

# 7 DAYS IN RUSSIA

THE ADVENTURES OF ONE AMERICAN IN TODAY'S FEDERATION



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY

M.G. Crisci



**HELLO**

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**"NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF HIMSELF."  
- JOHN DONNE, 1624**



Yury Zaitsev  
and Galina  
Komissarova  
at the Russian  
Cultural Centre in  
Washington D.C.



When one undertakes an ambitious project into uncharted waters, it is rarely successful, without the help of others. So it was with *Seven Days in Russia*. The companies and organizations listed below provided access, support, advice and consul.

There were also many individual citizens, mostly Russian, who wished you to know more about their contry with the hope of bringing a better understanding between our two countries. People like Yelena Sivlop, Valentin Supanov PhD., Vera Slovenia, Valentina Vaschenko, Genadii Kuzbetsov, Elena Lavinskaya, Boris Sapunov, PhD., Lyudmila Agafejva, Artem Zagorodnov, Irina Dunkova, Michael Zagoutov, Michael Novakhov, Lloyd Costly, Esq, Gregory Gregarin, Ekaterina Doubrovina, M.D., Fred B. Tarter, Olga Guitchounts, Anja Litvak, and most of all my dear friends and supporters, Yury Zaitsev, Director, Rossotrudnichestvo, and his wife, Galina Komissarova, PhD. I thank them all.



Friends of Russian Cultural  
Centre Society



Rossiyskaya Gazeta  
News Group



Russian Cultural  
Center of Memphis



Radio Free Europe  
Foundation



American-Russian  
Children's Hospital



Rossotrudnichestvo  
(Russian Cultural Centre  
Worldwide)



Anomalia News Magazine



Russian Consulting Group

## DEAR READER,

My name is Dr. Valentin Sapunov. I am a professor of Biology in St. Petersburg, Russia. Since part of my life has been devoted to studying the evolution of physiological genetics, I am naturally interested in human nature. Recently, I visited the United States where I became certain that Americans of all generations want to know the truth about Russia.

This spring, I visited the U.S. city of Memphis which housed a building called “The Pyramid.” Despite the name, it has nothing to do with Egypt. My informal research suggested the city founders were heavy readers of historical novels. They decided that the area of the Nile near the city of Ginza, Egypt, looked like Memphis, Tennessee, where the Mississippi River winds through the center of the city. Memphis, USA, is also associated with the name of the great musician and singer Elvis Presley, who made his first recordings in a tiny recording room, called Sun Studios, near the town’s main street.

Memphis has also gradually turned into an important cultural hub in the southern part of the United States. That is why I was proud to visit the Memphis Russian Cultural Center, a place that would simply never happen in Russia. There I met and made friends with an emigrant from the USSR, Beck Niyazov, the center’s director. I was able to develop particularly warm feelings with his mostly American entire team. Beck, an Uzbek, said proudly and honestly “I Soviet man.” He went on to say, during the Soviet era, which contained both good and bad, the people were



*Dr. Valentin  
lecturing on  
the evolution of  
physiological  
Genetics at  
Moscow  
State University  
on Sparrow Hill in  
Moscow.*

beginning to form a new historical community that would communicate the true history of the Russian culture. He hoped some of that work would be continued through the activities of the new Cultural Center.

I met through Beck, an American writer, M.G. Crisci. Being an American with no clear Russian roots, he became interested in the history of our country after being shocked to learn a truth of World War II that is little known to most Americans—the loss of almost 30 million Soviet lives defending the free world against the German Nazis. He was so moved

by our losses during the Great Patriotic War he decided to call attention to our terrible day in history in a very American way. He chose to write a historical biography of one of the many who died in the war, a unique young lady from Moscow, who accomplished remarkable feats as a female fighter pilot, which to this day have never been equaled. He titled the book, *Call Sign, White Lily*, a book I believe every American would find instructive and entertaining.



(left to right) Dr. Sapunov presents to readers a partially restored 17th Century wood orthodox church at Nevesky Lesopark, just north of St. Petersburg; 20th Century B.C. Pyramids of Giza (satellite of Cairo); and 21st Century A.C. Pyramid Center Sports Arena in the center of Memphis, Tennessee.



In the course of gathering material, he visited the Ukraine, Russia, and most recently stayed in St. Petersburg. There he visited my home, met my father, Boris V. Sapunov, Ph.D., a veteran of World War II, and a regular contributor to “Anomalia.” The result of the beginning of cooperation was an updated Russian translation of *Call Sign, White Lily*, which we hope younger generations of Russians will also read for it’s many lessons about life, love and patriotism. The translation was completed for accuracy under the editorship of B.V.Sapunova as a living witnesses of those terrible days. The literary treatment of the Russian version also involved the contribution of a former Anomalia employee, Vera Soloviev. We are all proud of the end result which is now for sale around the world in print and digital format.

Our next joint project, the one before you, is a brief abstract of M.G.s Russian memories, observations and photos, as an ordinary American traveler. It is called quite simply, *Seven Days in Russia*. Our collective hope is that this new book will provide some very human insights into our everyday way of life, our culture, our pride, and our strong desire to be friends with peace loving people everywhere, especially the United States.

With Warm Regards and Deep Affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Сapunov". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Valentin Sapunov, Ph.D.



# PREFACE

What I'm learning everyday is that *life is a journey to an unknown destination*.

I'm the son of two Italian-American immigrants. Dad was a butcher; Mom, a telephone operator. Mom, Dad, my sister, and I lived in a three-room tenement in a really tough area of the South Bronx called Fort Apache. They spent their meager savings on one thing—a good education for my sister and me. My friends consisted of mostly Italians, Irish, Jewish, and African Americans. I never even met a Russian or knew where Russia was until high school.

That education, some lucky breaks, and a lot of chutzpah turned into an unexpectedly successful corporate career, and ultimately I was elected to *Who's Who in American Business* nineteen times. (I think they were just short of good nominees, and I was around!)

About seven years ago, I retired (sort of) from the Manhattan corporate jungle. I started to think about my legacy. Not my financial or personal legacy, but rather the unstated one that would suggest I once passed through here. I realized that, other than a wonderful family, three boys, and some grandchildren, I had done absolutely nothing to make the world a better place for future generations.

As I took stock, I realized I had a few assets that could be leveraged. I had lived some amazing experiences, had met some interesting people, had an eye for a story, and was a literate, approachable writer. So I decided I would write a book, perhaps two. But, they would not be some sensational, commercial, meandering pieces of fiction;

rather, I would attempt to write something literate in my voice, whatever that means. Well one book turned to two, and five years later there we five. Check out my website, [www.mgcrisci.com](http://www.mgcrisci.com), or visit some of the online stores like Amazon, Apple iBooks, Barnes & Noble, etc. (In case you weren't certain, that was a shameless bit of self-promotion!)

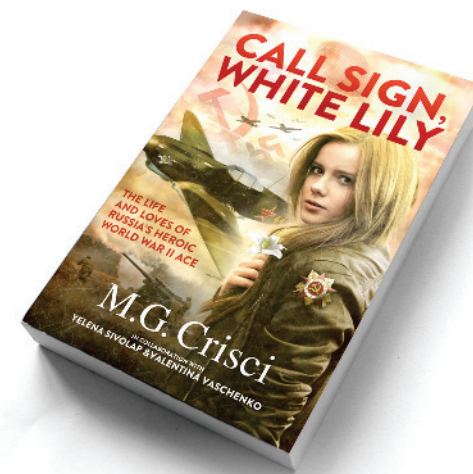
## ***Chance Meeting or Fate?***

As I thought about my sixth book, I met a Russian cabdriver in Miami Beach. After another three years of curious coincidences, I made the most illogical decision of my logical life. I would write a book about the world's most successful female fighter pilot, a beautiful teenager from Moscow named Lilia Litvyak. Her amazing accomplishments in a distinctly man's world had been lost in history for over sixty years to all but a few historians, academics, and history buffs. I also chose to write the book *Call Sign, White Lily* as an approachable coming-of-age story. My goal was simple. It would be my personal contribution to enhancing communications between two great nations. I say personal, because I didn't care if I sold a copy. It was between me and my god.

Fortunately, I met two Russian-born women now residing in the Eastern Ukraine, Valentina Vaschenko and Yelena Sivolap. They became my advisors, my collaborators, my guides, my editors, my friends, my "eyes of truth." The project took three years, a lot of research and interviews, and trips to Russia

and the Ukraine where, ironically, this fierce warrior's remains lay in a lonely grave in the absolute middle of nowhere. In the end, mission accomplished: a four-hundred-page literary work that pleased me. To my complete surprise, *Call Sign, White Lily* has grown in popularity and critical-acclaim while gathering its share of professional and academic jealousy. We've even managed to translate and publish a Russian edition, another first for an American author.

*Call Sign,  
White Lily  
- English and  
Russian Versions*



Somewhere along the way, I gathered the support of Director Yury Zaitsev and Dr. Galina Komissarova at the Russian Cultural Centre in Washington D.C. They introduced us to Russian media contacts, Russian war veterans, and influential Russian-Americans. And so it was that I entered and won an international editorial competition developed by the prestigious Russia Now newspaper (a Rossiyskaya Gazeta Company) based in Moscow. (In some parts of the world, the newspaper is known as *Russia Behind the Headlines*). Grand prize was an all-inclusive week long trip to Russia, co-sponsored by the Russian Consulting Corporation, who planned the trip as well as provided the knowledgeable, witty, and caring guides you're about to meet. I entitled the editorial "One American's View of Russia."

Upon my return from my second tour of Russia, I realized I now owned reams of notes and observations, a extensive picture library of everyday life, and numerous videos by and about my many new friends. Perhaps, more important than all that, I possessed a completely different perspective than most Americans hold or even care to hold about the Federation and its citizens.

I also came upon some surprising facts. Despite our inherent wealth, less than one tenth of one percent of American's have ever visited Russia\*. While no statistics exist, I imagine that if one removed diplomats, friends and associates of diplomats, and high-flying businessmen, the number of ordinary Americans like myself who have visited Russia for an extended period of time would be the

equivalent to a few pebbles of sand on a large beach. Ordinary Russians visiting America would be equally dismal, if not more so, since even today the average Russian earns \$8500 a year. I'm guessing it will be twenty-five to fifty years before a meaningful number of citizens from both our countries have experienced such a trip.

Why is all this important, you might ask. The answer is unmistakable: our perceptions of each other are shaped by the media, film makers, and those that consider themselves disciples of the cultural intelligentsia. Award-winning Hollywood Director Ridley Scott has painted Russians as secretive, mysterious gangsters and spies; the New York Times revels in stories about alcoholism among the Russian males; and so it goes with James Bond, etc. Likewise, Russian media communicators depict Americans as obsessed with the pursuit of wealth and, more often than not, acting like military and political bullies, insensitive to the subtle and overt differences between communism, totalitarian socialism, and a social democracy. In the end, these mutual misconceptions lead to mistrust in all its many forms.

I've also learned about another obstacle to mutual understanding. I call it the "Federation Top-Down Syndrome." Unlike America's populist democracy, Russia has been run top-down for centuries by benevolent Tsars, egocentric nobility, and Communist dictators. Because of that historical pedigree, today's Russian leaders think a singular focus on perceptual change at the top of the American political and academic chain will create a better

understanding about current day Russia, when in reality changing the perceptions of 1/100 of 1 percent does little to impact the other 99.99 percent of Americans.

So, as with *Call Sign, White Lily*. I decided to undertake another "personal" project. I would do what I could to help ordinary Americans understand the Russia that I have seen and experienced. I don't pretend to be an experienced travel advisor, and my intellectual shortcomings will create scorn and cynicism among the country's intellectual elite. But I've got a pretty good sense of observation, I'm a good listener and decent photographer, and I like to laugh; hence, *Seven Days in Russia*. The way I see this endeavor, my goal is to entertain and inform. So if just a few family, friends, or readers come away with a better understanding of a proud country, rich in tradition and culture and filled with wonderful, proud, peace-loving people, I'll be satisfied. Anything beyond that will be an unplanned destination.

\* Source: ITA Office of Travel & Tourism



**AWARD-WINNING EDITORIAL  
IN RUSSIA BEYOND THE HEADLINES.**

# **ONE AMERICAN'S VIEW OF RUSSIA BY M.G. CRISCI**



I'm an American businessman and author with absolutely no Russian ancestry. My Dad was a butcher and my Mom a telephone operator. I grew up on the streets of New York, and had to scrap for everything I have.

Four years ago, I accidentally met the world's greatest female fighter pilot, Moscovite Lilia Litvyak, on the Internet. A patriotic teenager who 278 missions scored 15 solo kills, and became Hitler's worst public relations nightmare. Despite these exploits history had not treated her kindly. She was shot down for the fourth and final time on August 1, 1943, 17 days before her 22nd birthday. Despite the fragments, her childhood, her friends, her loves, her determination, her remains and her plane were lost in time for 66 years. And, so it was that my sixth book *Call Sign, White Lily* was born. Fate seemingly had made a decision.

I decided to travel to Russia and Ukraine. There I lived with local residents, visited Lilia's modest gravesite in the tiny village of Marinovka, Eastern Ukraine, ate and drank with ordinary citizens in towns and cities. Most importantly, I collaborated with two incredible women, Valentina Vaschenko and Yelena Sivolap, who decided this befuddled American would help them make Lilia more than merely a footnote in history. Their love and support gave me a perspective about Russia, its people and culture that few Americans have ever experienced, much less believe.

Before my journey, I believed what most Americans believe: Russia is a borderline, third-world country; its citizens are a skeptical and secretive people who depressingly dramatize their past history, and drink themselves into oblivion at will. The country's leaders support an aberrant form of socialism that condones violations of human rights and views bribery as the normal course of business. Those that do not fit into the prior categories are either violent spies or vicious gangsters. How do Americans know that truth? Simple. We see these truths in our motion pictures,

television shows, and press articles written by reporters who have never lived inside an ordinary Russian home!

For three years, I gathered materials never seen by Americans and reconstructed Lilia's story—as I believe she would have liked it written. I now realize there was a grand plan to Yelena and Valentina's constant lectures. "Every detail, every word, every conversation, must be true to the real Russia." And, so it was I learned of patronymics, Yesenin, Father Frost and granddaughter Snegurochka, Morozko, burzhuikas, voronoks, Stalin's dreaded Advisor, and so much more.

I also learned the Great Patriotic War was, by far, the greatest tragedy in the history of the world. As one Russian explained, "There would not have been a Normandy if the blood of 30 million Russians had not been spent." I visited the unimaginable—mine shafts where people were buried alive and stopped in town centers where Nazis hung children for sport.

My journey taught me other things. Those mysterious, secretive people were actually kind, generous and understated. They would give what they had, if you showed respect and sensitivity. Yes, the language is difficult to grasp, and the inflections seem harsh. But, to a Russian, that is the way it has always been. Ironically, they think New Yorkers talk funny!

Another major discovery was the matter of Borscht. The mysterious, dark red bottle of liquid with selected ingredients that usually rests on a middle shelf in the "ethnic" section of selected American supermarkets. It never occurred to me that Borscht was a mealtime staple that had thousands of personal variations via recipes handed down through the ages, and laced with personal touches. Beyond the endless variations was something else. The making of Borscht speaks volumes about the quiet determination and self-sufficiency of a people that, over the centuries, had traveled many difficult political and social roads. Russians have learned how to make the stuff taste

absolutely delicious, based on whatever ingredients are readily available. There is never a lament, "It could be better, if only I had had..."

Russians also don't have 79 types of breakfast cereals to choose in supermarkets, but, there are supermarkets. And, surprise, surprise, there is food for all, movie theaters with interesting flicks, coffee shops with mountains of tasty pastries, clean, efficient and beautiful metros, abundant, reasonably-priced taxis and shopping malls with food courts. Russia is now the 6th largest economy in the world. I'm certain less than 1% of 300 million Americans would have ever guessed that. Even worse, I suspect there are Americans who still think Russians stand on lines to obtain the basics of everyday life. I mean, after all, wasn't that what we were taught by the American media?

Clearly, Russia is in the midst of a historic transition. A transition that will take decades before THE Russian form of social democracy emerges. It's also clear that America preaching "let us show you the way" is not the way. America started with a clean slate. We didn't want British rule. So we left, and found a new place—a land of immense abundance. There, we created a culture with no baggage. I am proud to be an American. Our political system works for us, but many of our allies have their own versions of democracy that work equally well for them...and that includes former adversaries like Germany and Japan.

The final matter to touch on is business. I do not propret to understand the "Russian Way" of business. It does appear to have its flaws. Older Russian businessmen act guarded, until they fell you can be trsuted. At that point a deal is a deal—contract or not. By contrast, the younger entrepreneur professes a love for the Amercian way of business. "We do deal. If we don't like, we break deal...just like Americans." Naturally, their rational offended me. They noticed and said, "What is so offensive? We read your papers. We know of Maddodd, Ebbers and Kowalski. Do you think that is a secret?"

*M.G. devouring  
pancakes and  
Coca Cola on  
Arbat Street*

**DAY 1**  
**WHAT COULD**  
**GO WRONG,**  
**GOES WRONG!**



ЯЧЕННАЯ



БЛИННАЯ



БЛИННАЯ ЯЧЕННАЯ

Coca-Cola





*The arrivals desk at the immaculately clean, efficient, and user-friendly Domodedovo Airport*

All started smooth—other than the fact that my driver, Ron Kramer, picked me up at 2:30 A.M. to make the 6:00 A.M. United Los Angeles-to-Moscow flight to collect my award from Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspapers.

The flight itself was rather uneventful, save for the fact that the pilot woke me in the middle of a deep sleep to announce United's intention to spend \$1 billion on a fleet cabin

renovations. After a subsequent visit to one of the bathrooms replete with white silicone caulking seeping from the seams, wood filler stuffed into the deep gorges in the folding

doors, and a faucet handle that flapped in the breeze, I've concluded the renovation plan might be about \$1 billion shy.



# THE ROAD FROM DOMODEDOVO

*Billboards are  
billboards along  
highways all over  
the world*

We arrived forty minutes early at Domodedovo Airport, and we were still able to get a docking gate. The Russian customs process was surprisingly efficient, and the English speaking coordinator from the Russian Consulting Group was precisely where I was told he'd be. As he called his driver (the pickup/drop-off area is rather chaotic), I launched right into an irrelevant egocentric monologue about how this was my second trip to Russia, that the first dispelled many stereotypes, and that I was confident this second stay would add to my list of insights.

Upon reflection, I was terribly fortunate that Vladimir was just twenty-four and looking forward to visiting America. "But, my friends tell me, America not so good for the middle class these days." I asked what he meant. He responded, "Is it true that most Americans eat fast food and pizza and hotdogs? That fresh fruits and vegetables are purchased primarily by those of means?"

By 10:40 A.M. we were on the road. As we pulled out of the airport my driver, a bushy haired young man named Novak, announced, "Nyet Angliyski [no English]."

Not to be outdone, I quickly responded "Nyet Russki [no Russian]." You could hear a pin drop in the car as we headed in the general direction of the Marriott, Olympic Centre (there are three Marriotts in Moscow). Every few miles I noticed a car stopped on the right side service road.

I pointed. He started to quickly pull over. "Da, da, wizz."

I wave "Nyet, Nyet." I thought quietly, *Could the drivers of all those guys' cars be taking a wizz?* As I was to learn, there are no highway rest stops as they exist in most parts of the United

States. The cab ride also tested my deeply self-conscious approach to communicating in Russian. I took the fifteen words or so that I had learned well and tried to string them together in short, terse, childlike sentences punctuated with gestures designed to communicate tone,

"Moscow is a great industrial city; our factories release industrial dust all the time."

As we continued to sputter along, there was an occasional high-spirited call from the dispatcher. I got the gist. He was wondering where the hell the driver was! The driver



like laughter, anger, sadness, etc.

The traffic was surprisingly light for the next ten kilometres (that's the European spelling). Suddenly, we came to a complete halt for thirty minutes on a rare eighty degree April day in Moscow. During the wait I learned just how rare, because the well-appointed automobile didn't have air conditioning. No worries; I opened the window. We puttered about for another hour. I looked down at my black chinos; they were covered with little white specks. Later, someone explained matter-of-factly,

became quite agitated, and I learned a new word..... (unrepeatable). My view was now exclusively dusty, dirty cars; clogged turnoffs; billboards screaming deals; and automobile accidents (two minor, two real fender benders) with drivers vigorously pointing the finger at each other in the middle of the highway.

# VISITING ARTEM AND IRENA

I took a stress-reducing shower and called my contact at *Russia Behind the Headlines*, PR Manager Irina Dunkova, to make arrangements for an office tour, to meet the editor, and to take a few PR pictures. Because the Cyrillian characters are all but indecipherable, I asked Irina to text me the paper's address: Ulitsa Pravdy 24, Building No. 4. She repeated the "Building No. 4" thing three times. I showed the text message to the cab driver at the hotel. He confidently nodded, "Da, da." After fifteen minutes and 400 rubles (\$16 US), he stopped in front of a gray building with four wooden doors, silver duct tape across each entrance, and a set of crumpling concrete steps held in place with steel rods. I shook my head, "Nyet, nyet," which was the best I could do for "It can't be."

He pointed to the text message and then the building sign that said 24 Pravdy str. He appeared so confident that I never questioned the "Building No.4" thing. He put his hand out. Reluctantly, I paid him and he took off down the street. I texted Irina... in front of her "supposed" building. She replied immediately, "Be right down." Moments later another text arrived." Do you have your passport?"

"Only a photocopy; I left the original in the hotel safe."

She responded philosophically, "Then, we will have to make do."

Five minutes passed; no Irina. Ten more minutes went by; still no Irina. I decided it was time to ditch the texting crap and talk to a live

voice at \$4.99 a minute which, from what I could tell, is the highest per minute cell rate in the world. She answered, "Mathew, where are you?"

I replied, "I'm right in front of the building."



"Describe it, please." There was a pause on the other end of the phone. "I know of no such place; are you sure you are on Pravdy Street?"

"I haven't got a clue because everything is in impossible-to-decipher Cyrillian," I blurted out impatiently.

Calmly, Irina tried a new approach. "Describe some of your surroundings." I walked down the block calling out Cyrillian shapes (you know N is this and H is that, etc.). Suddenly, I struck gold: a restaurant sign in Latin letters, "Maltese Restaurant." She said,

"Now I know; wait right there." I thought to myself, *like where am I going to go?*

A few minutes later, Irina and Artem, who I'd met several times in New York, came walking across the street side by side. Irina was exactly as I envisioned: a bouquet of beaming bubbles with golden blonde hair. Artem had his signature stoic stare blended with a slightly sheepish grin. There was not much to say; we just started laughing in the middle of the street, then headed to the lobby of their *actual* office...four blocks away! The barren lobby was vintage communist era: glossy battleship gray walls furnished with ancient computer equipment and one wooden chair to service visitors. There were no pictures, no corporate signs, nothing. The guy behind the desk had a large mustache and a constipated scowl. Artem took my passport photocopy and started talking to him in animated Russian. There was a flurry of activity behind the desk, the guy entered something into his computer, made a call, and then mumbled something to Artem. I resisted the temptation to make some wise ass sarcastic comment that only I would find both outrageous and funny. (As I had learned previously, the Russian and American senses of humor are quite different). I asked Artem matter-of-factly what was going on. He gestured with his hand "just be patient." Twenty minutes passed. Finally, the steel metal turnstile opened. Moments later, we were walking down a long, boring hall. At the end of the hall was a wooden door and a clean, professionally designed plaque with the *Russian Now* logo.

*Russia Now  
PR Manager  
Irina Dunkova  
wondering where  
the hell I was.*



*(l to r) Artem and Matt review the content of an upcoming edition of Russia Behind the Headlines prior to insertion in the Washington Post and New York Times; Artem and M.G. in the newspaper's state of the art newsroom, where two youthful, bilingual staff members discuss story changes*

I was amazed once inside. It was the sleek-est, most modern newsroom I'd ever seen. There were digital clocks of the world, ticker tapes, and thirty or forty bright, wholesome, attractive men and women engaged in various functions at their large, sleek, high-resolution flat screens. Editorial Chief Artem Zagorodnov (an Ohio State graduate, by the way) gave me a comprehensive day-to-day operational tour, and along the way we met numerous staff members. He showed me digital comps of the mostly-completed next edition of the newspaper that would be distributed to more than four million readers in nineteen different countries. We also took a bunch of publicity pictures (some of which are included). I was genuinely



impressed with everybody's professionalism. We then retired to a conference room to discuss Artem's editorial strategy, story ideas in development, long term vision, and, not least importantly, where to have dinner, since it was almost 5:30 P.M., Moscow time. I think it was about 4:40 A.M. San Diego time.

Artem explained he had a few issues to resolve before we met his girlfriend, Eva, at one of his favorite restaurants, Toro. He introduced me to an intense, friendly young man named Alex, who volunteered to kill some time with me.

Alex asked if I was thirsty. I responded, "A bottle of water would really hit the spot now. It's been a hell of a day." He smiled knowingly nodded and pointed at the kitchen. As we headed to the kitchen, Alex started bombarding me with thoughtful cultural, political, and business questions. He was highly inquisitive and determined to get answers.

"What is your opinion of the success of the Federation's new social democracy?"

"How do Americans see our elections? Not so good, huh?"

"Lots of problems in the world: greenhouse

emissions, terrorism. Do young people get involved in America?"

"Does America understand we should all be friends, old days gone?"

I tried to explain that I was not qualified to answer those questions. "Why not? I don't understand."

As I struggled, another colleague, Igor, introduced himself. Clearly, he and Alex were good friends. "Alex, leave the man alone," said Igor, as he pointed to the kitchen. The two men exchanged comments as we walked. Alex smiled. Once inside the kitchen, Alex placed nine fifty-gram glasses and a jar of baby pickles on the counter; then he reached into the freezer and pulled out a bottle of Russian vodka. We toasted "new" friendships, "my" victory, and "world" peace for mankind. Alex also explained how and why the crunchy, salty pickles enhanced the vodka experience. I had now been up about twenty-six straight hours, not eaten solid food in the last ten, and had gotten a pretty good buzz. The boys offered to do another round of three, but I begged off. They went up to the roof "to have a smoke."





Artem returned earlier than expected. Suddenly, every light, every computer, every clock in the place blinked and shut down. There were horrific groans and moans across the editorial floor. The unflappable Artem decided to let people go home, confident the backup system would kick in and all would be fine on Monday (which it was).

“I don’t know why people get so excited about such things. Let’s go to dinner, and some drinks,” said Artem calmly.

I asked, “Do we need a cab?”

He looked quizzically, “Why?”

I respond, “Maybe we need to call someone; isn’t it rush hour?”

Artem then explained Moscow taxi etiquette. “It is much easier, and faster, to simply get a citizen car in Moscow. We shall just go to a Prospekt [main street], stand on the corner, and raise our hand and wait. Somebody will stop and roll down the window. We tell him where we want to go and then negotiate a price. But always negotiate the final price before you enter the car,” warned Artem.

I figured he was a bit daft. Imagine trying to do that in Manhattan! But we were in his city, so I figured what the hell; do as the locals do. About four minutes later we were sitting in a clean gray BMW circa 1990 on the way to the restaurant. There I was introduced to his tall, stunning girlfriend, Eva, who looked like something out of *Town and Country* magazine. Fortunately, we were able to secure a patio table on what was a spectacularly warm, clear night. No sooner had we ordered drinks when Artem announced he had to make “an impor-

tant stop.” Minutes later, he returned to the table from outside the restaurant.

I asked, “In case I need the toilette, where exactly is it?”

“Oh, responded Artem, “Toro’s men’s room is small and always crowded. That’s why I use the rest rooms at the Starbuck’s across the

do that street thing again. Artem explained a subtle modification to the ride solicitation process. “At a busy Prospekt like this,” said Artem, “I usually let Eva do the waving. We get more response, faster.”

I smiled and thought to myself, The old bait-and-switch is alive and well in Moscow.

Five minutes later I was speeding down the Prospekt to the sound of Russian country and western in a blue Toyota pickup truck. Since my driver “nyet govorite angliyski,” and I “nyet govorite russki,” it was a music-filled ride back to the hotel.

*M.G. discusses the editorial plans for Russia Behind the Headlines with U.S. Editor-in-Chief, Artem Zagorodnov, at their editorial offices on Pravdy str. in Moscow*



mall area.” Dinner consisted of good food (Artem said the nine-inch high Toro burger was the best in town), lively conversation, and lots of dry red wine.

A man in the church tower across the way started banging on a giant bell. The bell reminded Artem it was now 11:00 P.M. My eyelids were drooping. (I had been up thirty straight hours).

“Let’s get you back to the hotel.”

I laughed because I knew we were about to



*(l to r) Busy first day in Moscow includes the obligatory stop at Red Square and St. Basil's; buying traditional Matryoshka dolls with a distinctly 21st Century flair;*

