

**TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE**  
**Journal of a Member of the Quddus Team**

**J.A. McLean**

1990 / 2018

**TRAVELS THROUGH  
MOSCOW, KIEV, LEVOV  
(4-18 August, 1990)**

**Shamsi Sedagat, Retired, From USA to Odessa**

**Ann Clavin, Fiber Artist, Macedonia, Ohio**

**Leo Misagi, Mining Engineer, Daniels, West Virginia**

**Jack McLean, Educator, Gatineau, Quebec**

## **QUDDUS**

The charismatic and noble figure of Quddus was the preeminent follower among the Letters of the Living or disciples of the Báb, the Prophet-Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Quddus suffered a horrific martyrdom by a fanatical mob in the town of Barfurush, Persia, today's Iran, on 16 May, 1849.

**This journal is lovingly and gratefully dedicated to my parents**

**JOYCE MARY HALSTED AND ALLAN JAMES MCLEAN**

who taught me the love, faith and knowledge of God

*and to*

**SHAMSI, ANN AND LEO**

with whom I shared a memorable moment of history in the making

## PREFACE

This journal was written to present a slice of spiritual history with a human face. It lay in my papers for some 27 years before I decided to revisit its pages. In the summer of 1990, a small group of four travel-teachers visited the Soviet Union to consolidate the activities of several larger proclamation teams from North and South America, Germany, the Holy Land. The visits of these proclamation teams during the late 1980's and early 1990's launched a new and vital stage in the development of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in those vast lands. The names recalled of some of the teams were the two musical groups, the Spanish-speaking El Viento Canta and the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour, the Marion Jack Teaching Project under the sponsorship of the Los Angeles Local Spiritual Assembly, and the Day Star Tour originating at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. (This list may not be complete).

In the intervening years, the once large territory of the Soviet Union has shrunk in surface area. Several independent nations have been constituted that were once ruled from Moscow, including an independent Ukraine, a region that the Quddus Team visited while protests in favor of independence were already taking place.

I would like to thank Corinne and Richard Hainsworth, former longtime pioneers to Moscow, for clarifying some impressions of the Feast of Kamal that the Quddus Team attended in early August, 1990, and for answering a few other queries.

Although the Quddus Team experience was a shared one, these journal entries are written largely from my own perspective. They are not intended to convey the personal experiences of my valued collaborators, Ann Clavin and Leo Misagi, who no doubt formed their own impressions. (As it turned out, pioneer Shamsi Sedagat was with us only at the beginning of our project). Like my team-mates, I did not visit the Soviet Union as a sight-seeing tourist but as a travel-teacher. Any passing impressions of the country recorded here are admittedly based on my very limited, two-week, action-packed experience. Although a few lines of this journal contain some negative impressions of life under Communism, these impressions are really only incidental to the main narrative which records an entirely positive spiritual experience with both Russian and Ukrainian people. The positive experiences recorded here intend to foreshadow the happier times that human beings who meet together in love and fellowship, and who share a belief in our common spiritual humanity, may enjoy.

I hope that this little journal will assist in making a small contribution to a more ambitious reconstruction of the history of the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith in the former Soviet Union during this vital period. At this writing, this important historical project has as yet to be undertaken.

The title of this journal, *To Russia with Love*, was suggested by the 1963 British spy film, *From Russia with Love*. I hope *To Russia with Love* will engage the intelligent reader's interest, as it presents the unfolding of the spiritual activities that took place during our short visit.

*Bonne lecture!*

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# DEPARTURE

## **Leaving Gatineau, West Quebec, via Ottawa: 4 August, 1990**

I got up at 5:00 a.m. having had little sleep during the night. I was quite keyed up at the prospect of visiting the Soviet Union. This is a favorable time to be travelling to the land that had witnessed the Russian revolution of October 1917, with the victory of the Bolsheviks and the establishment of the Communist party. The country has been engaged in a decade long experiment with *Perestroika* (restructuring), an ambitious project that has included the initiation of major economic and political reforms and the overhaul of the government's Central Planning Bureau. President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost* (openness) means that the Soviet Union has been breaking out of its isolation and is forging new ties with the West.

I was driven to the Ottawa International Airport from Gatineau, Quebec, just across the Ottawa river from Canada's capital, by my younger brother, Stephen McLean, who was visiting with his Inuk wife Zippie and family of four daughters from Happy Valley/Goosebay Labrador. We cleared US customs and flew to New York via Toronto since there was no direct flight from Ottawa to New York. We were delayed in Toronto when the maintenance crew had to change an oxygen hose. Although we were still on the ground, suddenly all the oxygen masks dropped down from their hidden compartments, taking us all by surprise. We had to change planes because it would have taken the crew one and a half hours to return the masks to their original positions. While we waited for our new aircraft, we were treated to a complimentary snack courtesy of Air Canada.

Our flight landed in LaGuardia airport. The Pan Am flight I had booked for Moscow was scheduled to take off from the John F. Kennedy airport (JFK). Changing airports would require a shuttle bus ride of about 45 minutes. After asking directions, I easily located the shuttle bus area on the ground level. Off we went. In the pre-boarding area, I spoke to a priest sitting beside me who was reading the Psalms of David from his Latin breviary. I tried to engage him in a conversation on a theological theme when he was finished, but he was apathetic, showing little interest in making conversation.

## **Barbara C. Jessie: Minnesota Council of American-Soviet Friendship**

Before taking off from JFK, I had been scheduled to meet the polite and soft-spoken Barbara Jessie, Chair of the Minnesota Council of American-Soviet friendship. Barbara was a modest, self-confessed, radiant American communist and atheist. She had been raised in a religious family, but during her teenaged years, she had experienced a "conversion" to atheism (her word). Yet there was no evangelical fervor in her espousal of Communism. Barbara strikes me as one who loves humanity. Her desire to build bridges of friendship with the Soviet Union is committed and sincere. We had a long, engaging conversation over lunch during which I told her about the Bahá'í Faith. I mentioned in particular the comprehensive Peace Statement by the Universal House of Justice, "To the Peoples of the World" (1986), that I promised to forward by mail once I returned home.

Despite her professed atheism, Barbara was open to the spiritual dimension, at least in humanistic terms. She was particularly responsive to the Bahá'í Teachings on world peace, and economic and social justice, on the necessity of narrowing the gap between the grotesquely affluent one percent of capitalists and the suffering masses of the world's poor. She seemed impressed with the concrete and practical methods for achieving world order offered by the Bahá'í Faith. I asked her if she had experienced any serious doubts about the efficacy of Communism to accomplish its goals because of the widely perceived failure to bring about prosperity in the Soviet Union. She replied that she had not yet lost faith in the system because real "Socialism"—that is a common synonym for Communism used by Americans, but Socialism and Communism are by no means identical—had not yet been given a chance. This response reminded me of the current clerical and believing proponents of the Progressive Christianity movement which, after the almost 2,000 year long history of Christianity, is still attempting in our time to rewrite Christian theology to make it coherent with the modern scientific mindset that has greatly eroded the traditional belief system of fundamental biblical Christianity.

### **Meeting Ann Clavin and Leo Misagi: Two More Members of the Quddus Team**

Linda Godwin was one of the names involved in organizing the departure of the teaching-teams from the United States. Net East in Canada with Allan Fuller, Jim Milne and Don and Diana Dainty was also performing the same function. But it was Joan Rankin of the Soviet-American Cooperation Society (SACS) who told me that I would rendez-vous with my three other team members close by the departure gate of the Pan Am flight, but they were nowhere to be seen. I began to worry when they did not appear one-half hour before boarding time. Finally I spotted them standing up against a wall. They had actually arrived earlier. Leo was wearing a back-to-front backpack with the word "Quddus" written on it in Russian and English. Here was the sign that Joan had told me to look for. I introduced myself and embraced them both. They did not recognize me immediately because I did not look like the man in the passport photo they had received from the Soviet-American Cooperation Society. I had shaved off my beard and instead of glasses, I was wearing contact lenses. (For a number of years, I used to shave my beard at the beginning of each summer, but the experiment in contact lenses proved to be of short duration. I found them to be too uncomfortable). Shamsi was nowhere in sight, but we had been notified by Joan Rankin of the possibility that she might not be able to make our flight on time because of the difficulty in making timely connections. I phoned Joan at SACS to see whether there had been any last minute information about Shamsi. Joan said that there had been change in plans: Shamsi would take the next flight to Moscow if she were unable to connect with us at the JFK airport.

We had not thought in advance of booking our seats together on the plane. Getting to know one another better would have to wait until Moscow. My seat was located directly behind the in-flight movie screen. I noticed that the plane had not been groomed with the usual care that is typical of overseas flights. We had a second delay before take-off when a passenger was ordered deported; his bag had to be found before he could board another plane. We took off at 6 p.m. and the flight to Moscow lasted seven and a half hours. The atmosphere did not reflect the more usual quiet decorum of the international flight. The Pan Am passengers were in a lighter, party mood.

## MOSCOW (5-8 August, 1990)

### Going Through Customs

After having slept little for 24 hours, we landed in Moscow. The unusually cautious, quiet and somber atmosphere in the Moscow airport enveloped me immediately. It felt almost oppressive. Compared with the hustle-bustle of North American airports, there was little pedestrian traffic; not all the usual comings-and-goings and rushing about; no bright shops to entice passengers appeared to be in sight. The airport was only dimly lit and the acoustics were poor. The first order of business was to pass through the passport-visa control. We lined up accordingly. It was a decidedly different experience from the usual North American customs check. What appeared to me to be a young soldier—actually he may have been a customs agent—with an unsmiling, deadpan face was seated in a narrow control booth. He was definitely in no rush to expedite the process, taking his time to verify our visas. As I recall, he asked no questions. We endured what I felt as long moments of uncomfortable silence, unbroken by any friendly chat.

As we stood in line, Leo gestured silently to alert us to the fact that a mirror was placed above and behind the incoming passengers so that the backs of the passengers would be visible to the customs agent. We wondered jokingly to ourselves why customs agents would want to see our backs. It was no doubt so that the agent could see your hands and lower body in case you were trying to smuggle something through. From his seated, somewhat elevated position in the booth, only the passenger's upper body and face were visible to him. I had the vague impression that he may have spoken English after all and that he was waiting for me to say something to Ann or Leo, but I kept silent. Finally, after a long delay, he handed me my papers and I went through. Throughout the whole time, the impression of the heavy atmosphere of the place never left me.

### Meeting Sasha and Igor

We had no difficulties going through customs after our passport and visa check. Once we had cleared customs, we were met by Sasha, Bill Mahoney's main man for the Soviet-American Cooperation Society, Sasha's girlfriend Maria, and driver and travel-agent Igor, Bill's new employee. Igor spoke English fairly well and during the few days we spent in Moscow, he looked after us well, helping with baggage, getting us checked into the hotel, escorting us on day trips, and driving us around town when necessary. Igor was an open and honest communicator. Unlike many Russians, he seemed to have no fear of speaking his mind, perhaps because the country was now in the midst of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. To put it mildly, Igor was totally fed-up with the Soviet system, as are many Soviets who are courageous enough to say so. I quickly grew to quite like Igor, not only because he did not seem to fear the ever-watchful eye of the State, but also because he worked very hard for us, applying himself with great energy, showing himself to be willing and able to assist us at any time. He told me that he had been making \$18.00 dollars a month working in the Civil Guard, but he quit his job to take a position with Bill

Mahoney, who was paying him double his former salary. Igor did tell me that travel-agents in Moscow working for other companies were making more money than Bill had offered him, but he confided that he was content with his salary for now because it was a vast improvement over what he had been making previously. Unlike many of his contemporaries in the tourist and service industry, Igor worked very hard to please, an effort that earned him both our respect and satisfaction.

### **Igor the Speed Demon**

In the exercise of his professional functions, Igor's one drawback—and it was serious enough—was his driving. He was a speed demon. When we got into his Lada, Igor warned us that he wanted us to arrive at the Salut Hotel in time for lunch. To arrive on time, Igor treated us to our first experience of mad driving Soviet style. After an exhausting trip on the plane, and a full day of being awake, except for brief snatches of uncomfortable sleep, we were not prepared for the further fraying of our nerves by a wild ride through the cobblestone streets of Moscow. In Moscow the police seem to be confined mainly to street corners and foot patrol. I rarely noticed any squad cars, those normally visible deterrents for speeding drivers. By North American standards, Igor, had he been spotted by an on-duty police officer in a cruiser, would have been arrested for dangerous driving. I don't know about Ann and Leo, but he scared the life out of me. A serious fear of dying at the relatively young age of 45 caused me to protest—I just couldn't help myself—but Igor was not listening, telling us that there was no danger. He just kept driving at speeds in excess of 120 km. an hour along the boulevards of Moscow.

### **Checking into the Salut Hotel**

Although I experienced great delight as I looked on the first scenes of countryside in the Soviet Union, the charm was quickly dissipated as we drove into Moscow. It was a grey, overcast day as we sped through the streets of the capital. My heart sank as I caught sight of the drab buildings, the neglected grounds and properties, the inactive construction sites and the generally dirty streets. The failure of Communism was entirely visible to the naked eye. You became quickly aware that the rhythm of business is considerably slower in the Soviet Union than in North America. It took us longer than we had anticipated to check into the Salut Hotel. There were inevitable delays and more questions than seemed necessary. Employees in the tourist and service industry are in no hurry to please the customer, one of the predictable outcomes of the Soviet system since employees are rarely fired. They know that they will continue to be paid no matter what standard of service they may provide. They know no such business ethic as “the customer is always right.” In fact, with the one outstanding exception of a smiling and very helpful middle-aged Russian woman, I had the impression that shop employees acted as if they were doing *you* a favor by serving you. According to the Russian employee's logic, this makes sense because employees are in a position to deliver the sorely needed, usually rare consumer goods. With so few retail outlets available, a lack of competition provides little incentive to please the customer. We checked into our rooms—I took room number 1405—and we went down for lunch. At this point the Quddus Team was quite tired since we had been up for about 24 hours without proper sleep.

## **The Marion Jack Tour, Bill Mahoney of SACS, Bill and Esther Bradley-DeTally**

At the hotel, we had our first taste of the Russian diet. We had a salad consisting of tomatoes, chopped onion and oil, a salad that was to become staple fare during our trip. A ham and potato soup, bread, and a main dish consisting of a large portion of beef and coleslaw completed the meal. Despite the heavy diet, I was grateful to enjoy a decent meal. When we first entered the hotel lobby, we met one lone remnant of the Day Star Tour that had come from the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa and had just recently left. This pleasant American young woman in her late teens told us that the Marion Jack Tour from California was still there. The Marion Jack Tour had made a long trip into Siberia, including Ulan-Ude where about 25 souls had reportedly entered the Faith. (That was the number as near as I can recall). It looked as if there were about 15 members of the Marion Jack Tour there for lunch each day, all of them bright, impressive and dedicated Bahá'í youth. Here we met Bill Mahoney, the owner and manager of the Soviet-American Cooperation Society and Esther and Bill Bradley-DeTally from Seattle, advisors to the Marion Jack Tour, who debriefed us on the activities in the teaching field prior to our arrival. Esther told me that they had to return to the US shortly because her brother-in-law was seriously ill with cancer.

### **A Change of Plans: Levov**

Bill and Esther inquired about our itinerary. Although we were not scheduled to go to Levov, but rather Charnovtsy, they asked us if it would be possible for us to go to Levov in the western Ukraine instead because the Day Star Tour had done a proclamation there. Bill and Esther thought that Levov held more promise than Charnovtsy because there were more Bahá'í contacts there. Ann Clavin and I had been scheduled to go to Tallin, Estonia instead of Charnovtsy to give some feedback on a peace education curriculum to Dolores Lindsay, but we felt that we could not make such a sudden change in plans without consulting Dolores. I phoned Dolores and she suggested that it would be better to go to Levov because no changes could now be made to the first year curriculum that had already been written by Betty Reed from the UK. We had brought Dolores some teaching materials that we could send her by mail. Based on our consultation with Esther and Bill and Dolores, Ann, Leo and I decided that Levov would be the better choice.

### **The Feast of Kamal Hosted by the Moscow Local Spiritual Assembly**

After lunch we went straight to the Nineteen Day Feast which was held in a rented facility close to the Tretyaskovskaya metro station in the center of town. It was used by the local friends for Holy Days and Feasts. The Feast was chaired by Richard Hainsworth, son of writer Philip Hainsworth, from the UK and his congenial and lively Welsh wife Corinne. The Hainsworths and their young children have been pioneering in Moscow for the past 7 years, making sacrificial services toward the challenging goal of advancing the Faith in the capital. I was told that about 50 believers were residing in Moscow. The Local Spiritual Assembly was reformed on 21 April earlier this year in the presence of the Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. Ali Akbar Furutan, who had lived and studied in the Soviet Union in his student years. (The LSA had been banned formerly by the Communist regime).

Since arriving in this country, I have already begun to appreciate the work of the Hainsworths here, who are living in the deprived and sometimes frustrating conditions of life in Moscow. Richard Hainsworth works for a publisher, and I was told that he is not allowed to leave the capital because he is a foreigner; foreigners do not have the freedom to travel at will in the Soviet Union. At the Feast, I also met Mrs. Hainsworth senior, Richard's mother, and spoke with her briefly. The Feast of Kamal was attended by the Hainsworths, members of the Marion Jack Tour, a few Russian members of the Moscow community, among them Leo Evgrafov, cellist and artistic director of "Rossisyskata Camerata", who gave a very moving speech of welcome and appreciation of the guests at the Feast, including the Quddus Team or Quddus Consolidation Project as they called us. I spoke with Leo Evgrafov during the social part of the Feast. I told him that I had seen the great Russian cellist Rostropovitch in concert at Massey Hall in Toronto when I was a student. He told me that Rostropovich had once been his teacher.

Richard Hainsworth conducted the Feast in both Russian and English. His Russian seems to be very fluent and his pronunciation generally excellent. Members of the Marion Jack Tour sang the "Queen of Carmel," with its moving refrain "circle round in adoration, circle round your Lord". Ann Clavin who was sitting beside me and a few others spontaneously joined in the singing. We were very conscious of the uniqueness of the occasion that we were privileged to be witnessing. The history of a vital new stage in the development of the Faith in Russia was being created before our eyes, with our grateful participation. Tears came into my eyes at the wonder of it all. Toward the end of the Feast, the members of the Marion Jack Tour left to return to the hotel. They would soon be leaving to return to the United States after an unforgettable summer in the Soviet Union.

### **Meeting Marina Pavlova, the First Female Bahá'í in Kiev**

Although Marina and her husband Victor lived in Kiev, Marina was there to welcome us to Moscow. I had already heard about Marina from Darlene Cameron of Gatineau, West Quebec, who stayed with the Pavlovs during the earlier Cathy and Red Grammar Tour. The Pavlovs were originally members of an organization called "World Family." Marina and her husband Victor had served as Darlene's host family. Marina had become a Bahá'í during Darlene's stay and Victor declared his faith a short time later. (The expression "declared his faith" was actually used by Shoghi Effendi, as cited by Ruhiiyyih Khanum in *The Priceless Pearl*, but it seems to have been replaced now by the expression "enrolled in the Faith"). Darlene told me before I left Gatineau how Marina had invited her to speak to the students of Marina's adult English conversation class about her trip to the Soviet Union with the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour. Darlene told them that she was a Bahá'í and shared with the class a brief outline of the Bahá'í Faith. When it was Marina's turn to speak to the class again, she suddenly announced: "And I am a Bahá'í too!" Darlene said that Marina's declaration of faith had taken her completely by surprise because Marina had not yet told Darlene of her decision to become a Bahá'í. It would appear that Marina decided on the spur of the moment that she was also a believer.

Because of her unusual spiritual depth and wisdom, despite the fact that her declaration of faith occurred only a few months earlier, and because she was chronologically the first woman believer in the Ukraine, it seems quite appropriate to call Marina the spiritual mother of the

Ukraine. According to our fellow Quddus team member, Leo Misagi, who prepared a travel-teachers' report for the Quddus Team, Marina is the first believer in the Ukraine. But Canadian Andrea Graham from Ontario, who was also on the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour, told me that Dima Krukov, the Olympic (?) gold medal hockey star—I don't know for which league and when Dima won his gold medal—was the first believer in Kiev. Although Andrea was there to witness Dima's declaration, unless other evidence comes to light, it seems safe to say that Marina Pavlova is the first female believer in the Ukraine. She and her husband Victor are to be counted among that first nucleus of believers in the Ukraine. The Pavlovs serve the Faith in exemplary fashion in Kiev by acting as tireless hosts for the successive teams of travel-teachers coming from North America and other places, and by serving on the Local Spiritual Assembly that was formed during our visit and by helping to organize local Bahá'í activities. Marina was later elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Soviet Union.

I sat beside Marina on the bus on the way to the Nineteen Day Feast. Marina is a talented folk dancer of Armenian descent who possesses both spiritual and natural beauty. I found that she was even more striking in appearance in person than the impression her photographs convey. I referred above to Marina's great spiritual depth and wisdom. She has a truly remarkable grasp of the Teachings and a great love for the Faith, qualities that one sees normally only in believers who have been Bahá'ís for many years. She was no doubt what Bahá'ís call a "prepared soul", a lively spark just waiting to be set aflame by the friends who passed her the torch of Faith. When I returned home, I gave Marina's love and greetings to her teacher and spiritual mother Darlene Cameron. When I left Canada, I carried a gift package to Marina from Darlene and letters from friends in Canada who had been to Kiev on previous trips, either with the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour or through Net East.

As we sat together on the bus, I noticed that Marina seemed subdued and reflective. When we began to talk, Marina's mood clearly conveyed a certain discouragement. I sensed that Marina was being too hard on herself, a quality that one often sees in conscientious believers. She shared her anxieties, telling me that she felt her English was not as proficient as she would like it to be. I replied that her English was really excellent for someone who had not yet visited an English-speaking country. She was also feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the task facing the Soviet believers in teaching the Faith in that vast country. Marina feels the obligation of the teaching the Cause as a very personal and sacred responsibility. (If only each and every new believer took this sacred duty to heart as seriously as Marina does). She was also concerned that the less than ideal economic and social conditions in the Soviet Union, conditions that the government under President Gorbachev was attempting to ameliorate, would hinder the more rapid growth that the Faith potentially could have here. I did what I could to cheer Marina up by paraphrasing one of the letters or pilgrim's notes of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, that the Bahá'í Faith would eventually sweep across the Soviet Union like wildfire. I also felt, although I cannot remember now if I shared this thought with Marina, that it must have been quite taxing for Marina and Victor, as pillars of the community in Kiev, to receive the successive teaching teams that came from North America every few months. This "gearing up" for each new team may have in part explained Marina's fatigue.

## **Good News and Bad News: 6 August, 1990**

Today we received the good news that the first LSA of Kiev was formed with representatives of the Moscow LSA acting as assistants and witnesses. The Iranian pioneers, Iraj and Jinous Victory, who been living formerly in my home community of Etobicoke (Toronto) were also present. Iraj and Jinous had lived in Etobicoke at the same time as my parents Joyce and Allan McLean before my mother and father moved to Salt Spring Island, British Columbia after their retirement. By this time Shamsi had been able to join the three of us. We were not to be a complete team of four for long however; Shamsi had planned to continue her journey directly on to Odessa, the port city on the Black Sea in southern Ukraine and to settle there as a resident pioneer. The Quddus Team did what most tourists do in Moscow: we visited Red Square including St. Basil's church. Nadia, one of Bill Mahoney's employees, acted as our guide. We intended to visit Lenin's tomb where his remains are on display, but the mausoleum was temporarily closed. (Lenin's corpse requires periodic maintenance, an activity that necessitated the temporary closure of the tomb).

The bad news came at the subway/underground entrance in Red Square. We had a decidedly unpleasant encounter with a young family of beggars: a mother, her boy child aged about eight years and sleeping baby. The boy was placed strategically at the subway entrance to beg from the passers-by who were entering the subway. The mother waited at the bottom of the stairs to collect money from her son, while her well-wrapped baby slept on a blanket on the floor of the subway. I was told by one of our Russian friends that these beggars sometimes drug their babies so that they will sleep all day while the others are left free to beg. I was shocked at the pallid color of the baby once I glanced at mother and child. The baby's face had such a sickly, pale color that I thought the child was comatose rather than sleeping. The boy approached me, wrapped his arms around my leg, and in well-practiced mock pity, laid his head on my knee to gain my sympathy. Then he held out his hand for the money. I was not only not impressed by these theatrics, but I was positively alarmed at the sickly color of the infant. It occurred to me that the child needed emergency medical care, but there was little that I could do under the circumstances. When the mother saw that her son had been unsuccessful in begging money from me, she gave him several hard slaps on the head, while she harangued him with a good screaming for being unsuccessful in his attempt.

We returned to the Salut Hotel for lunch. I took a much-needed nap in the afternoon, while the others went to the Bahá'í Center to consolidate our stock of Bahá'í literature in Russian. We ended up being quite successful in stocking up; in addition to the small amount of literature that we had brought with us, we accumulated enough material to fill a large duffel/kit bag. Half of it was destined for Kiev and the other half for Levov. We began our journey well-armed for seekers. By the end of our two week travel-teaching trip, the entire quantity of our stock had disappeared. That night we had supper at the Salut Hotel and retired early.

## **The Delighted Little Girl in the Subway/Underground Train**

During the few days that we had spent in Moscow, and considering the brevity of our projected stay, I felt that I had not been doing enough to teach the Faith in the capital. I had come

to the Soviet Union to spread the Faith after all, but I done very little teaching. I had talked briefly to Nadia, our tour guide, about the Faith, but until then, I had given away only a few bilingual “One Family Bahá’í Faith” buttons. As we continued our journey, sitting opposite me in the subway/underground train, was a young mother and her blond child, a little girl about 7 years old. The little girl wore thick glasses and her right eye was heavily bandaged. I could not engage them in conversation because I spoke no Russian, but I said a few words to them in English. To the mother I gave a pamphlet in Russian and to the little girl I held out a One Family button. That moment in the subway train became one of the memorable highlights of the entire trip. When I handed the little girl the One Family button, a transformation occurred. Her whole face lit up in a bright smile. Her sad expression turned to one of joy. I never thought that such a small thing could bring a child such delight.

### **Fireside with Stan Smith, Professor of Peace Studies and the African-American Sociology Professor**

In the afternoon, Esther Bradley-DeTally asked if anyone had in English the Peace Statement of the Universal House of Justice, “To the Peoples of the World”. I replied that I had several Canadian editions. Esther said that she had met a man named Stan Smith who was teaching peace studies at the Boyd and Grace Martin Peace Institute of the University of Idaho. Esther had arranged a Fireside with him. She asked if I could replace her and meet him at 10:15 p.m. in the Salut Hotel. I readily agreed to her request. I went up at 10:15 and knocked on the door. Stan introduced me to his roommate, an African American sociology professor who was quite vocal in his beliefs, although we had just met. He let me know straight away that he deplored what he perceived as the neglect of social justice in religion and also the hypocrisy of religious people. The professor was no polite academic whose personality consisted only of a thin veneer of intellectualism. He spoke sincerely and straight from the heart.

I responded to his challenge and had a Fireside with both of them there and then, making a vigorous case for the Faith’s interest in social justice and its involvement with the peace process. Stan and I went out to the lounge while the sociology professor got some sleep. I presented him with the Peace Statement. While Stan read the entire statement out loud, he summarized the text and asked me for feedback as he read. Stan told me that he was a member of the Unitarian church and that he had written a curriculum unit on peace education, which I assume he taught at the University of Idaho. He offered to send it to me. I felt satisfied with the Fireside when it was over because an honest and informative exchange of views had taken place. Our conversation had been a two-way street. I had been learning as well as teaching. Stan certainly seemed keen on learning about the Bahá’í view on peace. I had never before had such a Fireside during which a seeker read through the whole Bahá’í text as we discussed it. When the Fireside ended, we shook hands and said goodbye. I intended to follow up with Stan once I returned home.

### **Arbot Street, the Artists’ Quarter: 7 August, 1990**

In the morning we went to visit Arbot Street, the artsy part of town. Like all artists’ quarters in any large city, Arbot Street attracts a good influx of tourists. At noon, Ann and

Shamsi returned to the hotel while Leo and I stayed on. I had my portrait done in colored chalk by an artist named Vladimir who charged me the very meagre sum of 6 rubles—at that time worth only a fraction of a Canadian dollar. A similar portrait by a street artist would have cost between \$30.00 to \$50.00 dollars in Canada. Vladimir worked quickly, but the quality of the sketch was excellent. I left the portrait in storage for 23 years until 2013 when I finally had it framed, but until I identified myself, my grandchildren could not recognize the much younger, beardless man without glasses and a fuller head of hair. I left Vladimir a pamphlet in Russian as he went on to sketch his next subject, a West German girl.

In the afternoon Leo and I wanted to visit a few bookstores, but they were not open yet. We met an English tourist named Nicky Fisher who lived in Crouch End, north London. While we waited for the bookstores to open, we sat outside chatting at a café. We told her about the purpose of our visit and when I returned to Canada, I sent her the Peace Statement. When the bookstores opened, I bought a two-volume edition of Pushkin in English translation, a German grammar book and 2 philosophy books in English by Russian authors: one on Aristotle and the other called *The Principles of Philosophy*. I didn't realize it until later when I began to read them more carefully that both philosophy volumes had been heavily influenced by Marxism. In retrospect, I recall now that Leo had warned me that the philosophy presentation would be heavily influenced by Marxist ideology.

Not being familiar with Russian business practice, I asked the middle-aged salesperson if she wouldn't mind wrapping my portrait. (I made my request somewhat cautiously because I had not purchased my portrait there). She responded immediately in an impressive spirit of alacrity. She wrapped it with the greatest care, using light brown carton paper to protect the portrait and an outer layer of dark brown wrapping paper. She tied the package securely with a thick brown string, and to finish it off, closed the open edges with a glue that she brushed on. She was adamant in refusing the tip that I offered her, but even after all these years, that woman's graciousness I can still recall clearly in my mind's eye.

### **A Light Moment on the Tourist Bus: 8 August, 1990**

The Marion Jack Tour left Moscow on 7 August; the Day Star Tour that had originated in Haifa left on 5 August. For our daytrip on 8 August, we decided to travel to the ancient, imposing Russian Orthodox monastery complex of Zagorsk, alternately called Sergiyev Posad, founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Zagorsk is located about 75 kms/47 miles or an hour's slow bus ride north-east of Moscow. The happy threesome consisting of 2 Americans and 1 Canadian ended up taking a bus filled largely with Italian tourists. On the bus we met a young woman from German-speaking Switzerland who had moved to Italy as a youth; I spoke a little *hoch Deutsch* with her since I don't speak any Swiss German. This ride turned out to be great fun when a Florentine whom Ann nicknamed "Leonardo," decided to amuse his fellow-travelers by acting as the group's funnyman. Leonardo's impromptu comedy sketch triggered the latent comedian in me. (I do have a zany side that is seldom seen, even by close friends and family, but it can suddenly and spontaneously emerge when a friendly audience is present). Although Leonardo spoke very little English, I engaged him in a conversation while both of us were standing at the front of the bus. To join in the fun, I did an imitation accent of an Italian speaking English, gesturing with my

hands *à l'Italienne*. It made an immediate “hit” with the Italian tourists. Leonardo and I were able to entertain the friendly travelers with a mixture of Italian, German, French and English. I joked that I spoke very good Italian. To prove it, I trotted out all the names of Italian dishes that I knew from Canada, such as *pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, vino, fettucini alfredo, pasta fazool, zuppa* and some other words such as *dollari* and so on. The Italians who are known for their love of life and good humor responded with smiling faces and laughter, as long as Leonardo and I continued with our antics. It was an enjoyable moment of comic relief.

## **The Monastery Complex at Zagorsk/Sergiyev Posad**

### **The Two Cranky Monks: 8 August, 1990**

The name Zagorsk dates from the Communist era. It reverted to its original name in 1991, a year after our visit. Although the expansive grounds of the Holy Trinity Monastery complex of St. Sergey is a much frequented tourist destination, for centuries it has been an authentic place of pilgrimage and retreat for devoted Russian Orthodox Christians. It is the most important of Russian monasteries and the principal spiritual and administrative center of the Russian Orthodox Church. I imagine that Zagorsk has been enjoying a revival since the inception of *Glasnost*, permitting citizens of Western Europe, North America and other places access to these holy sites that have been seen rarely by those living outside the Soviet Union. An atmosphere of serenity pervaded the flower dotted green precincts with their magnificent assemblage of colorful churches, chapels and seminary, crowned by the bright blue and gold, bulbous, tapering domes. Inside the main entrance to the Cathedral of the Assumption, two monks were rather reluctantly serving tea. They looked as if they had been ordered by the Abbot to provide this service to tourists, but their entire body language appeared to begrudge the task they had been assigned. Perhaps they regarded tourists as an invasion of their monkish privacy, peace and quiet. In such a spot, so holy and sacred to Russian Christians, wisdom should have dictated that I pass them by.

But after a few moments of deliberation, as I recalled Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to be “unrestrained as the wind” while carrying the Divine Message, blowing on all regions without distinction, I decided to present them with two yellow pamphlets in Russian on the Faith. I had a quick consultation with Ann and Leo who discouraged me from my intention. They walked away from me, no doubt fearing a confrontation, if not an explosion. They thought the gesture might provoke the monks. When I handed the monks the pamphlets, something curious occurred. As Leo and Ann had anticipated, both men immediately castigated me. I could not of course understand what they were saying, but one monk spoke in reactive anger as he handed back the pamphlet. The other monk, however, took his pen and crossed out the name Bahá'í Faith, but left the inscription “One Family.” I held out my hand and said firmly: “Well, if you don't want it, give it back!” Strangely, the second monk would not. For whatever reason, whether to read it out of curiosity, destroy it or report the Bahá'ís to the ecclesiastical authorities to warn them of this heresy, he decided to keep the pamphlet.

## **Shamsi Sedagat: Lone Pioneer to Odessa**

In the late afternoon, the Quddus Team headed for the railway station to see Shamsi off to Odessa where she would become the lone pioneer. The Victorys had been living there previously, but they had moved to Kiev. Like Leo Misagi, Shamsi had been born in Russian Turkestan. (I suspect that Shamsi like Leo had been born in Ishqabad but I cannot be sure). She naturally spoke Russian as well as Persian growing up, but at age 16 she and her family and the other Bahá'ís had been deported to Iran by Stalin. Unlike Leo who had been able to keep his Russian fluent over the years, Shamsi had forgotten hers, but some Russian words were already starting to come back to her. (It would be just a matter of time until she became fluent again). Shamsi is one of those very exemplary senior Bahá'ís who has been a pioneer for over 40 years. She had the very great blessing of making the pilgrimage during the days when Shoghi Effendi was Guardian of the Faith. In Tehran she attended the first deepening institute in which she and other believers were taught by the prolific and distinguished scholar, Jenabi Fazeli Mazandarani, who had been sent to the United States to deepen the friends in the Covenant on the orders of 'Abdu'l-Baha and later by Shoghi Effendi during the early 1920's. The Hand of the Cause, Ali Akbar Furutan, and other eminent teachers had also instructed the friends at this same institute.

Shamsi is a woman of action, an energetic believer who puts the Faith first in her life. She is assertive and determined without being aggressive or overbearing. Here she was at a time in her life when most people would be looking forward to a quiet retirement, but instead she pulled up stakes from her home in California to bring the light of this New Day to the faraway city of Odessa. She served on the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Trinidad and Tobago. In those twin island nations, she had brought a well-known doctor into the Faith. The story of his conversion to the Faith was both unusual and fascinating. She had been bitten by a dog and had gone to the doctor's clinic for treatment. The conversation turned to things spiritual when a friendly debate ensued. The doctor told Shamsi that he was a confident devotee of meditation, while Shamsi told the doctor that she put her faith in the Bahá'í prayers, notwithstanding the fact that Bahá'ís also meditate.

The conversation came to a head when they reached a point of challenging one another right there and then. The doctor sat and meditated while Shamsi prayed the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh. Well during their spiritual contest, the doctor was completely taken over by the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. It was such a decisive experience that he immediately became a Bahá'í! The doctor was also elected to the first NSA of Trinidad and Tobago. After she told me the story, I reminded her of those verses in the Quran that recounted one of the battles of the Prophet: "...those shafts were God's not thine," (Surah 8:17), but in jest I changed them to "That dog bite was God's not thine." Shamsi smiled knowingly. Shamsi came prepared to live in Russia. She brought two fax machines, one of which she gave away, I think to Bill Mahoney, and a slide projector. The 7 suitcases she brought with her well exceeded the weight restriction; she was

charged an extra \$500.00 dollars by Pan Am Airlines. We were very concerned how Shamsi, with her 7 pieces of luggage, was going to get all her belongings onto the train. Most Russians travel with a small bag, or a few small bags, or depending on the distance, nothing at all. We knew that there would not be enough room in Shamsi's compartment to accommodate all her luggage. We were all saying the Greatest Name as Sergey, one of Bill Mahoney's agents, talked to the female conductor. After a brief conversation, she agreed to put some of Shamsi's things in her own compartment. The rest of it would be packed in Shamsi's berth. With a sigh of relief, we helped her on the train, and after thanking the conductor profusely, we said goodbye to this exemplary soul who had served the Cause with such great devotion for so many years. Her several fine qualifications will surely enable this steadfast pioneer to be a great asset to the Faith in the Soviet Union.

### **The Love of Shoghi Effendi: A Mystical Experience in Shamsi's Presence**

As I travelled on a bus with Shamsi in Moscow, I was possessed suddenly by that same heavenly love of Shoghi Effendi that I felt circa 1965 in Toronto when Hand of the Cause, Mr. Zikhrullah Khadem, spoke to the Bahá'í youth at a National Convention at York University. Each Hand of the Cause of God had distinctive, particular qualities that made him or her different from all other Hands. In that sense, each Hand was the essence of individuality, notwithstanding their collective devotion to the Guardian and to the needs of the Divine Plan. Mr. Khadem was noted particularly for his remarkable love, dedication and devotion to the Guardian. Affectionate, humble and courteous, a man of refined manners and finely tuned spiritual sensitivity, he was like an evanescent drop lost in the ocean of Shoghi Effendi's love. Unusually rare in this world, and like all mystical experiences, difficult to describe in words, it was vastly different from any form of human love that one may feel for loved ones, whether friends, family or fellow believers.

What struck me suddenly at York University was an experience of much greater magnitude, but of the same origin nonetheless as the spiritual phenomenon that I felt sitting beside Shamsi. Now imagine a colossal, heavenly magnet suspended in the air above the stage where Mr. Khadem was speaking. Now picture yourself as the speck of a single iron filing. Would you be able to escape such a powerful, irresistible force? That force transported me to an unknown spiritual realm and ecstatic form of consciousness, a force that drew me out of my seat and down the aisle, and in full view of all the assembled friends, to mount the stage even as Mr. Khadem was speaking, and completely unembarrassed and forgetful of self, to throw my arms around him and kiss him on the cheek. Yes, as I think about it now, no one in his right mind would ever do such a thing, but I was not at all in my "right" mind, but fully a mad Majnun in the Valley of Love. He looked at me, a strange young man who had climbed the stage to interrupt his talk, but he seemed not at all surprised or disturbed by my unusual behavior. He said

simply “God bless you.” Still oblivious to those around me, I left the stage blinded by my own tears and returned to my seat, as my everyday mundane consciousness gradually returned.

I had not been able to identify precisely the origin of this Divine Love which drew me like a gigantic magnet in the sky, nor for some years did I really seek to comprehend the experience any further. But years later, after Mr. Khadem had passed on from this world, I met his wife, Javidokh Khadem, at a conference in Quebec City. As she gathered with some of her children, I found a brief moment to tell her about my unusual experience. She responded with the simple but certain observation: “Yes, that was the love of Shoghi Effendi.” Mrs. Khadem’s insight was the master key that instantly unlocked the meaning of that rare spiritual event. Sitting beside Shamsi that day on a bus in Moscow, as she spoke about the Guardian, she too became the vehicle for the love of Shoghi Effendi. I wonder now whether or not every pilgrim who had been in the presence of the Guardian could be the vehicle for that same heavenly love.

## ON THE TRAIN FROM MOSCOW TO KIEV

### **Immediate Response: Elena Seyfoulina from Siberia: 9 August, 1990**

After saying goodbye to Shamsi, Ann, Leo and I continued our train ride south to Kiev. Since it was an overnight journey, we took a sleeping car that had four berths. Because we were only three travelers, one berth was left empty. We were joined by a tall, blonde, Soviet traveler named Elena Seyfoulina who was about 21 years old. Elena boarded the train at a close distance from our windows. We could see that she had been accompanied to the station by another young woman who was clearly a close friend. As the train pulled away, Elena's friend engaged her in making funny faces, as they laughed and waved goodbye to one another. We welcomed Elena to our compartment and helped her to off load her luggage. Leo was able to speak with her in Russian, but like many Soviet students, Elena spoke English fairly well. Speaking mainly in English, would mean that Leo would be relieved of providing a running translation, but he was able to clarify certain points in Russian from time to time, so using both languages worked well.

Elena told us that she was studying to become a philologist—she may have meant linguist—but that in the meantime to support herself, she was also working as a tour guide. Although Elena was originally from distant Siberia, the largest land mass in Russia, known for its harsh, northern long winters, she was now living in the warmer region of Crimea, with its Mediterranean climate, on the northern coast of the Black Sea. She had also been studying philosophy and eastern religions, the latter subjects providing a natural connection to a conversation about the Bahá'í Faith. It didn't take long for us to introduce the Faith, once she asked what had brought us to the Soviet Union. We had brought along a duffle/kit bag jam packed full of literature in Russian that was heavy enough that it had to be carried by both Leo and myself. Leo presented Elena with a pamphlet entitled "Bahá'ism" which had been just newly translated from the Canadian pamphlet "The Bahá'í Faith".

I had heard from Darlene Cameron of Gatineau, West Quebec, that the Soviet people, having been deprived of religion for decades under Communism, had such a deep thirst for spiritual truth that their interest in the Bahá'í Teachings could be susceptible to immediate response. I saw a living example of this ready interest as we watched Elena take the pamphlet and begin to read it earnestly on the spot. This response one would almost never see in the West. Most people would set it aside, read it later or discard it, depending on their inclination. The American professor of peace studies, Stan Smith, mentioned above was a welcome and notable exception. We sat in a hushed silence of anticipation, as Elena read through the pamphlet. A few moments later, she looked up and said with conviction: "I'm interested in the Faith." This immediate, positive response to the Bahá'í Teachings was something we would witness several times during our two-week stay in the USSR. That same evening we had a very warm, engaged,

bilingual Fireside with Elena in our train compartment. We told her that we would be giving a Fireside at the Pavlovs in Kiev. We gave Elena the phone number and invited her to attend. Just as the train was pulling into the Kiev station, Elena introduced us to a Russian journalist who had travelled to the USA and had written a series of articles on his visit. He told us how much he had grown to like the American people during his stay there. I gave him a copy of the Peace Statement in Russian and the *Hidden Words* in English. When it came time, we said our warm goodbyes. I hoped especially that Elena would be able to attend the Fireside at the Pavlovs.

# KIEV

## **Meeting Marina and Victor Pavlov and our Hostesses in Kiev: 10 August, 1990**

At the station in Kiev, we were met by Marina and Victor Pavlov and our two hostesses, Irena Andreyeva, in whose family Leo and I would stay, and another Elena, in whose family Ann would stay. Our hostess Irena, who preferred to be called by the diminutive Ira, was a 17 year old student from Kiev who is studying at the Economics Institute. (We would meet her mother and sister later). It was important for Ira to remind us that she was almost 18. Compared with youth of the same age in Canada, I found Ira to be quite responsible and mature. Ira had been born with half of one forearm missing. She had been scheduled to have an artificial limb fitted during an operation in East Germany, but when the political impetus for the reunification of the two Germanys accelerated and negotiations were underway, many agreements between the two countries were simply cancelled. Unfortunately, Ira's operation was one of them.

As we drove through Kiev from the train station, I got my first morning look at the capital of the Ukraine. The cobblestone streets droned out a dull rumble under the taxi wheels, a familiar lulling sound I hadn't heard since my student days at the Sorbonne in Paris during the late 1960's. As we drove along, I wondered aloud where the "great gate of Kiev" was, the title of the triumphant 10<sup>th</sup> piece of Mussorgsky's "Pictures from an Exhibition," his 1874 showpiece piano composition. Although Ira answered that Mussorgsky's piece was probably synonymous with the city itself because Kiev is the gate to the Ukraine, I have since discovered that the Great Gate of Kiev or Golden Gate was actually the southern gate. The original fortified gate was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. In the modern era only vestiges remained, but it was completely rebuilt by the Soviet authorities in 1982. Ira's home on 6 Cheluskincev Street, apartment 53, was located not far from the main square of Kiev with its several fountains. Once we deposited our luggage inside, we were greeted heartily and then introduced to the family. We met Grandma, Darya Aleksandrovna Posevkina, Ira's mother, Katerina or "Katya" Andreyeva, and Ira's older sister, Albina, who is 7 months pregnant with her first child. Later we met her husband, Arturo, an engineering student at the Institute.

## **The Heritage Ukrainian Village: Invitation from the Smiling Lady on the Bus**

The family served the Quddus Team lunch at home, a meal that provided us with the opportunity to chat further and to share information about our respective backgrounds and family life in Canada and the United States. We found Grandma Posevkina to be especially friendly and open, uninhibited by the cautious reticence before strangers that we had experienced in some of the Soviets whom we had met. Grandma was a free spirit, a true original. Not only was she welcoming, but she was clearly enjoying and even amused by the experience of meeting "Amerikantski" strangers from so far away. In the afternoon, Ira escorted us by bus to visit a multi-hectare/acre heritage Ukrainian village. As we sat on the bus, chatting in English, and looking like the tourists that we were, a friendly, well-groomed woman who appeared to be in her late forties approached us, a light-haired brunette with matching brown eyes, who wore

loosely braided hair tied back in a bun. Engaging Leo in Russian, she told us that during the more recent period of *Glasnost*, we were the first foreigners that she had ever seen in Kiev. Although her comment was meant to welcome us, it inadvertently accentuated the previous closed door policy of the Soviet government.

This woman with the warm, smiling face spoke to us with an engaging courtesy and personal charm. She extended an invitation to visit her home. Although I could not understand her Russian, the dignity of her bearing and the warmth of her personality needed no translation. We would have been happy to accept her kind invitation, but there was no time to fix an appointment because in mid-conversation, the bus suddenly arrived at our destination. Regrettably cutting the conversation short, we thanked her as we hurried off the bus. The property featured several models of white-washed Ukrainian farmhouses as they appeared over the centuries—a church, wooden windmills and fields of golden grain now ripe in the summer sun. The cottages had been furnished and decorated with samples of period Ukrainian weavings and wall-hangings and handmade rustic furniture. The interior of the cottages was pleasantly scented with herbs and flowers from the surrounding fields and gardens. It struck me that the model village was a more idyllic, romanticized representation of what was most certainly harsher times in the Ukrainian rural life of centuries past.

### **The Remarkable Dream of Oleg Fulfilled at the Drinking Fountain**

Ann, Leo and I decided to go our separate ways to rendez-vous later at an appointed time. After walking through the Ukrainian village during the summer afternoon, I was thirsty. I was directed to a drinking fountain where two men in their early thirties sat on the bench opposite. One of them noticed my Bahá'í button and asked me in English where I was from. These men were Oleg and his brother Sergey. We began to converse freely. Oleg told me that he had lived in the United States for two years. He wasted no time, probably taking his cue from my Bahá'í button, in telling me that he was a seeker of truth. I was delighted, of course, to have a spiritual conversation with Oleg. Based on my limited experience in the USSR, I found that the immediacy, intensity and earnestness of these spiritual exchanges take place at a much deeper level where one feels less resistance in teaching the Faith than one feels in conversations with citizens of Europe or North America. Without hesitation Oleg began to describe a life-altering mystical experience and the great joy that he had experienced in “finding God.” He said that he knew he was going to meet us here because he had dreamt that something significant was going to happen to him today. When I began to share with Oleg and Sergey the Teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, Oleg told me that these principles were what he had been searching for. As the discussion continued, I introduced the concept of progressive revelation. He affirmed that he believed already in the unity of the world's religions. Oleg had seen Ann earlier at the bus stop and some force had attracted him to her. He waved to Ann but she didn't respond. Ann told me later that she had seen Oleg, but she had been advised not to make easy contact with Soviet citizens. During the more open period of *Perestroika*, to improve their life-and-economic situation, many Soviets were seeking to leave Mother Russia for other countries in Europe or North America.

Oleg felt comfortable enough to share with me some personal details about his life in America. He had been married to a Soviet woman in the US, but his marriage had ended in

divorce. He said that his wife wanted to pursue an independent lifestyle—I am not sure what he meant by this, and I did not inquire further—and this desire on her part was not acceptable to him. He had a young daughter there, and it was clear to me that Oleg was suffering from this separation; he missed his child very much. He was, he said, very concerned about his child's spiritual and moral development. He confided that his daughter never answered the letters that he sent, and he suspected his ex-wife withheld the correspondence. He asked me if I would send his daughter a teddy bear that would serve meanwhile as a substitute for the Russian black bear that he promised to send her. I assured him that I would do so. I carried out Oleg's wish once I returned home.

Well unbeknownst to Oleg, I also had had a premonitory dream about meeting him. In retrospect, the meeting with Oleg in Kiev was foreordained it seems; both of us had dreams about meeting one another. Before leaving Gatineau, I dreamt about a stout-looking man who said to me: "I believe in the Teachings; why do I have to believe in Bahá'u'lláh?" Now Oleg is rather slim, but we know that in dreams reality sometimes presents itself in reversed manner. In this case, the portly man in my dream was slim in reality. I invited Oleg and Sergey, who did not speak much English, to the upcoming Fireside at the Pavlovs; they said that they would attend. Later that night as we walked through the streets of Kiev, Oleg admitted that he was the man I had seen in my dream. He said yes that he did accept the Bahá'í Teachings, but he did not see why he had to accept Bahá'u'lláh. He said that he still had some investigating to do. I encouraged him to investigate further until he was completely satisfied, and yet, despite his confessions of finding inner peace and the joy of God, I still sensed in Oleg a state of spiritual struggle and perturbation, a state that is for some seekers part of the natural process in the search for truth. (The follow-up to Oleg's spiritual journey can be found at the 12 August entry).

### **Leo Tries to Boost Katya's Sagging Spirits**

That evening Ira and I, Leo and Katiya, Ira's mom, went for a walk down to the Dnieper River. I was the only one who wanted to go for a swim. The water was quite chilly, even during the month of August, but once you got in and swam around, it was quite invigorating. We were joined later by Ann's hostess, Elena, and a friend of hers, Ina, a teacher of young children. Ina had been deserted that very day by her alcoholic husband. (We were told during our visit that the rate of desertion and divorce is very high in the Soviet Union). Ann joined us later. I was glad to see Ann again. She is always a joy to be with and we shared many hearty laughs and a few tears during our travels. Leo spent a good part of the evening on a bench with Katya listening to her recount the trials of her life which were real enough. Leo proved himself to be a very patient listener. Katya had had cancer which seemed to be in remission. Her husband had walked out on her some years ago. She became, consequently, the main caretaker and economic support for the rest of the family. Katya earned her living as a seamstress during the day and worked in the evenings at a second job to make ends meet. In her charge were Grandma Posevkina, Ira and her sister, Albina, who was expecting a baby, and Katya's son-in-law Arturo. Katya was able to manage the household with about \$1,200 dollars annually, an amount that seems pitifully low by North American standards, but which is quite lucrative compared to the poverty of many Soviet households. Leo tried to boost Katya's spirits by being a compassionate listener and by gently

encouraging her with any thoughtful spiritual counsel that came to mind during their conversation. He had hoped that what he had to offer her would at least be a momentary source of encouragement, but when someone is submerged in what seems like a sea of troubles, even heartfelt encouragement sometimes offers little consolation.

After the swim, the walk and the talk, Leo headed home with Katya while Ann, the others and I climbed the hill to the great arc overlooking the Dnieper that symbolizes the friendship between the Soviet and Ukrainian peoples. Ann and I leaned on the stone retaining wall that runs like a vein along the crest of the hill, rested, talked and admired the view of the summer scene of the illuminated city below. It was here, under the arc, they told us that the Daystar Tour had performed a proclamation concert some weeks before. In that very spot, Ann and I told a small group of Ukrainian youth about the Faith and gave them pamphlets. Then we headed home.

### **Visiting Kiev and the Fireside at the Pavlovs: 12 August, 1990**

In the morning we visited Kiev, while we did a bit of sightseeing and bought a few goods in the local department store that we intended to offer as presents. The goods reminded me of the items that were stocked in stores during the 1950's in Toronto when I was growing up, particularly the style of clothing. The next evening we had our first consolidation Fireside at Marina and Victor Pavlovs. Much to our great delight, Elena whom we had met on the train on the way down to Kiev, appeared in the doorway halfway through the evening. Oleg also came with his brother Sergey, as did Ann and her hostess, the other Elena and Elena's friend, Ina. A Bahá'í named Micha acted as a translator and did a very admirable job. A somewhat retiring professional artist, Giorgi, also attended. The Fireside did not unfold as smoothly as I would have liked. The three of us took turns in speaking, a strategy that did not serve us well, because each speaker had to be translated. We took questions about politics as best as we could during the discussion. Leo wanted to discuss the principle of consultation as well as the ideology of atheism which he felt still had a strong hold over the Soviet people.

During our post-fireside talk, Oleg told me that he felt that Soviets and Ukrainians became Bahá'ís too quickly, a point of view that fit with his feeling that he needed to do more study of the Faith before he accepted it. When I left Kiev, I felt that if Oleg continued to frequent the Pavlov's Firesides, and with their help to investigate the truth, that he would eventually overcome the obstacles that stood in his path because he was an alert man, possessing both spiritual and intellectual capacity. After I returned home, Oleg and I continued to correspond for some months, but the correspondence eventually petered out. In the meantime, I have not been able to discover the outcome of Oleg's spiritual journey.

### **Grandma Posevkina Becomes a Bahá'í**

Much to our great joy, during our home-stay at the Andreyevas in Kiev, Grandma, Darya Alexandrovna Posevkina, declared her faith. Leo and I had given her some literature to read. Thank heaven Leo possessed a good command of Russian. He spent several sessions with Grandma in a *tête-à-tête* explaining the Teachings to her. Grandma was a survivor. She had survived the horrible ordeal of World War Two in Russia and she was living through widowhood, although well surrounded and supported by her family when we met her. Despite

the challenges of her past and present life, Grandma retained a joyful and enthusiastic outlook. Her buoyant sense of humor was subtle, but ever-ready to break through the present moment to put a smile on the faces of her friends and family. Her delight at meeting *Amerikantski* strangers from the West, a rare phenomenon in Kiev, was clearly manifest. Our visit injected a note of hope into the monotonous routine of her life in Kiev. Each time I left the apartment, Grandma would give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. I felt very close to her, although each of our conversations had to take place with the aid of translation. In Grandma's home, the slogan on our Bahá'í button was fully realized: we were one family. Grandma declared her faith to Leo in the morning. It was with that familiar refrain we heard more than once during our visit. She had always believed in these Teachings, but she didn't know that such a religion existed in the world. Grandma accompanied us to the fireside the following evening at Eugene and Irene Ivchenkos and told us later how much she loved it. Her enthusiasm for her newfound faith was such that she told Leo she was going to move out of the family apartment and set up a place just to receive Bahá'ís from the West! Grandma Posevkina really had the spirit. (I was not able to discover later if Grandma eventually carried out her intention).

### **Evaluating our Fireside Technique**

During the same momentous morning when Grandma declared her faith, Leo and I did an evaluation of the Fireside that took place at Marina's and Victor's the previous evening. Then Ann and Leo went off after breakfast to a local park to consult and do their own evaluation. We felt that we had performed somewhat shakily at the Pavlovs. Basically, we wanted to improve the flow of our Fireside technique, and by planning more carefully, to make a more effective presentation at the next one. After these consultations, the three of us visited downtown Kiev to see the sights and buy a few souvenirs. Ann ended up by having her portrait done in chalk pastels in an underground passageway. Unlike Moscow there is no subway/underground in Kiev. Her portrait took about 45 minutes.

### **Comic Relief: Jack does Laundry with the Andreyeva Family**

This day produced the most comical incident for me during our entire two-week travel-teaching trip. Goodwill, enjoyment and friendship characterized the entire visit of the Quddus Team to the Andreyeva family apartment, but the day-trip to the laundromat produced some genuine laughter. Most Ukrainians and Soviets wash their clothes daily and hang them up overnight to dry. Once in a while, they go to a laundromat to wash the heavier or larger items—sheets, towels, table cloths, etc. Because we were on the move, Ann, Leo and I really did not have the opportunity to wash our clothes. I told Ira that I wanted to wash all my clothes at once at a commercial laundromat. Ira responded that laundromats existed in the Soviet Union, but they were few and far between; one has to make an appointment to use them. The family found it quite amusing that I wanted to wash my clothes at the laundromat, but Ira went ahead and made an appointment at a local facility. (I in turn found *it* amusing, that you had to make a reservation to use a laundromat. As it turned out, the place was almost empty). Despite being slightly amused at my proposal, the family decided to join me. Mother Katya, her two daughters, Ira and pregnant Albina and I all piled into a taxi, loaded down with our suitcases and bags full of dirty laundry and headed for downtown Kiev. Despite my attempt to explain that Canadians were a

separate nation from the United States, they sometimes referred to me in the third person as the *Amerikantski*.

### **The Laundromat: A Moment Back in Time**

The taxi pulled up before the grey, bleak-looking, low brick building. We all piled out with our laundry. The equipment inside was of heavy duty, Soviet manufacture that looked as if it had been in operation since 1945, the end of the Second World War. The bulky machines had external gauges to regulate the water temperature and to allow for drainage. When you wanted to empty the dirty water after the rinse cycle, you pulled a lever at the side of the washing machine and the water ran down into a stone trough, where it was carried away into the sewer system. I set the temperature gauge to lukewarm because I wanted to wash the colors and whites together; I didn't want to spend any longer in the laundromat than was necessary. After the wash and rinse cycles were done, you transferred your wet laundry into a shopping cart and wheeled the cart over to the truly redoubtable spinning machine. Once your clothes were loaded inside and the door closed, the spinning machine spun into action. The spinner was a type of high performance machine that I had never seen in Canada. It was so efficient that when the spin cycle was finished, the clothes were only slightly damp. The laundromat did have a drier, but it appeared to be out-of-order.

The Andreyevas explained to me that I could proceed right to the pressing stage; there was no need to dry the clothes first. To dry and press your damp laundry in one operation, you carted your laundry either to the hot roller press, which was about 5 feet/152 cm. wide for the larger items, or to two swiveling, ironing boards for such things as shirts and trousers. The boards were extra-large and they rotated from front to back. You placed your clothes on the board as straight as you could, because when you pressed the red button, the boards and the iron went into sudden operation. The hot steam iron came down on them with force, sandwiching the clothes in-between the ironing boards, and pressing them dry under intense heat. Too bad for you if you didn't get your trousers straight enough, because no matter how you arranged them, they were guaranteed in short order to come out with beautifully pressed creases. I had never seen my trousers looking so flat and neatly pressed! The whole efficient operation reminded me of the old Warner Brothers' "Looney Tunes" television cartoons from the 1950's and 1960's when Daffy Duck got run over by a steam roller and squashed into a layer that made him as flat as a pancake.

### **The Dance of the Sheets and Towels**

One person alone could not handle the large sheets to make them ready for the pressing phase, so Albina and I helped one another to accomplish the task. We both grabbed the end of the sheet and in sync we pulled it a few times in a quick motion to smooth out the creases as much as we could. This rhythmic pulling and stretching movement of the arms and hands somehow reminded me of the motion of a strange minuet. Although we were only preparing sheets for ironing, a mundane enough task, it struck me, there in the damp surroundings of a laundromat, that we were both taking on graceful and aristocratic airs, as if we were dancing. I spontaneously did a quick imitation of a dance gesture. Albina got the point immediately, and we both burst out laughing. (The comic relief required no translation). Katya and Albina said later

that they felt that it was in the laundromat that we all worked together as “one family.” So for them, our unity was created by carrying out a common household task. To describe the situation, it seemed appropriate to change a line from the poem by William Cowper: God works in a humorous way, His wonders to perform. (“God works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform”).

### **Visit to Giorgi S. Levov’s Art Studio**

We received an invitation from Giorgi, whom we had met at the Fireside at the Pavlovs, to visit his art studio the next day. Giorgi Levov, whose last name was coincidentally the same as the city we were to visit next, seemed to be rather quiet, but he was a living example of the saying “still waters run deep.” As mentioned, other than exchanging polite greetings, he said almost nothing at the Fireside. But although he lived alone as a solitary artist to accomplish his work, Giorgi was no anti-social person. He felt comfortable enough to invite us to his home and to extend his warm hospitality. The quality of Giorgi’s art work would rank him as being on par with the best professional artists in Canada. He had been commissioned to paint murals on some public buildings in the Ukraine. The public contracts that Giorgi secured usually consisted of utilitarian art that glorified the events of the Russian Revolution or the cause of the industrious proletariat. However, for comparison’s sake, the human figures featured in his personal art are somewhat reminiscent of those painted by William Blake to illustrate the great English poet’s and artist’s verse. Giorgi’s art depicts an innocent, etherealized vision of men, women and children, except that his figures do not have as much of the airy, ghostly quality of some of the mythological creatures who inhabit Blake’s world. Like Blake’s, Giorgi’s subjects have an innocent or angelic quality, but being more impressionistic, they are not rendered as the bright, clear figures we find in Blake. Giorgi makes symbolic use of his human figures, he told me, to convey a message, but he seemed reluctant to tell me more, intending perhaps to let his art speak for itself. Giorgi also paints nature as a healing, wholesome force.

### **Humor at Meal Time and Replenishing the Soviet Diet**

Meal time was always a pleasure since we had a chance to chat and to share some lighter moments. Both Ann and Leo have a keen sense of humor. Ann is always ready to laugh. Her sense of humor is direct and open, while Leo’s is more subtle and understated. During our mealtime conversations, Leo did an excellent job of translating our jokes and stories with his usual patience. We laughed a lot during our trip; in fact it was suggested to us in Kiev that we should tone down our laughter because Soviets and Ukrainians were not used to so much humor and our excessive laughter risked making them feel uncomfortable. (We appreciated the observation and acted accordingly when interacting in public). One morning Ira and I went downtown to the market to buy some provisions for lunch. Because the Soviet diet tends to be heavy in salt and fat, by this time I had begun to crave some fresh fruits and vegetables. We bought carrots, parsley, grapes, apricots, honey, tomatoes, and cabbage. Some of these foods, especially grapes, apricots and honey are not part of the regular Soviet diet. Although I felt somewhat conspicuous grocery shopping with Ira, much like a city dweller, who on a rare visit stocks the larder of his poorer country cousins, my appetite and nutritional needs drove me to it. I also wanted the Andreyeva family to enjoy a bit of variety in their diet. What I did enjoy in

the Soviet diet was the dark, fermented grain beverage called “Kwass” and also “compote”, which for the French means any finely mashed fruit, but which in the Soviet Union means any boiled fruit that has been allowed to cool. I especially liked compote that had been boiled with plums. I also liked “Kafir”, a drink that tastes like a mixture of yogurt and buttermilk, which aids digestion because of its bacterial qualities. Soviets rarely drink milk from the bottle; they usually boil it in cereal.

### **Fireside at the Ivchenkos: A New Believer Consults the Group About Difficult Family Relations**

One evening we held a Fireside at Eugene and Irene Ivchenko, a young married couple who lived in a comfortable apartment on the ground floor. Irene looks to be about 21 years of age and Eugene appears to be a few years older. When we entered the spacious living room, we saw that the Ivchenkos had posted the principles of the Faith conspicuously in a beautiful, stylized Cyrillic script. This Fireside had been better organized than the one we had held at the Pavlovs because we had planned it advance, with each of us choosing a suitable topic. Ann was to speak on the 1986 Peace Statement; Leo on consultation; myself on the station of Bahá’u’lláh. Leo and Ann spoke during the first half of the Fireside, but they had to leave during refreshments because another Fireside had been planned at the home of Ann’s hostess, Irene, where they were scheduled to speak.

During the break, tea was served. Leo asked me if I would be willing to forego my presentation because an “emergency” had come up. One of the new Bahá’ís, a young man in his late teens, felt both confident and upset enough to consult the group, which included a few non-Bahá’ís, on the problems he was having at home since he had declared his faith. His parents were active and dedicated members of the Communist party. They had forbidden him both to speak about his newly discovered faith and to attend Bahá’í meetings. This *diktat* had created a very tense situation at home with frequent arguments occurring. He was naturally very frustrated and looked visibly upset. After hearing him out, and offering its sympathies, the group advised him to refrain from discussing the Faith with his parents. We concurred with him that being unable to share the Faith with those whom you love because they have rejected it is one of life’s most difficult tests.

The new believer’s consultation had not taken more than 30 minutes. It turned out that we still had enough time that the friends were willing to listen to my presentation on the station of Bahá’u’lláh. During my presentation, I stuck to short declaratory sentences so the translation could be processed simply and quickly without fatiguing Micha the translator. Micha, who was an excellent translator, is going to study computer science in the Seattle, Washington. This manner of presentation allowed me to make a number of important points in succession, rather than constructing a convoluted argument that might be more difficult to translate and to follow. To lighten the presentation, I made a few humorous remarks in passing, which the Soviet friends seemed to enjoy. I had been mindful of the advice we had been given in Kiev that Soviets found that North Americans laughed too much and too loud, but I did not want to completely avoid any note of humor during my talk. Someone commented after the presentation that *Amerikantsi* had a well-developed sense of humor; a remark, I suppose, that was meant to be a compliment,

although the observation left me feeling ambivalent about the intent of his remark. It is true, of course, that North Americans do laugh more often than Soviets, but then they have had very little to laugh about in their recent history, despite the “glorious” revolution that they continue to celebrate.

### **Grandma Posevkina Dashes Ahead in the Streets of Kiev**

Before we left the Ivchenkos, Eugene and Irene presented me with a finely hand-crafted leather pouch for glasses. We exchanged addresses and I promised to send them photos of our visit. Grandma Darya Aleksandrovina Posevkina, who had accompanied us to the Fireside as a newly declared Bahá'í, was anxious to get me home on time. I had reserved a telephone line to call Canada at 11 p.m. the same evening. When we emerged from the apartment building, Grandma took off through the dark streets of Kiev at a surprisingly fast pace for a woman of her age. I called out to her in an attempt to get her to slow down, telling her that we had lots of time, but she would not hear of it and did not slow her step. I could scarcely keep up with her myself, and I was also worried about her crossing the dimly lit streets at that time of night.

During the bus-ride home, I was approached by a smiling woman who appeared to be in her mid-thirties, who said she was an actress and a singer who was trying to get to America. She began to recount her troubles in Russian and broken English. After listening to her tale of woe, I did finally give her my address, although the two young men who had accompanied Grandma and me from the Fireside tried to dissuade me from doing so. I knew that there would be no harm in giving her my address. Once we arrived back at the Adreyevas, I discovered that I had missed the appointment because the operator had phoned one hour earlier at 10:00 p.m. Kiev time. I had forgotten that the telephone service runs on Moscow time. I discovered later when I returned home that my wife, Brigitte, had not yet returned from her family visit to Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula. I would have been unable to reach her in any case.

### **Tosha the Singing Dog: 13 August 1990**

On the morning of our departure, Leo and I packed up while Ira ordered a taxi well in advance so that we could reach the train station without rushing. In the bedroom that Leo and I had shared, we were treated to one of the most amusing scenes I had seen in a while: Tosha the singing dog. Tosha, the family pet, was a small, white, flop-eared dog who looked, at a guess, like a cross between a Pekinese and a Poodle. Katya, Ira's mother, brought a piano stool into the bedroom and set it on the floor in front of the bed. Then she fetched a small accordion “squeeze-box” and stood in front of the stool. As if on cue, Tosha jumped up on the stool and sat alert in position ready to perform. Katya began to play the accordion. I write “play,” but it was not the melodious playing one would normally expect, but rather the scratching out of some discordant sounds to prompt the dog to sing. As soon as Katya began to squeeze the accordion, little Tosha raised his head and began to howl. It was a strange howl, more painful than the baying of a dog at the moon. Since I had my micro-cassette recorder handy, I was able to capture a few moments of the unusual scene. When Tosha had finished singing, Albina spontaneously recorded an appreciation in Russian of our visit, saying that we had all become one family in the short time

that we had been in Kiev. Ira gave a simple summary in English of Abina's appreciation on the spot, but I shall have someone fully translate her kind farewell later.

### **Departure for Levov on the Night Train**

As we sped away in the taxi, Albina blew the Quddus Team a kiss. As I watched her recede into the background, I wondered what kind of life the young mother-to-be would face during *Perestroika* and the years of economic uncertainty that lay ahead. We boarded the night train at the Kiev station, heading south-east to the formerly ethnic Polish city of Levov, the largest city in western Ukraine. Because it had not been possible for the ticket agent to book the three of us in the same compartment, we hoped to make some further arrangement once we got on the train, not knowing if it would be possible for us to share the same compartment. We were pleased when the female-attendant proved to be very cooperative in arranging for us to be together. The attendant gave us our bedding and a light linen towel at the same time as she took our tickets. To stretch my legs and to take a look at a Soviet train, I walked through several cars. Train travel provided a fruitful opportunity for teaching the Faith. During our waking hours, we were able to teach the Faith virtually non-stop, as curious train-travelers inquired about the purpose of our visit. That night was the first time I slept in a berth. Contrary to expectation, I found the firm bed to be very comfortable. The rocking, swaying, back-and-forth motion of the train, along with the clickety-clack of the wheels, produced a pleasant, hypnotic effect that helped to lull me to sleep.

# LEVOV

## **Our Excited Young Hostesses Meet Us: 14-16 August, 1990**

Levov for me was the highlight of our Russian and Ukrainian tour. Before we arrived in the Ukrainian city, the Day Star Tour from Haifa had passed through Levov a few weeks before and held a proclamation there. Between the efforts of the Day Star Proclamation Tour and our consolidation team, after just two days of intensive teaching, we left behind a fledgling community of 6 believers. As the train glided slowly into the central station and made its stop, I was the first one of our team to alight from car number 38, bag-in-hand and barely awake. Before I even had time to react, my bag was suddenly snatched from my hand. I looked around and saw a young woman standing before me, virtually bouncing up and down with excitement, who said to me in English: “Are you from America?” I looked again and saw three young women standing before us on the platform, two of them almost frantic with excitement. It was almost as if we had just landed from another planet, but I imagine that during their lifetime, and thanks to *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, we were probably the first visitors they had seen in person from the mythical continent of *Amerika*. Our enchanted eyes beheld two of our hostesses holding up two lovely bouquets of red roses wrapped in cellophane. There stood two of Ann’s hostesses, yet another Irena and her twin sister and Gallina, a slightly older young woman, who was to act as hostess for Leo and myself at her parents’ flat. Greeting and introducing one to the another, our hostesses and the Quddus Team all swept along the platform together, while we did our best to look refreshed and awake after the night journey, and to accept the welcoming bouquets of flowers gracefully and to handle our baggage—all at the same time.

### **Ann’s Host Family: The Twins, Their Mother Nellie and Grandma Maria**

We took a taxi to the home of Ann’s hostesses, the irrepressible Irene and her twin sister, their mother Nellie and Grandma Maria. The usual copious Ukrainian/Russian breakfast was already laid out on the table before us. The apartment was spacious and luxurious and contained several items from America that had been provided by Nellie’s sister in the USA: telephones, two VCR’s (video cassette recorders), stereo sets, items that were a fairly rare commodity in the Soviet Union. Unlike the households of Ina and Katya, whom we met earlier, a husband and father was indeed living with this family, a building contractor who was away on business. (We met him only once during our stay when he drove us to the train station for our departure). We talked as we ate, using mainly question and answer during the conversation to discover the basic facts about one another’s lives.

Now that I had a chance to look at them more closely, the twins appeared to be in their late teenage years. Irene and her twin sister revived my belief in the innocence of youth. They were unusually sweet girls, a type of thoroughly fresh young woman that you would rarely meet in the more worldly atmosphere of North America these days, a continent that has long since lost its innocence. The twins who were both studying at the Faculty of Medicine were sincere, solicitous and charming. Their mother Nellie, a slightly dramatic woman who was friendly and

hospitable, I estimated to be in her early forties. Nellie taught music theory at a music institute in Levov. Grandma Maria was mild-mannered and pleasant, and by contrast, much quieter than her daughter. She told us that she had already been to the United States because Nellie's sister was living and working in the USA. The family was very desirous of emigrating to the US, the main driving factor in their being so anxious to perfect their English and why they were super keen to meet anyone from America. The rules of English grammar with examples were posted in all the rooms throughout the apartment, even the bathroom. One of the posters I recall detailed the rules for forming the collective noun.

During the conversation, we discovered that the family was Jewish. Leo asked Grandma Maria in Russian why she had a Christian name. Grandma responded that Levov had been rife with a virulent, anti-Semitism; for their own survival, the family had to conceal their Jewish identity by adopting Christian names. When I found out that the family was Jewish, I spoke some words in German to Grandma, hoping that she would understand me because most European Jews of Grandma's generation spoke Yiddish, a low German dialect. Her face lit up when I told her that my family and I were planning a pilgrimage to *das heilige Land* (The Holy Land) in 1992, a phrase that she recognized immediately.

### **Leo and I take the Bus to Gallina's Parents' Apartment**

After breakfast, Leo, Gallina and I took the bus to the apartment of Gallina's parents, who lived in the suburbs of Levov. Leo and I presented Maria and Vassily with some small gifts which included beauty soap and an umbrella. We had not been there long when Vassily, who is close to retiring from his job as a driver of heavy transport trucks, told us his frustrating story of working under the "Soviet system," a phrase I had heard before. He told us that the firm that employed him owned a fleet of some 500 trucks, but these 500 trucks had something like 370 managers. He was doubly frustrated because he had learned that truck drivers in Belgium earned in one month what he made in an entire year.

### **Gallina Distributes Bahá'í Pamphlets on the Bus**

Gallina is in her early twenties and employed by the Red Army in the war museum in Levov. She is married to a captain in the Red Army who is stationed in the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Russian Far East. They have a very cute little son named Maxim who is two-and-a-half years old. Gallina proved herself to be a remarkable and cheerful hostess. In the morning she would wake up singing and go about her daily tasks with vigor. She has undergone physical training in the Red Army and has become quite fit. Her fitness combined with a slim figure enable her to move through the streets and climb subway stairs quickly. Her energy, open and frank manner lead Gallina to tackle any challenge head-on with confidence. She loves music and is able to sing the words to a few pop songs of the Beatles, the British rock band, but she has not been able to master all the English lyrics. I was happy to help her out. At the bus stop or even in the elevator—her parents' apartment was on the 28<sup>th</sup> floor—we would break out spontaneously into Beatle songs. She quite enjoyed my singing "Michelle" and "Yesterday" for her.

One morning as we travelled to town on the bus, I handed to the passenger beside me one of the many pamphlets we brought with us. It was again our ever faithful, much used "One

Family.” The pamphlet had been designed in Chelsea, West Quebec, by the very resourceful Laurie Zrudlo, who had copied and pasted excerpts from the Russian edition of *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, along with a few photos and had it printed as a pamphlet. We gave away generous amounts of One Family during our tour. When Gallina saw me give the pamphlet to my fellow passenger, she asked me for more. I passed her a handful of One Family pamphlets, when much to our pleasant surprise, Gallina stood up and went down the aisle of the bus with her characteristic confidence and determination, called everyone to attention and told them about the purpose of the Quddus Team’s visit. She then proceeded to give everyone on the bus a pamphlet which they readily accepted. What a courageous spirit Gallina showed that day!

Her spontaneous gesture in support of our efforts indicates another noteworthy feature of the spread of the Bahá’í Faith in the Soviet Union—and this is true of pioneering generally. The distinction between who is and who is not a Bahá’í becomes much less significant when teaching the Faith. Friends and seekers often assist Bahá’ís in their efforts to promote the Faith in foreign lands. This has been my experience in more than one county and many other pioneers and travel-teachers have also experienced this same phenomenon of assistance from those who have not officially joined the Faith.

### **Visit to the Soviet War Museum and the Tour by two old Veterans**

This morning Gallina took Leo and me to meet her army bosses at the Red Army museum in Levov. While we were there, she arranged a tour by two old veterans of World War II. They led us, the only two tourists in the entire museum, through the exhibits of the war, which included a pictorial history that highlighted “the brave acts of the Soviet patriot army” and its victories over the Nazi armies of Hitler. While these veterans were undoubtedly proud of the sacrifices made by Soviet citizens and soldiers in combatting Nazism, for me the tour in the war museum was depressing, especially because we were there to teach the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh with its superlative message of harmony, peace and unity. I had up to that moment been feeling exhilarated and uplifted because of the many opportunities we had found to teach the Bahá’í Faith with its healing message. But nevertheless the tour of the war museum ended on an uplifting note of optimism. When the tour was complete, one of the veterans said: “Now it is up to you to keep the peace for us. Please come back to the Soviet Union. We need such gestures of friendship here.” As we thanked these two kind gentlemen, I said: “Let us hope that mankind will never again have to suffer the terrible ordeal of another world war with the bloody sacrifice of so many innocent lives.” As we left the premises, Leo shared the observation that Soviets are not at all interested in the war museum these days; it is practically deserted.

### **Olga Kovatch, A Spiritual Daughter is Found: The Principle of Sacrifice**

I mentioned above that Levov was the highlight of our travel-teaching project. Our teaching efforts flowed smoothly and without incident in Levov. The doors of celestial confirmation, as emphatically promised by the Center of the Covenant, were wide open. We handed out Bahá’í literature in the café on Armenian Street, and in the park beside the former Dominican cathedral, an imposing, solid structure that was later reconsecrated from the Latin rite to a church of the Greek Catholic rite. The church had been converted in the 1970’s to a museum

of atheism, but the adjoining monastery still serves as a museum of the History of Religion. We could read the inscription *Solo Dei* (For God alone) on the dome. We distributed pamphlets on buses, trolley cars and in the street. The Bahá'í youth group from Haifa, the Day Star Tour, had done a musical proclamation in the little square in the front of the church doors, very near to the little park where we continued to teach and proclaim the Faith. Thus it was that our little consolidation group followed in the footsteps of the those who preceded us, even as Ann and I had distributed some Bahá'í literature to a group of Ukrainian youth in Kiev, just below the huge arch overlooking the Dnieper River where Day Star had also held a proclamation. (Actually, the Quddus Team was also doing proclamation as well as consolidation).

One of the great joys of the Soviet trip was that we found in Levov a spiritual daughter, Olga Kovatch. Olga is a native of Levov, but during the year she studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Leningrad where she is in third year. We met Olga on a bus going into town. Leo and I were standing up, chatting. Olga was standing right beside us. When she overheard me talking to Leo, she spoke to me in English in an open and friendly fashion. Olga asked the usual question of what brought us to the Soviet Union. When we told her, spontaneously we asked Olga if she had time to join us to meet the Bahá'ís we were scheduled to contact and to visit our host families. She said yes. Remarkably, within 24 hours, after a teaching moment sitting with Leo on a park bench, about 3:00 p.m. on the following day, in the little park beside the cathedral, Olga had declared her faith. As we walked through the streets of Levov, later that day, Olga took me by the arm and in a touching moment that I did not expect said: "Jack, you are my spiritual father." It astonished me that a brand new Bahá'í would already have the concept of a spiritual parent, but I had no doubt that Leo was just as much Olga's spiritual father as I was. Her words produced in me an indescribable joy. We had known one another for only 24 hours and yet we had established one of the most loving connections two believers can share. Later when we were sitting in the same park, on the same bench, Olga looked at me and said: "I would like to know. Did I find you or did you find me?" Again, this remark was another indication of the spiritual depth and maturity that exists in the Soviet and Ukrainian peoples. I ventured that I thought we found one another because while she was looking for us, we were looking for her, and that in making this spiritual connection among us, we were all of us seeking Bahá'u'lláh. Leo wisely said that our experiences in the Soviet Union proved what is sometimes said among the friends that Bahá'ís are not made but found.

One morning we visited an exhibition of fiber art and hand-sewn Ukrainian folk dress where Olga's mother had one of her dresses on display. Ann, who is herself a fiber artist, tried on a dress which I thought suited her well, but she did not buy it. Later Olga gave me a hand-painted Easter egg made in the Carpathian mountains which bore the inscription "Christ has risen." Soviets and Ukrainians understand very well the principle of sacrifice. Not only do they understand it, but they demonstrate it. Olga told me that the only reason she was giving me her gift was that she was very attached to it—a conscious decision on her part. She added that she did not like to give anything away unless she was attached to it, because parting with it imbued the offering with real value; otherwise, it did not. (Olga's hand-painted egg now sits in my study in a cotton wool nest in a small glass bowl).

## **The Youth in the Coffee House on Armenian Street**

We called it Armenian Street, a translation from the Russian. The street is a narrow one, not far from the cathedral. Here in Armenian Street, some of the more progressive youth in Kiev gathered. Within this gathering of questioning and searching youth, there were those whose search also included experimentation with drugs, but it seemed to me that they were in the minority. Most of the youth who frequented the coffee house on the corner were engaged in meaningful discussions, asking questions, looking to invest their lives with meaning, and seeking new solutions to old problems. (As the world turns, so it has ever been with questioning youth). At one point, I crossed the street to give a drink to a young woman who was under the effect of a narcotic drug. Her male friend was attempting to waken her, and I knew his real fear was that she might not wake again if she went to sleep. She took a few sips from the glass of sweet water I offered her, but refused the rest. I spoke to her, hoping to catch her attention and to keep her awake, but she nodded off again. After this brief intervention, I left her there in the care of her friend. We came to the coffee house on Armenian Street at least twice. We gave out pamphlets in the café, as we did on the street outside. We held firesides both in the coffee house and on the street.

In the same park, I gave the ubiquitous “One Family” pamphlet to a young couple sitting on the bench beside me. They read it quickly and said they were students at the Polytechnic Institute. They offered to organize a lecture for us at the Institute if we were still in Levov when school reopened. Their offer was just another example of how non-Bahá’ís assist the friends in promoting the Faith, just as Gallina had distributed Bahá’í pamphlets on the bus and announced to all the passengers the purpose of our visit. Unfortunately, because of timing, we could not take advantage of their generous offer.

## **Sergey Chervetsov: The Moth Circles Around the Flame**

On Armenian Street we met Sergey, an engaging, sociable man with dark black hair who smoked heavily. Sergey was a little “rough around the edges”; he resisted the Teachings more than the others we met in the Ukraine. He was an expert conversationalist even though English was not his mother tongue. Like many Soviets and Ukrainians, he was not averse to a good theological discussion. Somehow Sergey and Leo got into a discussion in Russian about the fine points of one of the fundamental Christian dogmas, the trinity. When Leo and Sergey reached a pause in the discussion, the conversation continued with me through Leo’s translation, a feasible but less than ideal arrangement for understanding such an abstract and abstruse theological question. As Sergey learned more about the Bahá’í Faith, his main objection, which he kept repeating, was that there was nothing new in our Teachings. He could find these Teachings in other religions, he insisted. He said this as he perused *The Hidden Words*. We could readily understand how Sergey came to this conclusion, based on a cursory reading of Bahá’u’lláh’s preeminent ethical work, since that book encapsulates the perennial essence of the ethical teachings of the world’s great religions. We did our best to enlighten him by referring to some other social and spiritual teachings that have been developed in an entirely new form in the Faith, such as the cornerstone teaching of the organic unity of humanity and the abolition of all forms

of prejudice—and others—although we readily agreed that the seed concepts of these teachings may have existed in other scriptures or in enlightened and perceptive minds in other religions.

I had the feeling that meeting the Quddus Team had become a potential turning-point in Sergey's life. My intuitive impression was that in his heart Sergey wanted to become a Bahá'í, but something was preventing him. I felt that he had been hurt or disappointed by an incident(s) earlier in his life and that he remained disturbed by it. Because our departure was imminent, there in the same park, I took a more frank approach and shared with him, as tactfully as I could, my intuitive impression about the struggle I perceived that was taking place inside him. I joked with him that he was like a moth circling around the light, a moth that was afraid to get too close because it might singe its wings. Sergey was not offended by my frankness. My observation led us further into a little poetical conversation about the metaphor of the moth being entranced by the flame, finding the truth and being willing to be consumed by its flame. We both enjoyed the exchange.

In spite of his resistance to the Teachings, Sergey wanted to join us wherever we went. On the afternoon that we left Levov, our friends accompanied us to the train station. I was disappointed that Sergey was not in the group when we arrived at the station, but he joined us later on the platform, running himself out of breath to find us. I asked him if he had been afraid of missing his train. "No," he replied. "I was afraid of missing you." Like the moth entranced by the light, Sergey remained drawn to us for the brief time that we knew him. Despite theological differences, in a short lapse of time, we established close bonds of friendship with Sergey. Hopefully, the seed that we planted in his heart will be tended by other gardeners who will help nurture that seed into a beautiful flower.

### **Bogdana "Donna" Zlenko: Leo Confirms Donna in the Faith**

One of the "spark plugs" of the Bahá'í community in Levov is Donna Zlenko and her friend Igor. Donna speaks English well; she is a solid, able teacher of the Faith. She loves discussing the principles and engaging others in exploring the Teachings. Donna said she had always believed in the Teachings, but she didn't know that such a religion existed. Like an echo, it was the same remark we had from Grandma Posevkina in Kiev. One afternoon we were sitting on that same park bench when Leo spontaneously offered Donna his English prayer book. His kind gesture, offered sincerely from the heart, produced a confirmation in Donna's faith. Unbeknownst to us, until that moment, she had not been sure if becoming a Bahá'í was the right decision. Leo's heartfelt generosity helped to confirm Donna in her faith because she knew how precious Leo's prayer book was to him. Donna's Bahá'í friend Igor, also a new believer, was less vocal than she was in explaining the Teachings, but Igor accompanied and assisted us during the time we were in Levov. We also met Donna's mother, Olga Sidorenko, who is sympathetic to the Teachings. Olga is a psychologist who works as a therapist for alcoholics. Therapy programs for alcoholics are relatively new in the Soviet Union. Olga requested any Bahá'í literature that deals with the treatment of substance abuse, as well as any information on Alcoholics Anonymous.

## Visit with Eugene and Olga Yarosh

We met Eugene and his wife, another Olga, because they had been contacted previously by Bahá'ís; they were on our list of contacts when we got into Levov. Eugene had been Irena's (Ann's hostess) teacher in the past. Eugene taught German and other subjects in the humanities. Now that he was retired, Eugene and his wife were enthusiastically looking for ways to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Eugene met us at the tram stop and greeted us warmly. He was wearing a light, powder-blue, tropical Mexican shirt that had two large pockets down low on the front of the vest. (His shirt was identical to one my parents had bought for me during their vacation to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico). Eugene was originally from Argentina's large cosmopolitan capital, Buenos Aires. His Spanish was consequently fluent. His father was Ukrainian and he and Olga, who were the parents of grown children, had lived in the Ukraine for many years. Like many others whom we met, Eugene and his wife were discouraged with life under the Soviet "system". (There was that word again). He called the Ukraine, "the one big concentration camp left in the world", and exhorted us strongly not to be fooled by the rhetoric about *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* because very little had actually changed in the Soviet Union. Eugene's degree of frustration was more severe than the others whom we met: either that or he was just more vocal in expressing his disappointment.

He questioned us about emigrating to South Africa, a topic about which we had virtually no information other than the common knowledge that the climate would be more favorable than the Ukraine's. He told us that South Africa was the only country that offered financial assistance to *emigrés*; for other countries you needed both sponsors and financial resources. The Yaroshes were lacking both. We told him that although the offer of financial assistance was an attractive feature, the political climate at that moment in South Africa was uncertain. I told him that once I returned to Canada, I would inquire as to whether or not the Russian Orthodox church in Ottawa would sponsor a move to Canada. Eugene questioned each one of us in turn about our profession, then translated Ann's and my comments into Ukrainian for his wife. We spent most of the conversation discussing his emigration project. Toward the end of our conversation, the purpose of our being in the Ukraine came up. He said that he accepted the Bahá'í Teachings because he had some of these ideas when he was a young man. I assumed that Eugene was referring here to the progressive, social principles of the Faith, principles that would have been accepted by liberally minded people everywhere, including humanitarian-motivated Communists. He did not question us further about the Faith. Toward the end of our visit, they served us tea and a rich cake, decorated with sculpted, icing sugar colored bright red. (I rarely eat such deserts at home but "when in Rome do as the Romans do"). When abroad one needs to be flexible about dietary habits to avoid offending those who are doing their best to be hospitable to strangers.

## Climbing Lookout Point in Levov

One afternoon we climbed look-out point in Levov. It is an ancient hill crowned with a monument which has a lovely vantage point and view of the whole city. At the base of this hill, peasants built their first rustic dwellings in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Our guide Gallina and I climbed ahead of the others. We purposely avoided the footpath and chose to climb the tree-studded flank of the hill so that we might have a bit of a workout. We very much enjoyed the challenge of

climbing the high, steep hill. For the convenience of pedestrians who are closer to the top, a stone path leads up to the monument, but I kept climbing the flank of the hill, over a stone and earthen wall that led to the top. The flank was very steep and because it was in rough condition, I was able to get my hands and feet into nooks and crannies and so climb to the top. We got lots of exercise that afternoon. I noticed by the next morning that the “bug” that I had caught in Kiev had disappeared, possibly because I had been able to sweat it out of my system with exercise.

### **The Departure: 16 August, 1990**

The departure from Levov was memorable. We all felt that something quite significant had taken place in the city and we wanted to ensure that we all gave one another a fitting *au revoir*. Gallina, Olga, Sergey, and Donna and others came out to see us off. We met with the usual delays, but we welcomed them, because it meant that we could spend a little longer in one another’s company. We must have been quite the sight standing on the train platform. We stood in a circle, told funny stories, enjoying one another’s company in the brief time that remained to us. We sang Beatles songs to enliven our spirits, one of which was “Yellow Submarine”, a song that is quite familiar to Russian and Ukrainian young people, especially the refrain “We all live in a yellow submarine.” Even during our departure, we found opportunities to teach the Faith. I gave a pamphlet to a thoughtful-looking young woman who had caught my eye while she was reading a newspaper. Every few moments, she would glance over at our group with an intrigued look on her face. Other passengers would occasionally glance over at the happy group of Russians, Ukrainians, two Americans and one Canadian who were attracting attention by their joviality.

While we waited, our friends enjoyed listening to Ann’s “Walkman,” to the selection of cassette tapes of Bahá’í musical groups from the United States like Do’a and others. For Bogdana I sang Richie Valens’ hit from 1958 “Oh Donna”, written for his high school sweetheart, Donna Ludwig, whose prejudiced parents forbade to date Richie because he was Latino, even though he didn’t speak Spanish. (They went out together secretly until his tragic death in a plane crash at age 17). When we were about to board, we tightened our circle of unity, kept singing and said our goodbyes. At the last moment, I showed some of our friends the popular “High Five” and “Low Five” greeting made by slapping palms of the hands together with arms high in the air or “down low” that had been popularized first by professional basketball players in the African-American community. (It is usually used for a greeting or congratulations rather than saying goodbye). When we boarded the train, I found the first window I could open and leaned out. As the train pulled out of the station, I put my arm out of the window, extended my hand and slapped a few others in a “low five”. Ann started shouting to me that I shouldn’t be doing it because the train was in motion and our friends were too close to the moving car. As our train gradually picked up speed, I continued to wave to them as long as I could. Then we were gone, but Levov would live in our hearts for a long time.

### **The Return Trip Levov-Moscow: Bogdana Joins Us**

Donna decided to accompany us to Moscow along with Gallina’s friend Taras. Gallina, Leo, Taras and I had walked through a park together in Levov. I think Gallina invited Taras that

day mainly because he played guitar and knew the melodies of those ever-popular Beatle tunes, but not the lyrics. We walked through a park to a hotel so that I could buy some rolls of film for my camera, but there was not a roll to be purchased that we could find anywhere in Levov. Ann also had back luck with her film. Her film did not engage properly and consequently had not advanced. So despite impressions, no photos were actually taken by her camera. We were consequently entirely without a photographic record of Levov.

The distance back to Moscow from West Ukraine is about 800 miles/1287 kilometers. It took us 24 hours. We continued teaching on the train. Donna and I taught a threesome in our compartment who were travelling to Moscow. The gentleman was an athlete dressed in a track-suit who was travelling with his wife and a friend. We noticed that other athletes were on the train. He was less receptive than other Soviets and Ukrainians whom we met. He basically took the position of a skeptic and materialist and reflected in his response the widespread atheistic ideology that Leo had justifiably been concerned about during his fireside talk in Kiev. Atheism still holds a wide sway here. It needs to be combatted in the wisest way because of the long years of indoctrination under Communist rule.

On the train Leo taught a few ladies from one of the port cities that maintains a submarine base for one of the several Soviet fleets. One of the ladies mentioned that the city had once been closed to foreigners, but it was now beginning to open up. They said that they would like to form a Bahá'í group there too. Leo also introduced me to two Muslim women, one of whom was a teacher, who were from one of the Asian republics. They also expressed an interest in the Faith. Leo said they were pleased that he spoke of the Prophet Muhammad with so much respect. Throughout our whole trip, whenever he could, Leo took the addresses of those whom we taught so that he could follow up once he returned home. All our contacts were given Bahá'í literature in Russian.

### **The Return of Igor: At the Train Station in Moscow**

When we rolled into Moscow after our 24 hour trip, we were quite tired. I had been sick for two days in Kiev, but had by then recovered. Now it was Ann and Leo's turn to be ill. Leo had brought his trusted Pepto Bismal for emergencies, and Ann relied on her homeopathic medicine kit which she took for everything. I used Ann's kit for both nausea and nosebleed, but without much success. We were counting on Bill Mahoney's driver, Igor, to meet us again, and there he was, one of the first people whom we saw after getting off the train. We were very relieved to see Igor again, despite his dangerously fast driving, because we had no idea where we were going to stay overnight. We were driving along nicely when Igor repeated again his great frustration with living under the System. He would gladly take the first opportunity "to fly from the country" as he put it. Igor checked us into a hotel near the airport. We all had to share one room, something we would not normally have done, but there were three beds in the room. Ann went to bed right away to recover while Leo, Igor and I went to the cafeteria at the airport terminal to stand in a long line for a meal. It was the only eatery in the whole airport that was open. When we returned to the hotel room, we were very quiet so as not wake Ann. I slept on the spare bed.

# HOMeward BOUND

## **Moscow-New York**

Igor came to see us off the next morning. Unfortunately, we were not able to connect with Donna who had wanted to say goodbye in person. I embraced Igor, thanked him for all he had done and told him that I would recommend that Bill Mahoney give him a raise! Igor laughed out loud and we all laughed together. Nonetheless we were hopeful that Bill would do just that. The custom's officer waved us right through. No delays this time. Our Pan Am Jumbo Jet was scheduled to leave at 1:00 p.m. (flight #031), but they discovered a defective fuel pump that had to be replaced. We were not able to leave until 6:00 p.m., a five hour delay. All passengers were treated to a free meal, cafeteria style. The Moscow Pan Am representative announced to the passengers that their agents would get in touch with our families to notify them of the delay since many of us had connecting flights to make or had immediate family, relatives or friends who would be waiting at the airport at the scheduled time. We all wrote down our messages with names and phone numbers, but as it turned out Brigitte never received mine. (I had to wonder if the whole thing was just a publicity stunt). There we were, all stuck in the airport, without the possibility of even getting a message out. Despite it being 1990, the age of modernity, the phones were connected only within Moscow and the telegram bureau was on the other side of customs. We did not have access to it unless we exited the boarding area and returned again. No one seemed to be in the mood to do that. We were at the mercy of Pan Am. Finally after the long delay, we took off on schedule. The flight home seemed more orderly and quiet than the flight over. The aircraft appeared to have been groomed more carefully.

## **New York-Toronto-Ottawa-Gatineau: Reverse Culture Shock**

The Quddus Team decided that once we landed we would say goodbye on the plane, and we did so without too much ceremony. We had grown close during our time together and we wanted to make our parting as easy and simple as possible. We just did not have it in us to indulge in any emotional goodbyes. I was also in a rush to get a connecting flight. In spite of the 5 hour delay in Moscow, I was able to catch a taxi from LaGuardia to JFK airport in time to make an Air Canada connecting flight to Toronto. From Toronto I took a short 15 minute flight to Ottawa where Brigitte met me at the airport with Mireille Côté, our friend and neighbor. Brigitte had had car trouble and Mireille had offered to drive her. We arrived home at 12:20 a.m.

For about a week following my return, I felt somewhat depressed. I longed to return to the Soviet Union at every turn where I could again be teaching the Faith. I was experiencing reverse culture shock. While travel-teaching you experience such joy teaching the Faith and make close friends, even if only temporarily. My soul had reached a spiritual peak, but now I was momentarily in the valley of despondence. It was hard to return; hard to return to material comfort without spirituality; hard to return to stores that are well-stocked with goods and food; hard to return to a place where there is so little interest in God, in spirituality and in His latest Revelation. Yes it seems strange to say, but it was hard to return to this great land of Canada where materialism acts as a drug and a distraction to the soul.

## RETROSPECTIVE AND REFLECTION

When teaching the Faith, the Soviet Union provides a foretaste of the Kingdom of God on earth where souls relate to one another in an intense, intimate and loving dynamic, where the knowledge and love of God are shared, and where you participate fully in the greatest activity on earth with eager and thirsty souls. As mentioned above, a pilgrim's note, shared by Hand of the Cause, Ali Akbar Furutan, quotes Shoghi Effendi as saying that in the future the Faith shall sweep across Russia with the speed of a prairie fire. The metaphor describes accurately what our team saw and experienced. Were there enough Bahá'í teachers there, we would easily witness entry by troops in the Soviet Union. I hope that if and when I am able to return, I can meet with the Local Spiritual Assembly of Levov. It is such a joy and privilege to know that one has been instrumental in helping to raise up a Bahá'í institution in that vast land. After returning to Canada, I began writing the friends we made in the Soviet Union. I want to keep in touch particularly with my spiritual daughter Olga Kovatch, who has by now returned to her medical studies in Leningrad. Olga told me that she was an only child and feared being the only believer in Leningrad. I was able to assure her that as far as I knew, there were Bahá'ís in Leningrad and that I would put her in contact with the friends there. Linda Brown, Linda Godwin's assistant, gave me the names of two key people in Leningrad whom I presume are believers. I have forwarded these names to Olga.

Travel-teaching in the Soviet Union has been a unique experience and the highlight of my travel-teachings activities since I first became a believer in 1962. On the one hand, it has given me a clearer understanding of the drug-like, lulling effect of consumer materialism in North America, and on the other hand, how the material and spiritual suffering of the Ukrainian and Soviet peoples have greatly strengthened their spirit and prepared them to receive God's latest revelation. Shoghi Effendi's phrase, "while there is yet time", has taken on a new meaning for me. The doors are still open, but who knows how long we shall be able to continue to teach before the lives and energies of the Ukrainian and Soviet peoples become controlled or preoccupied by some new political movement or materialistic preoccupation. Actions performed for the Faith in the Ukraine and Soviet Union seem to be multiplied in strength and compressed in time. Activities that take months or even years in North America take only days. Leo made a remarkable statement while we were there. He said that he had done more teaching in Russia in two weeks than he had done in 28 years living in the United States, although he was living for some of that time as an isolated believer. You may be able to judge from this statement with what relative ease one can find declared believers in that country. Let those who can arise do so; let those who cannot, send another in their stead. May we all live to see the day when Shoghi Effendi's prophecy about the burning flame of the Faith sweeping across that vast northern nation comes true!

Gatineau, Quebec, Canada, 8 September 1990