor; sector G was for people in philology. You had to have a pass to get into MGU and anything you brought with you was examined by the women inspectors at whichever entrance you chose to use. Our clothing and especially our shoes always gave us away as Americans. One thing we soon learned was that when you wanted to have a serious conversation, you went for a walk. That is because the rooms were “bugged.” But the “bugs” did have their plus side and sometimes we would have conversations with the “bug” in our room just for something to do. Everywhere you went, you crossed lines which told the KGB (the Soviet secret police) where you were: in MGU, making a free telephone call from the dormitory alerted the KGB, as did visiting the Lenin Library, or going to a play, concert, or ballet, and maybe even buying something in a store. The Lenin Library was the equivalent of the

Library of Congress and I and most other foreign scholars spent much of our time there.

In order to understand the difficulties of being a foreigner in Moscow you need to know that foreigners were limited to an area of forty kilometers (25 miles) from the center of Moscow. If you wanted to go farther and to stay over night you had to get advance permission from a place called OVIR which was a bureaucratic nightmare. The OVIR was the place where one received a residence permit and any change of residence, even for one night, had to be duly reported to and registered by the OVIR.

My second stay was during the summer in 1966 when a group of Americans who taught Russian took part in a language program for Americans. After receiving another IREX grant I experienced my third stay in the spring semester of 1970. I spent February in Leningrad and then four months in Moscow. My fifth stay, sponsored by combined Fulbright and IREX grants, was in the spring semester of 1988 when the Soviet Union was obviously changing. Again I spent February in Leningrad and then four months in Moscow. With all this background information in mind, I will now turn to my experiences themselves.

During my first stay in Moscow I had one good Russian friend, Dima, who twice invited me to his parents' apartment. Those were the only times I saw how people lived in Moscow. His father evidently worked for the Foreign Service so that Dima knew many things about the rest of the world. Because of his worldliness, we never had an argument about anything. This contrasted sharply to interactions with others: arguments with typical Soviet citizens tended to focus on the relative merits of the Soviet and American systems and they were all too easy to start and almost impossible to win. Dima was studying English drama after the Second World War and so his English was excellent – but we always spoke Russian. He showed me many wonderful things in and around Moscow that, otherwise, I would have never seen. And these were things that were part of Soviet life and yet unknown to foreigners. For example, on Christmas Eve he took me to a church that was somewhere in the northwestern part of Moscow. It was holding a Christmas service and was packed since few churches functioned as religious organizations in Soviet times. We entered through a side door and emerged in the space between the railing and the iconostasis in an Orthodox church, a place few people are apparently allowed to enter. Most of the service is sung in a Russian Orthodox Church. The choir, which was high up above on a balcony, was wonderful. When I

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mentioned this later to Dima, he said it was the choir of the Bolshoi Theater (opera house) in downtown Moscow. On yet another occasion Dima took me on a pretty spring day to the “Serebrianni Bor,” a beautiful pine forest somewhere to the west of Moscow. It was wonderful walking around such a well preserved forest along the Moscow River. Evidently, in recent years, the newly rich Moscow millionaires have started building residences there. And then there was the “Novodevichii monastery,” a well preserved nunnery which then was a museum. A fine Russian white-stone church and a small cemetery are also there. What may be the largest cemetery in Moscow is located on the other side of the nunnery. Many famous people, writers, artists, actors, and others are buried there so it is interesting to walk around looking for distinctive tomb stones. Even non-famous people had interesting graves: a Soviet general had a huge grave stone with a cannon mounted on top of it!

Each American on the exchange was assigned a Russian professor to be his “advisor.” Mine was professor Kuleshov who taught Russian literature written in the first part of the nineteenth century. We would meet in “the old building” which was the original site of Moscow University and was downtown across the street from the Kremlin. We had to ride bus No. 111 to get there from the “new building.” One time I took a number of slides (diapositives) I had made in California, mostly in San Francisco, to a meeting with Kuleshov. I had a battery operated small viewer you could hold in your hand. When I showed him a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge he said, “We have a bridge like that.” He could not tell me just where. He insisted that there was nothing special in the United States and certainly nothing that was in any way better than things in the Soviet Union.

Another time he said that the West did very little to help the Soviet Union during Second World War and that millions of Soviets had died. He had served in the army during the war and so he knew, he said. I pointed out that hundreds of American and English sailors had died on ships trying to take supplies to Murmansk past German submarines off the coast of Norway. The United States shipped supplies through Iran and P39 fighter planes were flown to Siberia from Alaska. I also mentioned Lend Lease. Maybe I won that argument when I asked him whether he had ever ridden in a jeep; he admitted that he had. Once I mentioned that I had read that Tchaikovsky had apparently lived for awhile in the city of Klin northwest of Moscow. I asked Kuleshov why it was so hard for an American to get permission to go there. I had been

exchanging language lessons with a young Russian woman who also lived on the seventh floor of sector G at MGU. When I returned to the new building that evening and again met with her she said, “James. Why don’t we go visit Klin?” That was how fast things got done then in Moscow. And most Russians, to this day, call me “James”; only a few call me “Jim.”

Another conversation with Kuleshov concerned the increasing trouble between the West and the Soviets concerning Berlin. When I was serving in the army in Frankfurt-am-Main my future German wife Hanna had a friend whose mother came to visit her from East Germany. Obviously this was before the Berlin wall was built. Among other things, the mother said that they still had food rationing in East Germany in 1956, eleven years after the end of WW II! When I was talking with Kuleshov about Berlin, he said that they had to restrict visitors because West Berliners would come to East Berlin to buy things that were cheaper there. When I told him they still had food rationing in East Berlin some eleven years after WW II, he stopped talking about the subject. That meant that I had won an argument about the merits of the Soviet system once again. In most cases, however, it was best not to argue with a “real” Soviet citizen because the argument could go on and on.

The last memorable episode concerns how I stopped meeting Kuleshov. As I got better and better at reading Russian, I started exploring various writers. I bought a collection of the poetry by the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok and started reading it. Somehow Kuleshov heard about this, called me, and said he wanted to talk to me about reading this “decadent” poet. Blok is actually one of Russia’s finest poets from the beginning of the twentieth century. I don’t remember how the conversation ended.

When I was in Moscow that first time, I succumbed to what I call “the Russian scholar’s disease,” a disease that would plague me on subsequent visits. This “disease” causes you buy any and all books on subjects in which you have even the vaguest interest. In Soviet times it was easy to become infected because there were many used book stores (“bukinisty”) and the books were extremely cheap, especially by western standards. And as a lonely American in Moscow one of the things I did was roam around used book stores once or twice a week. Gradually I learned which stores tended to have things I wanted on several scholarly subjects; I will not bother you with the details. Another thing to keep in mind is that in those bygone days no one used backpacks (except maybe

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tramps) and so I had to carry all of that scholarly stuff in my briefcase. That of course would bend you over to the right or to the left as it made your back bend the wrong way. A great stimulus for book-buying was that you could take a pile of books to the post office in the main "Telegraf" building that was on the corner of a block not far from Red Square and from a subway station. The women there would wrap the books and you would write your Soviet address and your home address on the package. You had to get special permission from the Lenin Library to mail anything published before 1918; later this was changed to 1945. Mailing books was unbelievably inexpensive. Many years later, around 2004, I took some ten books to the main Moscow post office. It turned out that Bush had abolished surface mail so I had to spend about \$75 to send just ten books home by air mail – quite a change from years past. Today Russian books cost close to what books cost in the United States. Several years ago I had the 3000 odd Slavic books in my library appraised. To my surprise they were valued at over \$75,000! I donated half the books to the University of Wisconsin library and the other half to the University of Kentucky. And of course I took a small deduction from my income tax as a charitable contribution. What beautiful empty shelves I now have! I guess I am now finally cured of the Russian scholar's disease.

Yet another event from my first stay in Moscow is worth exploring. Near the end of my stay Dima gave me a large folder of typed poems by Mandelshtam, all in manuscript form, dated from the period of the poet's exile in the provincial city Voronezh, if I remember correctly. Mandelshtam eventually became known as one of Russia's finest poets from the first part of the twentieth century. He eventually perished in a gulag or prison camp. Dima was worried that it might be discovered that I got the manuscripts from him. Also the typewriter of the person who had copied the poems could be identified in those days. I had a large trunk and put the folder on the bottom, under all of my stuff. I checked the trunk when I bought my ticket to ride the train from Moscow to Helsinki through Leningrad and made a point of not having it with me. The Soviet border town with Finland was Vyborg. After the guards inspected the things we had with us in our compartment, I and another American left the train to have something to eat in the restaurant at the station. We were sitting there for an hour or so when a woman ran in and shouted that little time was left for the guards to inspect the luggage that we had in the baggage car. We walked slowly but deliberately toward the baggage car. While a guard was going through my stuff, a whistle

signaled that the train was about to leave for Helsinki. The guard did not have time to reach the folder of Mandelshtam's poems on the bottom of my trunk. Who knows what would have happened if he had. At the very least he would have confiscated the folder.

The Mandelshtam story continued after I returned home and started graduate work in Slavic Languages at Harvard University in the fall of 1959. I was apprehensive about showing the manuscripts to anyone or even talking about them. I did not want to cause any harm to Dima back in the Soviet Union. It was perhaps as late as my third year at Harvard that I mentioned the manuscripts to Professor Vsevolod Setchkarev who asked to read them. After going through the poems he said that they were excellent and that they should be sent to Professor Gleb Struve at the University of California at Berkeley because he was collecting and publishing poets whose works were forbidden in the Soviet Union. I asked Professor Setchkarev to mail the folder to Struve and I asked him not to reveal how he had received the folder. Later Struve included the poems in a collection of Mandelshtam's works and described the manuscript in the notes. Eventually I gave my name to Struve who sent me the collection with his personal dedication. For several years he sent me collections of Russian poetry that he was editing and publishing. Thus Dima, and to a small extent I, contributed to the preservation of the heritage of Mandelshtam.

Moving back to my memoirs, I need to note that during the summer of 1966 Dima called me at the dormitory in MGU and invited me to spend the weekend with his wife Masha in a small house ("dacha") they were renting outside of Moscow. Dima told me to go to a certain subway station, take a particular exit, walk to a bridge, and go down below to wait for a train to New Jerusalem. There I found no posted schedule indicating when and where the trains were going so I waited for several to pass before I asked someone for help. When I got on the right train at last, I found the car was jammed with people because it was Saturday and they were eager to get out of Moscow in the summer time. I stood in the platform at the end of a car next to a policeman. The train stopped several times but there were no signs and so there was no way for me to tell where we were. Finally I asked the policeman for help. He turned out to be friendly, even to a foreigner, and told me where to get off. I did so, only to discover that Dima was not there waiting for me! So what was I, a suspicious American, doing so far outside of Moscow? What could I do? I waited and waited until Dima finally showed up. We walked through a small town, across a stream, and through some trees until we

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reached the little house. Later Masha showed me around the area and asked me to help her pick mushrooms, but not what she called “little pagans,” that is, toadstools. We walked by a collective farm where Masha pointed out containers and explained that this indicated that the peasants were making alcohol to sell “on the left,” that is, to make money by selling for profit merchandise that was not in the collective farm register. Just imagine — moonshining in the Soviet Union! That evening everyone got together for dinner in the large house. I had brought along a bottle of scotch as a present. I had bought it at a Berezka, the only place in Moscow where you could buy a bottle of scotch and a place where you had to pay in dollars — more about Berezka later. Dima took the bottle and put it on the table. One man present poured out the scotch and drank it as though it were vodka, shot after shot! I, of course, was horrified and felt that he had no appreciation for the value of my gift. The next morning Dima and Masha wanted to walk barefoot to see the nearby New Jerusalem Monastery. Along the way Dima showed me where German troops had dug trenches as they approached Moscow during the Second World War. Unfortunately a thunderstorm started so we gave up going to the empty monastery. I should mention that four or five years ago someone took me to see the monastery which had played an important cultural role in Russia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So I did get to see it after all, but only much later. As for my trip to visit Dima and Masha, that evening one of the very few people who had a car in the Soviet Union gave me a ride back to Moscow and dropped me off at a subway station.

The second event during my stay in Moscow came during the summer of 1966 and also involved Masha and Dima. They lived in an apartment which belonged to Masha’s mother, a well-known actress. The apartment was located on what used to be called Gorky Street but since has reverted to its old name Tverskaia Street, one of the main streets in Moscow leading toward Red Square. As I remember, they lived on the sixth floor. On the next to last day that my group was to spend in Moscow, Dima and Masha invited me to dinner and I took along another American. During the day Masha ran into a French friend whom she also invited for dinner. Eight of us were sitting around a long table and enjoying ourselves. Overhead on the ceiling was a spot as long as the table which was caused by rain water leaking through a decorative balcony overlooking the street. When I stood up to propose a toast, the ceiling fell down in two parts. One shattered over my head and the other piece swung toward the Frenchman sitting at the end of the long table.

Fortunately he swung away from the slab which nevertheless grazed him. Masha and Dima put me on a bed and tried to wash the plaster off me; eventually it started drying hard on my head. I had brought along all my remaining American “luxuries” which Dima put on top of the refrigerator in plain sight. Dima screamed to Masha, telling her to hide the foreign goods so that officials would not see them. Then she ran into the living room where all this had happened to pull an icon off the wall — again so that officials would not see a picture of a saint. She pulled and pulled but could not make it budge. Dima first called the police. A policeman, who was from Novgorod and spoke in a dialect, looked at me, demanded my documents, and asked me questions, but did nothing more and left. Then Dima called the firemen who did the same thing. Finally Dima called the ambulance to take me and the Frenchman to a Moscow hospital. When we walked out of the building downstairs into the courtyard a crowd was standing there, waiting. They had heard that an American had been killed! So away we rode in an ambulance with the sirens screaming through Moscow to a hospital. They examined me, took an X-ray which revealed nothing serious, and asked me to stay for the night. I knew I might not get out of the place soon so I said no. They called for a taxi to take me back to the MGU dormitory.

Shortly thereafter, for our last class in Russian language, the teachers asked us to write an essay showing how our Russian had improved. So I wrote about my ceiling incident. It turned out that the story was a familiar one to the teachers and to people living in Moscow then. Apparently ceilings fell with regularity. That evening I returned to say goodbye to Dima and Masha. They had spent the whole day talking to all kinds of officials about what had happened. It turned out that the woman in charge of the apartment building was responsible because she had done nothing to repair the leaking balcony despite many requests from Masha. The woman came to them for a signature to relieve her of responsibility. She knelt on the floor, cried, and said her life would be ruined if Masha did not sign. After Masha signed, the woman stood up and ran out of the apartment without even saying thank you. I asked Masha and Dima whether the officials had searched the apartment above theirs to see what could be done. The man living there had refused and they had not. To my utter surprise, officials in the USSR could not enter someone’s apartment without the resident’s permission. Dima said the man refused because he was a “speculator,” the Soviet term for someone selling something for a profit, that is, a capitalist. This was totally illegal in a Communist country! So I said goodbye to Dima and Masha. Thus

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ended my second stay in the USSR. At home I told this story to several people. Some time later, at a convention, a Russian whom I had once met walked up to me and said the same thing had happened to him, thus confirming that falling ceilings were nothing exceptional!

My next memorable adventure occurred in Moscow in the spring of 1970. Thanks to Masha's mother, she and Dima had moved to an apartment for MXAT, that is, the Moscow Art Theater. The building was on a street then named "Nemirovich-Danchenko" after a famous director. One time there I briefly met Masha's famous actress mother. Dima and Masha were friends with a doctor who was a specialist in cancer treatment. The husband of a woman the doctor had treated was in charge of hunting lodges scattered in various places. He wanted to express his appreciation by arranging a visit to a hunting lodge on a barge on a lake shore maybe some 150 kilometers north of Moscow. Dima wanted me to go there with them even though he knew it was far beyond the allowable limit of 40 kilometers from the center of Moscow to which foreigners were supposed to adhere. All this was in the beginning of May when the KGB tended to go through and clear their records. "Why are you friends with foreigners? Why do you get so much foreign mail? Why do you read non-communist books?" These were the questions that Dima and Masha might expect to be asked. Also at the beginning of May came three holidays: May Day, Victory Day (a celebration of the end of the Second World War on May ninth), and some important person's birthday, whose, I no longer remember. I told Dima that I had a cold, was worn out, and did not feel like a long trip. So I returned to the Academy Hotel where I was staying. Dima called me by the phone in my room. "Jim, it is a beautiful spot. It is only 150 K north of Moscow. No one will know." Again I told Dima I had a cold, was worn out, and didn't feel like a long trip. My first reaction was to think, "Dima. What are you doing to me!" Ten minutes later Dima called again. Same conversation and same answer by me. Five minutes later the phone rang again. A deep rough voice spoke slowly. "We want to congratulate you on arranging a holiday. We understand that it is sad to be alone on a holiday." And on and on. Finally I said, "Who is calling?" The voice answered, "It is not important who is speaking, but what he says." So much for a foreign literary scholar in Soviet Moscow repeatedly saying he would not go. Those eavesdroppers wanted to do their duty and show they knew everything. And it was they who decided who would or would not go and where. This may be my best "Soviet adventure."

Often after I finished working in the Lenin Library where room No. 1 was reserved for academicians and foreigners, I would walk to spend the evening and have dinner with Dima and Masha. I would take different routes there so that I could see different parts of Moscow. One thing I was curious about was an apartment complex not far from the Lenin Library. Every time I walked by, there were cars with chauffeurs parked outside, usually the cars were Volgas, the best Soviet car. Only big shots had such cars and chauffeurs as well. There were no signs indicating this structure as an official building and so I had no idea what was going on. Only years later did I read in an American reporter's memoirs that this was a special place where big shots shop, especially for groceries. Shopping in Soviet times was miserable because there was little in the stores and you never knew what might be for sale on the street. You always carried a bag called "avos'ka" (perhapsnik) just in case you ran into something being sold on the street. If you returned ten minutes later, it would all be gone. After another walk from the Lenin Library I made another such discovery. I got to the entrance of the building where Dima and Masha lived. You would have to tell a door keeper there you wanted to see so and so. Someone came in with me and rode the elevator with me up to the floor where Dima and Masha lived. The man also got out on that floor. When I rang the doorbell and Masha opened the door, the man ran down stairs. Masha said I had been "tailed."

My adventures in Moscow include this small incident. When you wanted to buy something in a store, you would select what you wanted and get the price from a sales woman, then go to the cashier who sat in a booth in another part of the store; you would pay and get a receipt, and then take the receipt back to the saleswoman who would give you the item. One time in a shop I went to the cashier and paid. When I was walking away she said: "Thank you comrade. No, he is not a comrade but I don't know what he is." I guess my American accent betrayed me again and I could not be anonymous even in this quotidian space.

Every hotel that provided rooms for foreigners had a special place called "Berezka" (little birch) where some foreign things as well as some Russian things hard to find in ordinary shops were sold, but only in exchange for foreign currency, especially dollars. One time I took Masha to the biggest Berezka in Moscow. This Berezka was near the Hotel Rossiia, at that time a new hotel built not far from Red Square, mainly for foreign tourists. It stood near the Moscow River and was recently torn down. I paid dollars for the things Masha needed and we left the

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store, walked a way along a side street near the Moscow River. There I noticed an entrance to a store that was selling luxurious items not available in normal Soviet stores. When Masha and I tried to enter, a man stopped us and told us we were not allowed inside. Thus we discovered yet another ritzy place that only the Soviet upper class could use and it was located right in the middle of the land of the people.

Service in stores usually was poor and frustrating, probably because so few things were available and people were willing to work hard at getting what they needed. People sometimes resorted to a “berzobrazie,” that is, yelling at someone and raising hell to get their attention. What follows is literally “an ugliness” which was typical of many everyday occurrences. Even if you are an English speaker sooner or later you learn enough Russian to indulge in such madness at times. The occasion that I remember most vividly took place in the bookstore of the Academy of Sciences located on Gorky Street close to Red Square. One section was for used books and I often went there because one of the women remembered me and sometimes set things aside for me. Once I entered the store soon after it had opened after its hour-long break for lunch. A woman asked the clerk if they had the multi-volume collection of translations of Jules Verne, the French popularizer of science fiction. The clerk said yes and told the woman how much it cost so she could pay for it at the cashier’s desk. Some man standing behind her reached over her shoulder and said he had already been there before the break, that the huge collection had been promised to him, and that he had a receipt showing that he had already paid for it. The two people started yelling at each other and the poor saleswoman over who actually had a right to take the many volumes. I left the store and came back some twenty minutes later. The “bezobrazie” was still going on. I do not know who won the screaming match over rights to many volumes written by a French writer and being sold in Moscow. On one occasion I indulged in a “bezobrazie” in an American establishment when staff did not respond by helping me. This was in a US bank when I just could not get someone’s attention so that I could be let into the room where the safe deposit boxes were. And the bank staff did not respond the way the Soviets did; instead they threatened to call the police! I guess a Russian “bezobrazie” does not work well in this country. I have to add that things have changed in Russia and it has been a long time since I have witnessed a “bezobrazie” type fanfare in either Moscow or Petersburg. Almost everything is available somewhere now and having money is what matters; just like here in the United States.

Yet another small incident began with my professor friend at Harvard, Kiril Taranovsky, asking me to find him a book by a well known Russian scholar. Usually it was easy to find such things in used book stores, but this particular book was one that I simply could not find. So I asked Dima what could be done. On Sunday he took me to a place on the same street as the Moscow Art Theater. People were selling all sorts of things at one intersection, including foreign publications of banned Russian writers. These were books that had been confiscated by border guards from people trying to bring them into the Soviet Union. Dima talked to one of the people on the street and told him what I was looking for. The fellow said he would find it and would meet me somewhere else on that street several days later. Standing cautiously in the entrance way where our meeting was scheduled to take place, the man slipped me the book. I do not know how much I paid but it probably was in dollars. This small episode once again shows how skilled Dima was at getting things done in Soviet Moscow.

Some more trivia follows. One afternoon when I came to see Dima and Masha some men were working on the steam radiator in the living room. Dima introduced me to the workers as an American. One of them said I should be hanged and then he laughed. This was just another example of the hostility toward Americans that the government had managed to inculcate in ordinary citizens.

Dima and Masha were renting a small modest dacha outside of Moscow near the Istra River. When I went there I had to sleep on a hard bed or even on a board, but I was woken up by nightingales. This was the first time in my life that I ever heard nightingales. Staying at the dacha, we would walk to and along the Istra River. This too is a lovely memory. But, paradoxically, what I remember most is the large and box-like wooden outhouse. When I sat down in it, I read the words LEND LEASE on the wall. This proved that what I had said about American aid to the Soviets during the Second World War and the Lend Lease program was true. Only I had to travel all the way to the Soviet Union to see those words on a container! On Sunday the people there gave us a ride to the railroad. Since we were beyond the 40 kilometer limit, Dima gave me a book to read and told me not to say a word since we would be sitting in an open coach. The book turned out to be a collection of Brodsky's poetry, something not published in the USSR. I had a collection of Brodsky's poems at home and had read them so I thumbed my way through the book and started reading a ballad about a young couple murdered on the shore of a rural lake. The man sitting next to me on the

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bench was taller than me and he started looking over my shoulder to see what I was reading. Suddenly he said, "Esenin wouldn't have written such a poem." Fortunately Masha was sitting opposite me. She started talking to the man to distract him and to keep me from revealing my American accent. She talked all the way to the station in Moscow. Once there I called another friend who asked me over for dinner. We ended up talking until such a late hour that he asked me to stay for the night. I arrived back in the Academy Hotel on Monday morning, just as the maid was cleaning my room. She was from a provincial town and often talked to me. She had already noticed that I had not slept in my bed, but she decided that she needed to be discreet and said not a word. So ended another weekend for the man taken to be "American spy" in Moscow.

When I was in Moscow in the spring of 1970 I often went to the US Embassy because they had a special room full of American books on all kinds of subjects. You could take all you wanted, walk out of the Embassy, and give them to Russian friends. I went there often because Dima was fluent in English and had a deep interest in American literature and life. Sometimes I left with such a heavy briefcase that I could barely carry it. I gave Dima so many books that he had no more room for them and piled them up on shelves above the entrance hall in their apartment. And back home in the United States it was possible to request that books be sent to Russian friends, perhaps through IREX. I wanted to send Dima a Webster's Dictionary because he needed such a dictionary, at least for American English, but IREX would not send it because it was too expensive and too heavy. So one of my attempts to repay Dima's many kindnesses failed.

The last time I saw Dima was the evening when I was leaving Moscow for Helsinki. Considering the amount of luggage I had, I probably took a taxi to Dima's place where I had dinner with Dima and Masha. He must have ordered a taxi to the Leningrad Station where he saw me off. Going through things from past years I found a lot of letters from Dima and one from Masha about his death in the summer of 1974. I also have several books in which he wrote a dedication to me. Wonderful, wonderful memories. I thank you for them, Dima, my friend.

I should write a few words about where Dima died. He and his wife Masha had acquired a cottage on the Island of Hiiumaa in the Baltic Sea off the coast of Estonia which then was part of the Soviet Union. Friends liked to join them there because they felt as though they had almost escaped from the grips of the USSR. It was no accident that Soviet Border guards were there to keep people from escaping. Dima and

Masha could invite only relatives to visit them, but for some strange reason, they had many relatives. That is where Dima died in 1974, the same year when my father and Hanna's mother died. I lost three refugees in my life: one in California, one in Germany, and one in Moscow. Thanks to some mutual Estonian friends I visited Hiiumaa in the summer of 1994 where Masha and her second husband Vadim had just finished building a large home with beautiful wooden paneling.

When I went to the USSR in the spring of 1988 I called Masha and was invited by her to the same apartment that her mother had lived in. Masha's second husband Vadim was a singer. He traveled around many parts of the country and gave concerts for which he was paid well by Soviet standards. When people gave him all kinds of gifts (odds and ends) after a concert, he could not carry all the extra stuff with him and so he usually gave it to the servants in the hotels where he stayed. He had served in some capacity in the armed forces and knew jujitsu, if my memory has not deceived me once again. He had contacts with the higher military authorities, something which evidently helped him stay out of service in Afghanistan. He obviously understood how things were really done in the USSR and knew how to take advantage of his contacts. For example, he was able to buy a "Volga," which was one of the finest cars in the USSR, but this created another problem: how to find a garage in which to park the car and keep it out of the reach of vandals. Again, using his contacts, he found a garage in the courtyard of the apartment complex where he and Masha lived. These examples explain what happened to me during another of my personal adventures.

I was again living in the Academy Hotel. One morning, when I was brushing my teeth, I noticed something hard. I pulled out something white and realized that it was a piece of a tooth! I went downstairs to where various services were provided for the people staying in the hotel. They told me to go to a special clinic presumably one for foreigners, on a street near the Belorusskii railroad station. They gave me the wrong address but I found it anyway. When the clinic let me in, they had me fill out a form. I sat down next to a Polish woman who had been waiting for several hours already and had been there several times. She had nothing good to say about the place. After I waited three or four hours I saw a dentist. He looked at my mouth, saw the problem, and said: "Go home! There is nothing we can do for you here!" I had about three months left to stay in Moscow on my exchange so what was I, an American, going to do?

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When I went to see Masha and Vadim that evening, Vadim said he knew a dentist who could do the job. He was working “on the left,” which meant he was making money on the side, in addition to what he earned at his official job. That probably meant that I would have to pay the dentist in dollars, which I was willing to do because I did not want to go home. When we saw the dentist, he said I should have two crowns and that these would be made out of first-rate imported German material. I was skeptical because, by that time, a time close to the collapse of the Soviet Union, fake foreign things were being sold as genuine imports. But I agreed because I had no choice. Thank heavens Vadim had a car because he drove me to many places scattered all over Moscow to see several dentists, each of whom did something different with my teeth. When they ground the tips off my teeth, they did little or nothing to cover the exposed tops as is done in the United States. After about a month of assorted procedures, Vadim took me to get the crowns put on by the main dentist. That evening we went to the emergency dental clinic for all of Moscow. The large entrance room was full of people moaning and groaning while they waited for treatment. Vadim took me in and we walked right past all those miserable people to the dentist’s room. In a short time he put the crowns on my teeth and everything was finished. I think I paid him or his assistant several hundred dollars. This many years after the event I am not sure precisely where or how much I paid. Needless to say, without Vadim’s know how I would not have been able to live through all of this torment and doubt. When I got back to the United States, I went to our dentist and told him my story. He examined the crowns and said that they were genuine German material and that the workmanship was excellent. So even good things could happen in the USSR.

Masha came to visit us in Madison, maybe in the fall of 1988. We showed her the delights of Madison and helped her buy things she needed to take home since it had become difficult to buy many things in Moscow. Unlike the Soviet Union where there were specific limitations on travel by foreigners, here Masha rode a bus to visit friends, I believe in Chicago and Detroit and, after leaving us, may have stayed with friends in New York on her way home. I also bought a computer for Masha to take home. I have pictures of her wrapping things so she could take them as luggage. I believe the computer arrived separately in Moscow and it took a big effort on Vadim’s part to get it through customs at the Moscow international airport, Sheremetevo.

Vadim's son played the oboe, the instrument I had played when I entered university in 1948. I asked Vadim if I could buy and send his son an excellent French oboe once I was back home; he agreed. The oboe teacher in the music school at the University of Wisconsin helped me order and buy the proper oboe. The problem was how to get it to Vadim because it would have been expensive to mail the oboe and to pay customs duties. Instead I asked a colleague in the Slavic Department to take the oboe with him on his trip to Moscow. Somehow I managed to let Vadim know and he met my colleague at the airport and picked up the oboe. The instrument easily passed customs without any import duty! That is the way I managed to thank Vadim for all that he had done for my teeth.

Vadim wanted his son to go to Germany and get a position in a German orchestra, in other words, to escape the Soviet Union and the mess that life had become as the Soviet system fell apart. Many musicians were trying to arrange this and many succeeded. Vadim's son had to stand in line for hours every morning at the German Embassy to get his application confirmed. Hundreds evidently were doing the same thing. I am not sure how long it took, but Vadim's son finally succeeded. He eventually became well established in Germany and began living there. Another difficulty was that he was in line to be drafted into the military but somehow Vadim managed to have the draft pass him by. Years later in Petersburg a friend who had children playing string instruments told me that they left Russia to play in Germany and that the groups they had played in at home had fallen apart. A sad situation in a country that had produced so many fine musicians.

When the Soviet Union was breaking up in 1990, foreigners were at long last able to visit and live with friends. So I visited and lived with Masha and Vadim in the summer of that year. Vadim took me to register at OVIR and then register again at a nearby police station. I was easily able to meet friends and then to return in the evening to Masha's apartment. As I remember, dozens of different newspapers were being published and sold on the streets since there no longer was any censorship. And I watched TV showing the Supreme Soviet in session as representatives debated changes in the country. I believe I watched the atomic scientist Sakharov advocating various changes after he had been released from exile in a city well away from Moscow. Crowds were demonstrating on the streets and demanding changes although I do not recall that I saw much of that first hand. I should also mention that Vadim took me by train to visit his friends in Tallinn, a beautiful city in

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Estonia. Not only did we travel that far away from Moscow without any permission, but we also stayed with his friends. Things were changing in the Soviet Union.

I could go on and on with bits and pieces about my adventures in the Soviet Union but I believe I have written enough to give the American reader some idea about what living in that country was like for an “alien American.” My experiences after the end of the Soviet Union are a different story with a different atmosphere which I will not write about here. Enough!