



Social Work  
Delegation to Moscow  
and St. Petersburg – **RUSSIA**

August 19 – 27, 2010



**Delegation Leaders**

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# First Impressions

## **BETSY CLARK**

(Элизабет Кларк)

When we landed in Moscow, I was delighted to see that the sky was free of smoke. We had had a difficult time trying to decide whether to travel or to cancel the trip. We had been in close contact with the People to People staff who were on the ground in Russia, and it looked like we made the right decision.

I'm always interested in the passport control process, and thought it would be difficult because the visa process was so explicit. The only issue was that we had to have both the entrance and exit forms completed before we could enter. Many people had only filled out the entrance form, and they had to leave the line and return. Fortunately, the area wasn't too busy so that didn't slow us down too much.

After rounding up everyone and getting our luggage, our guide led us to the bus. I was again pleased that the bus was comfortable and spacious. We would not be crowded.

Another early impression was the sheer beauty of the Russian Orthodox domes that you could see no matter what direction you looked. The gold shining in the sunlight during the week is a lasting impression.



I realized that Moscow was large, but I think I expected it to look more industrial – almost drab. I think I had this impression from movies during the time of the Cold War and movies that depicted the Soviet Union during World War II. In fact, it is a nice looking city and I was struck by how clean it seemed, especially given the recent forest fires and the smoke we had seen on TV.

As this report notes later, I think we were all surprised by the volume of traffic and the congestion. This would have an impact on several of our activities and on the amount of free time we would be able to protect during our visit.

Finally, we quickly noted that the city was not readily accessible to persons with physical challenges. We noted this at the airport and at the hotel. We would learn even more about this as the week progressed.

## **RICHARD JONES**

(Ричард Джонс)



The flight to Moscow was long but filled with interesting conversation with all of my seat mates as we made our way to Russia via New York and Frankfurt. I had lots of impressions before we arrived and for some reason, probably because of my earlier exposure to the Stalinist and Soviet eras, always had in mind the famous “hammer and sickle” which appeared on flags in history books and in much of the news coverage I was exposed to as I was growing up. I expected to see lots of armed police at the airport who would impose crowd control techniques as we were processed through customs.

To my pleasant surprise everyone was friendly and there were lots of families waiting for loved ones and friends to enter the arrival area, just like in most countries around the world today. It was a little overwhelming because the crowds were very large. I was immediately struck by the rich diversity, racial and cultural, that you see among the faces of the families who were traveling from many different parts of this vast country. There were police but they were helpful as we navigated our way to pick up luggage and gather the group to meet our National Guide. It is not a modern airport but it is large and filled with boundless activity as we looked around the facility and watched passengers pick up huge pieces of luggage full of items they had picked up from various places around the world and the country.

The weather was cool as we stepped outside to move on to our bus, and we were all appreciative that we did not have to worry about wearing the face masks we had brought along because the fires and smog had cleared. In fact it was relatively cool and I was pleased I had brought along a jacket to keep warm against the August chill and rain.

When we stepped on the bus, I thought it would be a matter of 30 minutes or so before we arrived at the airport. I was in for a big surprise.

Moscow is massive with many interesting new condo developments among the city's housing which was primarily built during the Stalinist era. The buildings were interesting and it's clear that the majority of Muscovites live in apartments and condos which are, as we learned later from our guide, passed down from family to family because housing is very expensive.

You are immediately struck by the large number of churches, with their distinctive onion shaped and multi-colored domes that are found throughout the City as we lumbered along the streets to our hotels. Monuments and parks dedicated to the victims of past wars are also found in many public parks, which like most of Russia are always massive and very prominent.

The traffic jams reminded me of being on the Dan Ryan during rush hour in Chicago because in a city of 10 million, traffic moves very slowly along avenues which have not been built to accommodate the rapid growth that is occurring in the country. The traffic jams would be an introduction to what we could expect during the remainder of our time in Moscow and St. Petersburg. I am confident because of their genius, either Catherine the Great and or Peter the Great would have come up with a solution to this problem as we also saw the incredible contributions both made to the spectacular growth of the country. They were awesome leaders.

Our National Guide did a wonderful job of filling in the time, as we made our way to our hotel, with lots of information about the history of the country which was informative and very important to our getting focused for the time we would be spending in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Alla Levitina is an incredible guide and her knowledge of the history of the country would easily compete with that of any university history professor.

When we arrived at the hotel, we were all thrilled by its charm and many modern amenities. We were literally blocks away from the Kremlin and though tired we were all eager to get settled, eat and continue our exciting journey. We heard a wonderful presentation from a representative of the US Embassy, though I was very troubled with the problems he described among many of Moscow's street children who are trying to raise themselves in a very challenging environment.

All in all, it was a thrilling day to share with my colleagues because the drive through the city, the peek at the Kremlin and Red Square, the view of the Russian Orthodox Churches, and the hustle and bustle on the streets wetted our appetites for more as we prepared for the remainder of our tour and knowledge exchange with other social workers in Russia.

## Friday August 20, 2010 – Arrival in Moscow

The delegation arrived via Frankfurt, Germany and landed at the Domodedovo Airport in Moscow in early afternoon. The system for clearing passport control was quite easy. Directly outside the area we were met by Ms. Alla Levitina, our Russian National Guide.

It took some time for all of us to gather and collect our luggage. When everyone was accounted for, Alla called our bus driver who then met us in a designated spot outside. The weather was a bit damp, but there was no smoke remaining from the forest fires.

We were transported by bus to the Marriott Tverskaya Hotel which is located on Moscow's main thoroughfare. I think we were unprepared for Friday afternoon traffic in Moscow. While the hotel is only a few miles from the airport, it took us well over an hour to reach our destination.

The hotel is an eight story art nouveau building with 163 rooms. A four-star hotel, it is the smallest of the Marriott chain in Moscow. While it is in an area that houses many restaurants, there is only one restaurant located within the hotel. Named Gratzki Restaurant, it serves both Russian and Italian cuisine.

We checked into the hotel without difficulty. It is always surprising when we need to leave our passports with the hotel registration. The staff were friendly and most spoke English. Our rooms had already been assigned so the process went quickly. We had only 40 or so minutes to unpack and get ready for our first professional meeting and orientation briefing.

### **PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM**

We had been asked to begin promptly at 5:30pm since we had an outside guest. Delegates had wanted to visit an orphanage while in Russia, but due to some recent issues around international adoption between the US and Russia, that was not possible on this trip.

Instead, a briefing on Russian/international adoption had been arranged. We expected Ms. Jessica Wolf-Hudson, Head of the Immigrant Visa Section of the U.S. Embassy, to speak. Unfortunately, she had been called to a meeting outside of Moscow. Her assistant, Douglas Johnston, came in her place.

Mr. Johnston is the Vice Consular of the US Embassy in Russia. He has been in that position for a year and a half. Previously he was stationed in India and in the USA. He began by giving us an overview of the US Embassy there. He said there are about 50 staff at the Embassy, and that it has three sections. One section approves visas for Russians who want to visit the USA. A visa is actually an application to enter a country. Hundreds of these are done for entry to the US each day. Since 9/11, everyone seeking a visa must come to the American Embassy for a personal interview.

The second section provides services for American citizens who are in Russia. They are available for assistance 24 hours per day. He also explained that visitors to Russia must register with the Russian officials within three days of arrival. The hotel will do that for us. That was the reason they collected our passports.

The third section is immigrant services for Russians who want to live in the United States. Usually those seeking immigrant services have relatives living in the USA. He noted that the population of Russia is shrinking and that they are losing 800,000 citizens per year. External adoptions fall under the immigrant services section. They do the final part of the adoption – something like an exit interview.

Some things were better for Russian citizens during the Soviet Union era. Education and health care were free and every person was guaranteed housing in communal apartments. The changes that started 20 years have been a shock to many. Now 20% of people live below the poverty level and there is the biggest gap ever between the average worker and billionaires. Homelessness is becoming more common.

The elderly, too, have had a difficult time. They have lost free health care. They now go to community medical clinics. There they often have to wait for quite a long time. People who can afford it buy private health insurance.

The retirement age for women is 55 and for men it is 60. In the past they were encouraged to leave their employment at retirement age, but now they can work and get their pension, too.

There was never a women's liberation movement in Russia. After the revolution, women had equal rights to men. They go to school and have careers. This has resulted in women having fewer children.

The government is concerned about the low birth rate. They are now providing what's called maternal capital – 300,000 rubles (\$10,000) – to encourage couples to have a second or third child. This stipend is given only once to a family after a second child is born. Families receive the money through the bank. It can be used for certain things such as better housing, education, and free daycare.

At the conclusion of Mr. Johnston's presentation, we had an excellent briefing on Russian culture and the activities for the week. The orientation was given by Tatiana Peresypkina.

Russia is huge in size, covering over 6 1/2 million square miles and nine different time zones; it is the world's largest country. We are only visiting two cities in Russia. Both are on the western side. One surprise was the proximity of St. Petersburg to Finland.

Russia is ethnically diverse. While Russian is the main language, English is spoken by many young people, especially in the urban areas.

We reviewed the week's travel schedule, especially those for Saturday and Sunday. We had arrived on Friday, so we had the weekend to look forward to. Since agencies were closed for the weekend, we would spend the next two days in cultural activities.

At 7:30pm we had a welcome dinner in the Seligersky conference room, a separate room at the hotel where we would have most of our meals while staying there. We were served delicious salmon. No one lingered long after the meal was served. We were all exhausted by our long hours of travel and were anxious to call it a night.

# Saturday August 21, 2010

## CULTURAL PROGRAM (DAY 1)

### Morning – Red Square, Tretyakov Gallery

A breakfast buffet was provided in the Seligersky conference room starting at 7am. Since it was the weekend, we began our visit with two days of cultural activities. Our first visit was to Red Square and the Tretyakov Gallery.

Red Square (Krasnaya Ploschad) is the historical center of Moscow. It is located immediately outside the Kremlin walls and it is dominated by Lenin’s marble tomb (Vladimir Lenin, the Founder of the Soviet State, led Russia from 1917-1924). It is a beautiful square. Years ago, its Russian name – Krasnaya – meant both beautiful and red. We entered through the Resurrection Gates. It was a perfect day for sightseeing. The sky was blue and the sun was shining.



We had time to explore the Square and an adjacent upscale shopping center on our own. Then we all met at St. Basil’s Cathedral at a designated time. St. Basil’s must be one of the most recognizable structures in the world.



Labeled Moscow’s “stone flower,” this church was built in 1555 to honor the victory over Mongol Tartars. It is actually a combination of nine different chapels and nine distinctive domes. All of the domes are colorful and each one is decorated in a different style of stripes, swirls, or other geometric designs. Somehow, taken together, it seems to work and it gives the impression of one complete structure. It actually reminded me of the castle at Disney’s Magic Kingdom. Unfortunately, we did not have time to tour the Cathedral. We also did not get to see Lenin’s tomb. While we waited for our bus to arrive, we did have the opportunity to take pictures, buy souvenirs and talk to artists who were selling their artwork on the street.



We next visited the Tretyakov Gallery, Russia’s first public art museum. It was begun by the Tretyakov brothers (who were merchant philanthropists) in the 1800s, and their private collection is a large part of it. It also contains many Russian icons, some dating from the 9th century. We walked through the museum in chronological historical order and our Russian guides did an amazing job of using the artwork to give us an overview of Russian history. There are many major works of art there including “Ivan the Terrible” by Ilya Repin.

We had a somewhat difficult time in keeping our group together as we crossed the bridge over the Moscow River on our way to and from the museum. We were enchanted by the number of brides and grooms who were celebrating their marriages on the banks of the river. They were following a custom that was not familiar to most of us. Large metal tree sculptures line the river bank and the bridge. Couples come to the area – often by limos – and they place two locks on a tree and throw the keys into the river to symbolize that they are locked together for life – that their marriage will survive. The wedding parties were still in wedding attire, and many of them were celebrating with champagne. The scene was charming, and delegates spent some time enjoying the scene and taking pictures.



Next we had lunch at a local restaurant called Baba Marta. We were served traditional Russian cuisine.



### Afternoon – Sightseeing Tour of Moscow

After lunch, we went on a sightseeing tour of Moscow that took us past many famous and recognizable buildings and landmarks. We saw numerous Orthodox churches with differently decorated domes. We drove past Gorky Park which is a huge amusement park. We also passed Victory Park, a tribute to the end of World War II and the victory over the Nazis. Our guide explained that 27 million Russian lives were lost during that war, more than any other country. No Russian family was untouched. The World War II veterans are still revered, and young brides go to the Victory Park to pay their respects to their ancestors. They often leave their bridal bouquets there.



We learned about the Boulevard Ring, seven concentric circles (marked by boulevards) that spread out from the Kremlin. Each circle represents an expansion of the ancient city's defense system. We also became familiar with "Stalin's Seven Sisters," skyscrapers with a distinctive look which were built in the 1950s. They were fairly recognizable in the city's skyline.

We stopped at the side of the Moscow River and tried to take pictures of the massive bronze monument of Peter the Great on a boat in the harbor. Picture taking was difficult because of the size of the statute – larger than the Statue of Liberty. It is over 200 feet high and was installed in 1997. It was sculpted by Zurab Tsereteli and the statute flies the flag of the Russian Navy that has a St. Andrew cross as the symbol (black with a gold cross).



We drove past Moscow State University which is over two centuries old. There are 40,000 students enrolled there. It is built on the highest spot in Moscow, which is called Sparrow Hills. The long avenue leading up to the University is lined with birch trees, the national tree of Russia. We stopped to take pictures of the city view from Sparrow Hill. There is an open air market there and we had some time to shop at the various stalls. Many of us bought some nice souvenirs at reasonable prices.

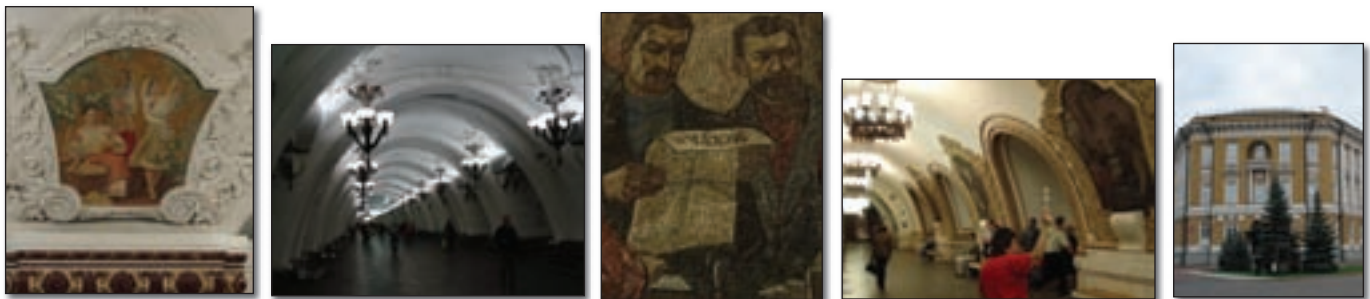
We arrived back at the hotel around 5:30pm. Dinner arrangements were on our own. After a short rest, several of us decided to go see Red Square at night. It was a lovely evening and some people decided to walk. Others took cabs. There was an outdoor concert in the Square, and St. Basil's at night was beautiful to see.

# Sunday August 22, 2010

## CULTURAL PROGRAM (DAY 2)

### Morning – Moscow Metro, Kremlin

Today was our second cultural day and we began by touring the Moscow Metro, the city's public transit system, and one of the world's busiest subways. Often called "The People's Palace," older parts of it are extensively decorated. These stations date from the 1930s and 40s and were built under Stalin's central planning. Stalin believed the working man should have some pleasing art to look at on his way to work.



The Circle Line of the Metro is the grandest. We saw several stations including the Kievskaya station which has beautiful mosaics portraying Ukrainian-Russian friendship. Other stations had stained glass, cast iron street lamps and decorative architecture.

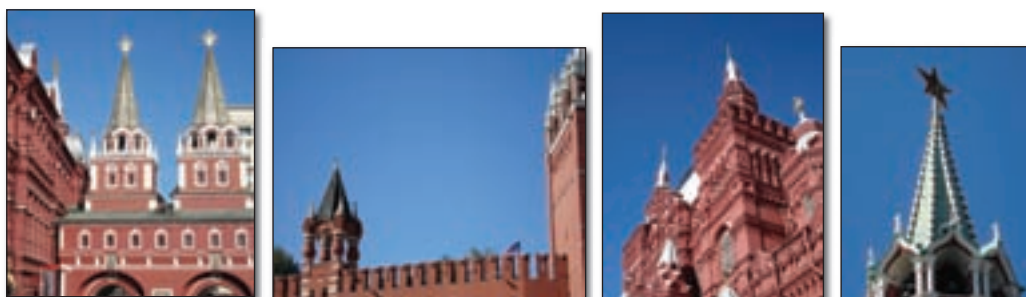


The trains run every 90 seconds and are quite crowded, yet the marble and granite floors are spotless.

We exited the Metro at the station closest to the Kremlin. We had tickets for an 11am entrance. We had seen the outside of the Kremlin from Red Square yesterday but that did not do it justice.

Covering 69 acres, the Kremlin is the former residence of Russian czars. Built as a fortress in the 12th century, it has been the seat of communist power, and is a landmark of great historical significance. It is a mini-city inside red brick walls with red stars on the towers.

We passed the Czar Bell, the largest bell ever made. It weighs 200 tons and is 22 feet in diameter. It had fallen and broken, and the massive pieces were displayed. We also saw the Czar Cannon, again the largest in world. Designed in 1586, it was never fired.



The complex centers around churches which are beautiful. Called Cathedral Square, it is the oldest place in Russia. We went inside the Cathedral of the Assumption or Dormission Church. The name comes from the word “dormant” or slipping into sleep. Topped by five brilliant gold domes, it was built between 1475 and 1479 by an Italian architect named Fioravanti. For five centuries it served as the site of the most important rituals including coronations of emperors and enthronements of heads of the Russian Orthodox Church. Surprisingly, these were no pews or seats in the Cathedral. There was, however, a throne like structure in which the Tsarina sat. In 1812, Napoleon briefly occupied Moscow. During that time he turned the Cathedral into horse stables and melted the silver chandeliers.



Next we visited the Armory Museum, one of the oldest museums in Russia. Admission is limited to four sessions per day, and we were in the second session. The exhibits offer a sweeping introduction to Russian history and include weaponry from many periods. Of interest to many of us was the collection of art, jewelry, and the famous Fabergé eggs that were exchanged by Czar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandria on Orthodox Easter for three decades. Ten of the eggs were on display. The rest had been sold by Stalin to museums in other countries. The museum also includes the robes Peter the Great wore at his coronation in 1698. Additionally, there is a throne display and a display of imperial carriages. One of the largest required a team of 23 horses to pull it. The crowns and thrones and many other items were encrusted with precious jewels. One Bible cover was decorated with 3,000 diamonds. It was a stunning exhibit. Our guide seemed quite proud of the collection.

### Afternoon/Evening – Late Lunch, Ballet Festival



We next had a late lunch at 2pm at Dymov #1 where we had a traditional Russian meal of boiled vegetable salad, borsch soup, beef stroganoff with buckwheat, and chocolate éclairs for dessert.

The plan for after lunch was to return to the hotel for a few hours of free time but Moscow traffic interfered. We only had a short time to get ready to attend the Summer Ballet Festival which began at seven.

The Ballet was performed at the Russian National Ballet Theatre because the Bolshoi Theatre has been under reconstruction since 2005 and will not open until September. The performance was “Sleeping Beauty” by Tchaikovsky. We were in rows three and four. We were able to have these terrific seats because Mila Bolgak, the representative for People to People in Russia, had ordered the tickets for the delegation several months ago. In all, it was a stunning performance.

It was a very full day.

# Monday August 23, 2010

## PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM

### Morning – Tsaritsyno District Social Services Center

Our first professional visit was to the Tsaritsyno District Social Services Center.

Each of the 10 districts of southern Moscow has its own center which is funded by the city of Moscow. Not all centers have their own building, but the Tsaritsyno Center does. It is housed in what was a pre-World War II hospital. This particular Center will be 20 years old this year. It is a beautiful property with a long drive leading up to the building. The drive is lined with birch trees which were planted on the 60th anniversary of World War II by veterans of that war and their family members.



To the left of the driveway is a lovely garden called “The Social Work Garden.” We all liked that tribute. Stephen Beatnik, the Director of the Center, explained that the garden had two levels to include all the things from micro to macro that social work includes. He is not a social worker (actually ex-military – a former colonial), so we were impressed by what his staff had taught him.

We had a lively and unusual welcome to the Center. First we were met by the Director, the Associate Director (Olga Morozova), and Valentina Zarubina, the head of their Community Relations Department. Next came three young women wearing cultural dresses and holding loaves of freshly baked bread topped with salt. This the traditional welcome in Russia. We each took a piece of bread and dipped it in the salt. There was a camera crew and our visit was filmed.



Another welcomer was an 80 year old client who wore a World War II jacket covered with medals. He rollerbladed down the driveway to greet us. He is obviously quite a fixture at the facility, and he had no hesitation in interrupting the Director to vie for our attention.



At the top of the driveway there was a small band and a man in traditional garb who sang Russian songs. Staff and clients were dancing and incorporated many of the delegates into the festivities.

Eventually, we were escorted inside the Center for a tour and description of their program.

The population of this particular district is 1.6 million people. Over 300,000 of them are retired and 170,000 people (4,000 of which are children) have disabilities.

They have 282 staff and 142 are called social workers. Of these, 68 have college degrees and 27 are in the process of getting degrees. Other staff include nurses and psychologists. Most of the staff are women. The Deputy Director is in the process of completing her degree.

The Director explained that 70% of the Moscow city budget is spent on social services. He said this is a carryover from communism when all citizens were cared for. This amount includes pensions, and construction of community facilities and housing.

There is a great need for more social workers, and the city provides incentives for people to go into social work. The average salary for a social worker is 26,000 rubles, not quite \$1,000 US per month. While that seemed startling to us, they hurriedly explained that it was almost twice the minimum living standard.

Since social workers are seen as so crucial, each Center (of which there are 123 in Moscow) has a club for social workers to help them prevent burnout. They provide tickets to special events and pay for some trips to keep staff positive. We asked if there were licensing or professional certification for social workers. There were not. Only medical personnel get certified.

One of the first programs we were told about was what is called the “Grandmother Corps” where older grandmothers are paired with young mothers. This began as a Russian-American partnership program, and professionals from the USA provided funding in the form of grants so young mothers got paid for attending. That didn’t work as they had hoped, so they used the money to buy baby food and for some social events to build a sense of community and to build trust. (We had learned at our cultural briefing the previous night that the government encourages, and provides financial incentives for families to have more than one child.)

They also provide a maternal school for young mothers who have lived in orphanages their whole life (young people can live in orphanages until they are 23). This program provides classes with psychologists and they have health classes and groups. The staff take care of the children while their mothers are in the program. They were quick to point out that this wasn’t just daycare for the children, but education, too. They work with children up to age six. They emphasized that it was a “real school.” Mothers get a diploma in parenting and family studies. The program has recently been expanded to include other young mothers (who were not orphans) and some grandmothers. They also work with employment services to help young mothers find jobs.

The Director has run the center for 12 years. Being a veteran himself, he has been an emphasis on services for veterans. Rehabilitation services also appeared to be a priority for the Center. They cover four districts and serve 1,400 people per month. The Director of Rehabilitation Department is working on obtaining her social work degree.

We visited a gym run by an Olympic triathlon champion. She works particularly with children who have cerebral palsy. There are 40 children enrolled in the program plus their parents receive services. They work with children and adolescents between three and 23 years of age.

We visited one activity program where women were making handmade lace. They had put out a display of finished products for us to see. Handmade lace is a lost art in our country. Several delegates asked about purchasing some pieces, but they were not available for sale.



We next saw a small group of clients doing what they call “medical salts.” This was a new procedure for many of us. The room looked like a solarium. It had low lighting and relaxing lounges. The therapy usually is given daily for a ten day period. This was not just aromatherapy, but an actual treatment procedure. Just by standing at the door to the treatment room you could taste salt on your lips.

There was much to see and they were happy to explain their services to us. We met with about 20 staff. They told us they are planning to expand social work services into schools and churches.

We had broken up into smaller groups for the tour. Fortunately, we had been accompanied to the Center by Mila Bolgak and Tatinana Peresytkina (who had done our opening cultural briefing the previous evening) as well as a professional interpreter, so our smaller groups were able to interact with the Center staff. They provided refreshments and we were able to have an informal exchange.

Eventually, all of our group met in the reception center and we took our leave.

## **Afternoon**

We had a free afternoon and evening for shopping and exploring some of the sites.

Since we were leaving for St. Petersburg tomorrow evening, we were asked to check out and settle our accounts at the hotel this evening.

My co-leader, Richard Jones, and I had invited Dr. Antonina Dashkina, head of the Russian Social Work Union, and her husband Tony Widmer to be our guests for an informal dinner. They had chosen their favorite Georgian restaurant called Taverna Barracuda. We were escorted by Metro to the restaurant by Anna Lavrinenko, the Executive Director of the Russian Association of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues. I was most amazed at her ability to maneuver cobblestones and uneven terrain in four-inch high heels.

The restaurant was located in the area called Arbat. It was a vibrant and colorful area with many shops, restaurants, street performers and artists. It would have been nice to spend a bit of time there.

The restaurant was quite large and rustic, and our guests were well known there. They served traditional Georgian food, and we all ordered their signature dish of shish kabobs. The meal was delicious and the company enjoyable.

At the conclusion of our meal, Antonina offered to hail a cab to take us back to the hotel. The first driver told her 1,000 rubles. She stated that was ridiculous, and we walked a short distance to a more major road. There she found us a cab that only charged 150 rubles. The exchange emphasized the importance of negotiating with drivers and vendors in Russia.

# Tuesday August 24, 2010

## PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM

### Morning – Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues (RUSW&SP)



Breakfast was again served in the private conference room. Our luggage had to be outside our doors at 8am and we departed for our agency visit at 9:15am.

We wanted to have the opportunity to meet with members of the national social work association while in their country. Unfortunately, the timing of our trip coincided with their major annual conference – The International Forum of the Social Workers of Siberia and the Far East – which was held in Siberia and did not end until August 23. We were grateful they had agreed to meet with us immediately upon their return.



We met with representatives of the Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues (RUSW&SP) as well as other social work colleagues on the grounds of the Moscow Institute for Continuing Education of Social Workers.

Dr. Antonina Dashkina, the President of the Russian Union, was our host. Dr. Dashkina has previously visited the offices of the National Association of Social Workers in the USA, and we have met previously at meetings of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Both RUSW&SP and NASW-USA are members of the IFSW. At the IFSW meeting in Adelaide, Australia in 2005, our two Associations signed a Memorandum of Understanding pledging to support each other and to work together whenever possible.

The Union has been in existence since 1990 and has 10,000 members in 70 cities in Russia. The logo of the RUSW&SP is in the form of three joined hearts to symbolize Kindness, Care and Support. The hearts are red, blue and white colors as the Russian flag to represent the devotion of social workers to serve the needs of the Russian people.

In addition to being President of the Union, Dr. Dashkina is Deputy Chair of the Commission on Fighting Poverty and Social Isolation and is editor of their professional journal called *Social Work*. She also teaches at the Institute for Continuing Education of Social Workers.

We were welcomed by both Dr. Dashkina and by Dr. Eudokya Kholostova, the Director of the Moscow Institute for Continuing Education of Social Workers. They explained that there are 500,000 people who work in the social work sphere in Russia. Many don't have degrees. They have practical skills, but lack theory. There are also 50,000 specialists in 42 different specialties, and just 43% have relevant degrees. That's why the Institute was established in 2008.

They have 11 social workers who hold PhDs on staff. Another 18 are working on their doctorates. They also have had visiting lecturers from the USA, Sweden, Australia, and France.

At the Institute, they do both retraining and advanced training for social workers, psychologists, counselors and individuals in social insurance. Their advance training course is a year long. They have had 2,500 professionals complete the program in the two years they have been in existence.

Dr. Dashkina explained that social work in Russia is only 20 years old – since 1991. Yet, there are now 100 colleges and universities across Russia that give degrees in social work. They have about 10,000 graduates each year.

Dr. Dashkina is widely credited with establishing social work in Russia. She related the history of Russian social work beginning with the auspicious meeting of Dr. Dashkina and Ronalee Whittington, a social worker from Hawaii, at a conference in Yugoslavia. She then visited Russia in 1990, and she invited a delegation of Russians to attend an NASW meeting in Boston. So, in 1991, Dr. Dashkina organized social pedagogues in Russia. Social pedagogue was a career that already existed. As far as we could understand, pedagogues seem to be similar to school counselors. Social workers were added to the Russian Association a year later. In 2000, it was renamed the Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues. This was done to bind the two professions more closely, but that union has not been completely successful.

Dr. Dashkina next discussed the important role that the Russian Union plays in improving the social support system and social policies in Russia. She noted that the goals of the Russian Union are to: 1) disseminate the best practices in social work; 2) increase the prestige of the social work profession; and 3) establish international relationships.

We had a four hour block of time for our meeting, but, in actuality, the agenda was too full. After Dr. Dashkina and Dr. Kholostova spoke, we had a presentation by Vladimir Petrosyan who is the Head of the Department of Social Protection in Moscow City. He holds degrees in both social work and law and he is finishing his doctorate. It was obviously a great honor for Mr. Petrosyan to come to our meeting.



There are 10 divisions in Moscow and 125 centers for social services. (We had visited one of them, the Tsaritsyno District Social Services Center, the previous day.) The budget for the city is \$26 billion annually. They called it social protection and they use a targeted approach. Their social services include social benefits, government support programs, support for children in the schools, support for veterans and people with disabilities, and construction of subsidized housing. Mr. Petrosyan highlighted two special programs – reintegration of people with disabilities into the community and homeless children.

There are more than a million people with disabilities in Moscow. Over 27,000 of them are children. He noted that until recently people with disabilities have “been invisible” and they have been “incarcerated in their homes” because they can’t move around the city. The core problem is they need a fully accessible environment. The first law to establish accessibility was enacted in 2003. In 2009, the Mayor of Moscow proclaimed “The Year of Opportunities,” and things are starting to get done. A total of four billion rubles (\$13.3 million U.S. dollars) is being devoted to this work. The city should be fully accessible for wheelchairs for 2013. There is some discussion happening about which should come first – raising public acceptance of people with disabilities or making the environment accessible.

In contrast, the services for veterans seem well established. World War II veterans are revered in Russia and are the focus of special services. They are surrounded by support, respect, and care. This was a theme we were to hear frequently during our visit. Also, 2010 is the 60th anniversary of the Victory of World War II, so it is a special year in Moscow. Veterans receive a pension of \$800- \$1,000 per month, or on average \$12,000 year. This is equivalent to the average salary of a social worker.

The pension system in Russia is being reformed with the goal of increasing the amount of annual payments. The average pension is around 25% of previous salary. The minimal survival levels are unequal between Moscow and the outlying areas so cities make extra payments. This is called “Luzhkov’s money” after the Mayor of Moscow. (Incidentally, shortly after our visit, the Mayor was dismissed by President Medvedev after 18 years in office.)

At the conclusion of Mr. Petrosyan’s interesting presentation, we were quite far behind schedule on the agenda. Two staff of the RUSW&SP were scheduled to speak, and one of our delegates had prepared a presentation. We managed to get one more presentation in before a break.

Ms. Tatiana Samoilova, the Manager of Social Programs at the Russian Union, gave an overview of their program on “A System of Re-entry of Minor Prisoners into the Community.”

One-tenth of all crimes in Russia have involvement of minors. When they are in prison, they often become alienated from their families, many of whom have not been able to visit or keep in contact because of great distances between their community and the location of the prison.

This innovative program has been running in three regions for a year. Social workers are hired by the prison system and by family support centers. Their goal is to try to keep the minors integrated with their families. They use a multidisciplinary approach. So far they have worked with 70 offenders and their families. They use video link-ups and Skype to keep the family members connected. They also use the video visit as a form of reward for good behavior in prison.

This program seemed creative and quite advanced. The presentation was a bit hard to follow as it was being translated and the slides were in Russian. Also, we were all quite aware of the time constraints.

We then had a much needed coffee break. The downside was that it was difficult to get everyone started again. Fortunately, Dr. Lee Rathbone-McCuan, one of our delegates, was the next presenter. Her presentation was “Social and Health Care for US Older Adults with HIV/AIDS.” Lee did a nice job of giving a succinct overview of the issues. We hope to use her presentation in a future publication from NASW.



The final speaker was Ms. Anna Lavrinenko, Executive Director of the Russian Union. We had met Anna previously when we visited the Tsaritsyno District Social Services Center on Monday. She also had been quite helpful by making many of our arrangements. Anna speaks excellent English. She told us that her mother is an English teacher and that she had been taught English from an early age. Her presentation and her slides were both in English. The title of her presentation was “Preventing Professional Burnout of Social Workers.” Anna discussed a two year, three country research project funded by government funding from Russia, Great Britain and Denmark. They gathered 300 case stories

of high stress client interactions. They have made a film about extreme situations and what social workers can do to prevent burnout.

Linda Engel, one of our US delegates, wrote the following about Anna's presentation.

When visiting the University Institute for Continuing Education as an American social worker, I was very impressed. It was amazing to me that social work in Russia is only 20 years old. How far they have come in such a short period of time. The fact that they have instructors from France, England, Sweden, and the U.S. and that they are sending students to study internationally speaks of a certain sophistication and openness to learning about the field from other cultures.

I enjoyed the emphasis on caring for the "caretakers." A book that was spoken of entitled *Professional Burnout for Social Workers* impressed me. On one of our other site visits, to the Tsaritsyno District Social Services Center, there was talk of a special day for social workers.

The young Russian social worker who talked about the stages of burnout was very interesting. She talked about how to prevent it, in part by paying attention to it. She cited the following stages: the honeymoon stage whereby the social worker feels inspired and passionate about making major changes; the fuel shortage as the worker realizes her limitations; the beginning of chronic symptoms; the crisis; and finally the breakdown.

I think we could learn a lot from them as well. The idea of clubs for social workers, publications, trainings and workshops was inspiring to me and something that I know that the staff at the hospital where I work could really use.

We would have liked more time to discuss the issue of burnout and the research results, but we were quite pressed for time.

### **Afternoon/Evening – Late Lunch and Flight to St. Petersburg**

At the conclusion of the professional program, we had a hurried late lunch at a local restaurant named Taras Bulba. Immediately after lunch we departed for the Sheremetyevo-1 Airport. We checked in as a group, and it went smoothly. All of our luggage managed to make it through.

Our flight to St. Petersburg was scheduled for a 7:15pm departure. We were flying on Rossiya – Russian Airlines, flight 154. It was a fairly short flight. We arrived in St. Petersburg at Pulkovo-1 (the airport for domestic flights) around 8:30pm and were met by our city guide, Ms. Irina Kolesova. She accompanied us to the Corinthia Nevskij Palace, our hotel for our stay in St. Petersburg. Once again, check-in went smoothly. It had been a long day and most delegates had a quick dinner at or near the hotel.

# Wednesday August 25, 2010

## **CULTURAL PROGRAM**

### **Morning – Catherine Palace**

St. Petersburg has a population greater than 5 million. It was built by Peter the Great in 1703, and it is situated in the Gulf of Finland. It is surrounded by the Neva River which flows to the Baltic Sea. The city's main street (Nevsky Prospekt) is a 2 1/2 mile avenue that runs northwest to southeast. It was named after the warrior prince Alexander Nevsky. Our hotel was located at Nevsky Prospekt.

The city was built on swampland and has numerous canals and drawbridges. The drawbridges remain down during the day, but are put up at various times during the night so that ship traffic from the Baltic Sea can get through to the Russian interior. Helsinki, Finland is about six hours away.

Our hotel, the Corinthia Nevskij Palace Hotel, located in Upper Nevsky Prospekt, is considered one of the top hotels in St. Petersburg. Renovated in 2005, it is a five-star property with all amenities and four restaurants.

Our first full day in St. Petersburg began with an easy start as we spent the morning with a cultural program and a tour of Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, a village 16 miles outside of St. Petersburg. The name originally meant Tsar's Village. During the Soviet era the town was renamed to honor the poet Alexander Pushkin who had a house there in the 19th century. It has since reverted to its original name.

Catherine was the second wife of Peter the Great. It is the former summer residence of the Russian Imperial family and it is a tribute to both the architecture and gardening arts of the 18th and 19th centuries. Catherine I bequeathed Tsarskoye Selo to her daughter Elizabeth Petrovna who spared no money in turning the old mansion into a magnificent palace. Many architects and artists and gardeners worked on the palace for decades, but an architect named Rastrelli is credited with giving it its Baroque appearance.



Tsarskoye Selo is actually a park covering many acres. It is dominated by the Palace. The opulence begins at the Golden Gate which is made of open ironwork enhanced by elaborate gilded filigree. The main gate is crowned with the Imperial coat-of-arms, the double-headed eagle.

The Palace – the world's longest at 984 feet – holds an equally grand palatial hall that is 56 feet wide and 154 feet long. It is framed by two tiers of windows. In between the windows are mirrors in gilded carved frames. The opulence is overwhelming. The ceiling is beautifully painted and the floor is elaborately inlaid parquet. (We had been asked to wear booties over our shoes to protect the floors.) It is inadequate to try and describe the artistry and beauty in words. It almost has to be seen to be fully appreciated. Other rooms were also breathtaking. I particularly liked the Bedroom of Maria Fiodorovna which had elaborate floor to ceiling columns. The molded wall panels depict the joy of family life.

The Palace is perhaps best known for the Amber Room, considered by many to be the Eighth Wonder of the World. The Amber Room has had a fascinating history. It was a gift from a Prussian King to Peter the Great in 1716. It was looted during World War II, and it underwent a recent major reconstruction that took over two decades. It was finished in 2003 in time for the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg. The walls are lined in amber panels and the furniture and picture frames are inlaid with amber. Many of the works are copies of those destroyed by the Nazis. It's hard to describe the dazzle or the worth of this room. I knew there were different shades of amber, but the variation was remarkable. I also couldn't help thinking about the cost of a small piece of jewelry made of amber in the USA.



We only got to see the gardens and the chapel from a distance, but we did have a bit of a walk back to our bus. It was a beautiful day to be on such beautiful grounds.

## **PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM**

### **Afternoon – St. Petersburg Children's Hospice**

Traffic back into St. Petersburg was incredibly heavy and we were late getting to our restaurant which was called Demidov. We had a fairly hurried lunch, but then we had more incredible traffic and we were almost two hours late for our professional meeting at the St. Petersburg Children's Hospice. We had called to alert them to our lateness, but it was still a bit awkward. We had hoped to meet with Fr. Alexander Tkachenko, the founder of the Hospice, but he had to leave for another commitment. We were given a tour by two of the Hospice's social workers.

We were told that Fr. Tkachenko, an Orthodox Priest, had spent some time in the USA in Seattle, Washington where he learned about children's hospice services. He also completed a Clinical Pastoral Education Program at the Swedish Medical Center. He returned to Russia and began the Children's Hospice Program as a home based program. He realized the need for an inpatient hospice and respite facility and raised the money for the St. Petersburg facility. The city donated the building and helped to renovate it. It has been open only since June, 2010 and it still had a new feeling. Additional support for the Hospice comes from a partnership with the Seattle-St. Petersburg sister churches program of the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

Our guides explained that 7 million children have died from diseases in the last 10 years. The need for such a children's hospice program is great. They began with a home care program – which they still manage with 100 volunteers. They have a caseload of 250 patients. They believe they provide 100% coverage for children who are terminally ill living in the St. Petersburg area. All of the care is free.



I think we were all surprised by the lovely facility (8,549 square feet in size) and by the very comprehensive services offered there. They have 18 beds for overnight stay (up to 20 days) and 20 beds for their day hospital/respite program. The rest of the space includes playrooms, family rooms (relatives can stay overnight), computer rooms, video games, a small swimming pool, a room with strobe lights and other physical activities for meditation and relaxation, as well as rooms for various procedures. There was also a beautiful chapel.

Most surprising to many of us with a background in health care was the staffing. They have 38 professionals on staff, and an additional nine more who are on-call. There are three oncologists, three nephrologists, five pediatricians, one specialist in pain management, one neurologist, one rehabilitation specialist and one defectologist. There are also two physician assistants, one nurse and five practical nurses, and a masseuse. Of particular interest to us were the ten psychosocial staff who work with both the children and their families.

After our tour, we were served coffee and cookies in a cafeteria area. We had learned about the Hospice's "Dreams Come True" program for their terminally ill children, and the delegates had taken up a donation for the program which was presented by Richard Jones to the Associate Director during our refreshment break.



It had begun raining and progress going back to the hotel was slow. Several of the delegates wanted to attend a Rotary meeting that evening, and they realized they were going to be late. The bus driver dropped them off so they could take a cab from the most advantageous spot. An excerpt about the meeting from Warren Heinke is below.

On Wednesday night, during a very severe rainstorm, three of the People to People delegates who were also Rotary members stepped off the tour bus, waded into large mud puddles, opened their umbrellas, and hailed a cab to the St. Petersburg International Rotary Club meeting across town at a local hotel. Running about 1 1/2 hours late and paying twice the standard cab fare, they arrived at the meeting at about 8pm, just in time for the program. The presenter was a German businessman who represented a German-French co-op that raises sugar beets and processes sugar. He spoke in English (thank goodness) and offered a partnership to help the Russian farmers get better crop yields and improve their manufacturing process. The group of Rotarians was unique in that it included Swiss, English, German, Chinese, and Chechen in addition to Russian members. Our contact was the immediate past president, Stephanie Tsomakaeva, who has set up a network of educational sites to train travel agents in Northern Russia. She is active in Rotary in Russia, and just recently returned from a Regional meeting in Hamburg, Germany. She indicates that St. Petersburg International Rotary's local project is to help pay to provide training for social workers to counsel families of prisoners. The 13 Rotarians at the meeting were very friendly, and Stephanie and her husband graciously offered to take us back across town to the Corinthia Hotel. Delegates involved were Jay Davidson and Carol Stuecker (Louisville, KY Rotary Club) and Warren Heinke (Downtown Rockford, IL Rotary Club).

The rest of the delegation returned to the hotel and we had various plans for dinner and the evening. A small group of us went to a tiny Russian restaurant near the hotel called St. Petersburg Corner. It was another interesting experience. None of us spoke Russian and most of the staff didn't speak English. They did find a menu or two with English translation. They also found a woman who interpreted for us. I wanted to try both the stroganoff and the baked sauerkraut. That was obviously a strange combination, and they kept telling me "no." Eventually they felt I couldn't understand so they brought both. It was an excellent meal and a nice end to the day.

# Thursday August 26, 2010

## PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM

### Morning – Family and Children Social Support Center in Primorsk District

We began our day with a breakfast buffet and we were ready for our 9:30am departure. Today was divided into a professional morning and cultural afternoon.

A meeting had been arranged for us at the Family and Children Social Support Center in the Primorsk District. The center was founded in 2007 and is responsible for promoting stability of families, and assisting in helping families deal with their issues through counseling.



We were met by the Director, Ms. Natalia Rusakova. She seemed exceptionally pleased to have visitors from the USA. They had arranged a series of presentations for us and a tour of the facilities.

Similar to other places we had visited, they had a comprehensive menu of services, many related to children and youth. They have play therapists and pedagogues (like school social workers) who handle day care and after school programs, but their services are much broader than that. They provide physical therapy for children with disabilities. They also cover child neglect, provide protection of minors' legal rights, and assist in guardianship services. They make home visits as needed to make certain at-risk minors are safe and receiving care.

The staff seemed very compassionate about the stresses that families face. They mentioned that many families have short term crises such as when they are having financial difficulties and they are unable to provide food for their children. During those times, the Center offers overnight respite housing for the children. That seemed like a wonderful service. We saw the rooms where the children stayed while at the Center, and they were warm and welcoming. We also toured a relaxation room that included a punching bag so children could let out their anger and stress in a more constructive way.



They assist children and adolescents reenter their homes, their schools, and their places of employment. They also help young adults find jobs and become self-sufficient. This is a service that seemed especially available to orphans.



In 2008, the Center added a women's support department that includes social and legal counseling. In addition to day care services, they teach young mothers and pregnant women how to care for a baby.

Several delegates had expressed interest in learning about services for persons misusing drugs and the linkage of drug use and HIV. To address this topic, one of the presentations was given by the Director of Drug Abuse Prevention, a community NGO. They work jointly with the Center.

The program has been in existence for 15 years. They began with services for parents who were abusing drugs. They next expanded to primary prevention of drug abuse for young people, but recognized the need to include young people abusing drugs. They now have a peer to peer program.

They explained that St. Petersburg is a large city that is a harbor for the Baltic Sea. There are many transportation routes for drugs. The problem is huge. They estimate that 2-3 million people abuse drugs. St. Petersburg has the highest number of persons abusing drugs in the country. They estimate that St. Petersburg has 200,000-300,000 people using drugs. Their program has records for 15,000 people who have sought their help.

HIV is also a problem. They believe there are 475,000 HIV cases in the country. Over 26,000 of these are in St. Petersburg. Another issue is HIV among prisoners. There are 900,000 prisoners in Russia, and 30,000 have been diagnosed with HIV. Of these, 50% are in St. Petersburg.

It is important to note that when they were referring to drug abuse, they were not including alcoholism. They were pleased to report that the number of adolescents trying drugs decreased from 37% in the 1990s to 13% currently. But, they added, that many young people had turned to alcohol.

At the conclusion of the presentations, as we had done with all of our visits, we presented the Center Director with a framed certificate of appreciation. They then served us coffee, tea and pirogues which were delicious.

After our visit to the Center, we stopped at the Square of Arts near the beautiful Cathedral of the Spilled Blood where Alexander II was shot by a terrorist in 1881. We had almost two hours for shopping and lunch before we headed to the Hermitage.

## **CULTURAL PROGRAM**

### **Afternoon/Evening – Hermitage Art Museum and Farewell Dinner**



#### **BETSY**

The collection at the Hermitage Museum is second in size only to that of the Louvre. It is housed in the Winter Palace which would be an incredible museum even without its amazing art collection which has almost three million pieces of artwork and artifacts. Located on the bank of the Neva River, the Winter Palace is a Baroque structure which has served as the main residence of Russian Tsars.

The sheer size of the museum, and our limited time there (just several hours) meant that we had to be selective about which areas we visited. Again we divided into two groups, each with a guide to accompany us. They had previously planned the collections we would try to cover.



We had to check our coats and jackets and our bags. No liquids were allowed. They were very strict about that. There had been an incident a few years ago when a visitor had thrown acid on a priceless piece of artwork.

As we entered, we rushed past a Picasso exhibit without giving it more than a cursory glance. They could have been posters for all the attention they received. I couldn't help thinking that if that exhibit had been in a museum in the United States that people would line up for hours to see it.

I had a similar reaction when we walked quickly through several rooms of Impressionist paintings. (The Hermitage has the largest collection of French artwork outside of France.) The guide didn't seem to think that the exhibit was worth too much time – that there were more important things to see. I thought it was incredible to be surrounded by Monets, Van Goghs, Manets and Pissaros.

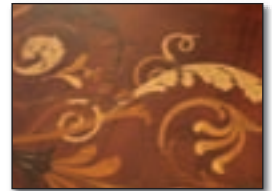
We were able to stand six inches away from them. I saw one painting by Van Gogh of lilacs that I had never seen before, even in art books.



The Hermitage wasn't quite as grand a place as the Catherine Palace, but it was close. The Pavilion Hall, with its murals, gold leaf and elaborate parquet floors was magnificent.



We finally arrived at what many might consider the centerpiece of the art collection. These were two paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci. Titled Madonna with a Flower (The Benois Madonna, 1478) and Madonna Litta (1490-1491) they were large and, once again, we could stand less than a foot in front of them. I remembered seeing the Mona Lisa in the Louvre years ago. I was surprised at how small it was and the fact that you had to view it from quite a distance. Since there are only a dozen Da Vinci paintings in existence, it seemed surprising that Russia had two of them.



There was just so much to see that it felt like sensory overload. It made me I think that it would be best to see the Hermitage in many short visits. I also thought how fitting it was that the museum was our last cultural visit. It felt somewhat like "saving the best for last."

We did have some time to visit the shops at the museum. They had some beautiful reproductions and other gifts at surprisingly reasonable prices. As usual, many of us came away with treasures.



## RICHARD

The Hermitage Museum was one of the highlights of our trip to St. Petersburg. The city of St. Petersburg serves as a magnificent backdrop to the Hermitage which houses one of the world's most spectacular collections of art. We had all read about the Hermitage but I don't think any of us were prepared for the enormity and absolute beauty of the art which is included in the collection which covers significant time periods in the history of the world. It is estimated that a visitor would have to spend no more than three minutes on each item in the exhibit rooms for 11 years to cover the collection of art which is maintained in the Hermitage.

Under the direction of our incredible national guides, we entered a large palatial room that served as the temporary home for one of the largest collections of Picassos I have ever seen in my life. There must have been over 50 pieces of some of his most important work on display. It was a mesmerizing experience to see all of these treasures on display in such a massive and beautiful room. I could have spent several days in that room alone because of the importance of the collection and the pieces which had been included in the exhibit.

We then proceeded to visit elaborate throne rooms, rooms filled with massive paintings of important historical events, lots of portraits of family members commissioned by the rich and famous of the Russian ruling families, and the art of many of the masters. I think we were all stunned when we saw the collection of Rembrandts and work by the famous Da Vinci. We were further amazed by how accessible the collection is to the visitors. You could easily reach out and touch the pieces because they were not situated too far from the tourist. There was an incident several years ago where acid had been thrown on a very expensive piece that had been meticulously restored by the museum staff.

Every nook and cranny of the museum was filled with art that had been created through the genius of many of the great artists of the world. I am so glad I purchased books from the museum to remind me of the breadth and depth of the collection. And, I hope to return to St. Petersburg to see more of this wonderful collection. The Fabergé Egg collection is fabulous as were the other miniatures that are included in the collections. There were pieces that were embedded with diamonds and other very expensive gems. Again, we walked through the collection in awe because of the beauty which surrounded us in every room of the museum. Tourists were everywhere but our guides kept in close view as they guided us through the maze of rooms which make up this incredible building.

I have to tell a story at this point in my reflections. We were all exhausted by the time we were ready to leave because you can walk forever as you continue to encounter endless beauty from room to room.

When we moved toward the exits in the museum we were of course directed to scores of stores selling books and reproductions of pieces found in the collection. Many of us purchased these reproductions to serve as souvenirs and reminders of the incredible experience we had experience at the Hermitage Museum.

Everything imaginable is available in these stores including reproductions of the Fabergé collection, scarves, post cards, books, umbrellas and lots of other items found in museum shops.

I decided to delay several of my purchases until we exited the building and were besieged by the variety of street vendors who carried some of the same products that are in the museum shop. Using my vast negotiating skills I bargained with the vendors for packets of the reproductions of the Fabergé eggs which I wanted to give as gifts to family members and friends. Proud of my purchases and negotiations I carefully packed my purchases for the long trip back to Chicago. Well, I was doing my usual thrift store hunts in one of Chicago's dollar stores about one week after I returned from Russia. There on a shelf was a whole container of the reproductions of the Fabergé eggs I had brought back with me on my long journey from Russia for one dollar each. I burst out into laughter and thought, "Ok Richard, what have you learned from this experience?" We live in a big world and we need to relax and experience as much of it as possible and don't sweat the small stuff. St. Petersburg is a must for every traveler who has dreamed of spending time with some of the great art treasures of the world.

## **BETSY**

We all got to the bus at the agreed upon time and made our way through the heavy traffic back to our hotel. We had time for a short rest and for dressing for our evening dinner.

We had the farewell banquet that evening at the Barbazan Restaurant, which was in the Radisson Royal Hotel. It was within walking distance of the Corinthia which made it nice. We had a large area mainly to ourselves and it was a lovely, but informal, evening. Several persons spoke about their experiences during the week, and we thanked the guides who had been with us throughout the trip. An added touch was that several of us delegates were celebrating our birthdays. Our colleagues had ordered a birthday cake for us and the staff brought them out topped with lighted sparklers. It was a very nice gesture and made the day quite special.

We needed to settle our hotel bills and get packed for a very early departure, so many of us called it a night very early. Some of the delegates, however, decided to continue on with the revelry and skip trying to sleep for such a short time.

## Friday August 27, 2010 – Depart St. Petersburg for home

The day began in the middle of the night. Luggage had to be ready for pickup at 2:15am, and we departed for the St. Petersburg Airport an hour later. Our flight for our reverse trip to Frankfurt was scheduled for 6am. Since this would be an international flight, we used Pulkova-2 airport which was only about 10 miles from our hotel.

The St. Petersburg Airport feels more manageable than Moscow's. It was renovated in 2003 and is brighter and more modern and seems easier to maneuver.

As a tour group, leaving the host country always seems more chaotic than beginning the tour. Everyone is worried about making their connections back in the US, and no matter what is recommended, our groups do a great deal of shopping and have lots of luggage to check and manage. This group was no exception.

Regardless, we all got checked in and our plane to Frankfurt left on time.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

#### **BETSY**

This is the fifth delegation I have led. We previously have gone to China, Cambodia, South Africa and Egypt. Each trip has been a unique and amazing experience, and I wholly concur with Dwight D. Eisenhower's philosophy for the People to People programs that:

"I have long believed, as have many before me, that peaceful relations between nations require mutual respect between individuals."

Some of my lasting impressions will be:

- the friendliness of the Russian people and how warmly we were received.
- the beauty of the Russian Orthodox churches.
- the high esteem in which the nation holds its World War II veterans.
- the opulence of the palaces and the incredible art and artifact collections of their museums.
- how far the social work profession has come in just 20 years.
- how meaningful and enriching it is to travel with social work colleagues.

A final few notes of appreciation are needed. First, our thanks to Mila Bolgak of the People to People staff, and Dr. Antonina Dashkina, and Anna Lavrinenko from the Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues (RUSW&SP) for helping us develop our agenda and for assisting with our professional meeting arrangements. Also, David Miller, in the NASW national office, does a yeoman's job with helping me prepare for the trip and with the detail and background work. Second, thanks to all of our guides, but especially our National Guide, Alla Levitina. We especially appreciated her expertise and her patience. Next I want to thank Richard Jones for agreeing to be the co-leader for the Russian delegation. It's always a pleasure to work and travel with Richard. I'd also like to thank Linda Engel. She has traveled with me on all five delegations

and she is a tremendous asset in our professional meetings. Her outlook on life and her positive attitude make her great fun to be around. Scott Hullinger should be acknowledged, too. He deserves recognition for willingly, and with great humor, taking on the job of collecting donations for various causes. That is never an easy job.

Finally, Richard and I thank all of you for traveling with us to Russia and for being wonderful ambassadors for the social work profession and for the United States. I hope some of you will be able to travel as part of the social work delegation on future trips. Next October we will travel to Brazil. Please watch for your invitation in the mail.

## **RICHARD**

Well, I came away from Russia with a very different impression in contrast to the, “Hammer and Sickle” image which had been ingrained in my thinking since my youth. Social work as a profession is only 20 years old and is on the verge of an incredible growth spurt because of the commitment to families and communities and an insatiable interest in building the very best with respect to “best in class” clinical practices, research, and policy initiatives which will form the future of the profession in this country in the years ahead. Russian social workers, both academicians and clinical practitioners, are also eager to collaborate with social workers from around the world as they continue their search for new practices they can add to their growing skill base of new ways of working with families and communities.

If I were a young social worker with a facility for a foreign language I think I would consider spending time in Moscow and get in on the ground floor of an exciting new venture which shows signs of immense promise.

I will always hold very close to my heart the visit to the Kremlin, the prominence of the Russian Orthodox Churches that are really quite beautiful, and the regard which the people of Russia hold for their older family members, particularly those who suffered because of the wars that the country struggled with over many years. It’s quite remarkable to see a wedding party travel to a cemetery or a war memorial following a wedding to pay their respects to deceased family members who gave their lives in the country’s struggle for freedom.

I will always remember the beautiful museums we visited particularly the Hermitage Museum where we had the opportunity to view the fabulous collection of artifacts, like the Fabergé Egg Collection and the paintings of De Vinci and other world renowned artists. The Hermitage Museum, the Kremlin, and the palatial homes of Catherine the Great are overwhelmingly beautiful and filled with some of the most incredible art I have ever seen in my life. The great families of Russia certainly knew how to live though a very high price was paid by the serfs and members of the working class to maintain the lavish life styles of the rich and famous.

The traditions of Russia are also fabulous. I particularly enjoyed watching the newlywed couples, surrounded by families and friends, pledge their love for each other by attaching a lock on a tree and then tossing the key to the lock into the Moscow river. Yes, romanticism is still very much alive in the world today and a great tradition is maintained by hundreds of newlyweds every day in this vast country.

The visits to the social service agencies were rich both in terms of content, theory and practice, and the commitment I observed to do the very best on behalf of the families and communities these agencies served. Though a lot of government funding is allocated through the City of Moscow, additional funding is needed and raised through private fundraising efforts including appeals to foundations and corporations. It's a model which is very similar to what we see in the United States in a country where social work as a profession is more than 100 years old. It will be interesting to watch the profession evolve in Russia as it perhaps yields a new financial model and practice models which we might consider adopting in our own country.

I want to congratulate the People to People program for keeping these cultural exchanges alive today. It's amazing how you come away from these experiences with a very different view and understanding of the country you are visiting in contrast to the impressions we have because of media and other information sources. The Russian people are wonderful and eager to learn and share their knowledge with other developed countries who are interested in helping families realize their full potential as contributing members of our world society. There is still hope in the world today regardless of all the craziness going on around us.

I want to express my deepest appreciation to Betsy Clark for the invitation to join her as a co-leader on this magnificent trip and learning experience which was a once in a life time experience. I also want to thank the 37 social workers who participated from around the country in providing me with stimulating conversation, much laughter, and a greater appreciation for the talented people who hold our sector together. I also want to thank our wonderful National Guide Alla Levitina for her incredible leadership and support during our entire trip. Your knowledge of the country is both fascinating and wonderfully informative.

I am really proud to be a social worker as I have now had an opportunity to travel to South Africa in 2008 and Russia in 2010. It is so important to reach out across the waters to build bridges between the National Association of Social Workers and a rapidly changing world.

Best wishes,



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