

## A Journey to Moscow

We live our lives forward but we understand them backwards. Hindsight is usually better than foresight. The only explanation I can make is, "It must be providential." It certainly was not initiated by me. I had little to do with shaping any of the preceding events.

It was the middle of April 1991 during my first year of retirement from teaching for more than twenty years at Tarrant County Junior College. Six months of travel and being on the go was about to play out. What was I to do for the rest of my life? In the middle of April, the exact date is unknown, I received a letter dated by the writer March 29, 1991. It was from a twenty six year old student enrolled in the Moscow Institute of International Relations. He had found my name in an "Encyclopedia of Associations" of the U.S.A. As far as I remember I had nothing to do with it being listed.

Six decades earlier, as a third grader in an upstate New York village I was walking home from school and as usual I stopped in a little store where unemployed men including my grandfather and others met daily. There was a political nobody in the store passing out Alf Landon campaign buttons. He gave my grandfather a handful and as we walked home together my grandfather gave one to me. It marked the beginning of a life long hobby.

The Moscow student wanted to know about the hobby. April 30, I replied to his letter and sent some of my duplicate campaign buttons. He in turn sent me pins from the Boris Yeltsin campaign then underway and other political material. What could be mailed was very limited but we exchanged several mailings. He finally asked me if I could come to Moscow and get much more. I immediately investigated the possibility.

The red tape involved (this is not a pun) was as complicated in the U.S. as it was in the U.S.S.R. I had to be invited not only by the student but also by the Visa Registration Office in Moscow. After that the invitation was sent to the Soviet Consulate in Washington. I finally got my passport on January 22, 2002 nearly a year after the initial letter. The preceding December 31, marks the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I arrived at the Moscow airport March 19 at 11:00 A.M.. As I entered the check-in area there was Paul holding up a big sign with my name on it. We proceeded to the station where I handed my passport to the agent. He looked at my picture and handed it back to me saying "O.K." He did not even stamp the passport. Customs was equally complacent and only asked if I had any firearms. I suppose they screened the baggage but I never had to open any of the three pieces of luggage. We took public transportation to the dormitory which was to be my hotel while in Moscow. After a short rest we went out to eat and that evening attended a concert in a former church on Red Square. Two male guitar players and a singer performed. The concert was free. Of course the singing was in Russian but one song was to the tune of "Hello Dolly". There were fewer than fifty in the audience quite similar to the places where my youngest son played in the Fort Worth\Arlington area.

The next morning we took the subway and every subway stop was a flea market. Ruth, my wife, was concerned about food shortages as shown on television in America, and loaded my baggage with snacks of a wide variety. To my surprise nearly everything she packed I could buy on the streets of Moscow. Residents would go to the shops early, buy them out and sell on the streets in the afternoon. Capitalism was all over the city in its most basic form. One of my church friends wanted to buy Bibles for me to take to Russia. I told him this was not a church

project. I told Paul about it and he pointed out copies of the Gospels available in kiosks all over the city. He bought a gospel of Luke in Russian for me to take home for my friend. We visited shops and flea markets all over the city nearly every day I was there. I was particularly interested in political pins and posters but bought much more. I was intrigued by the matreshka (nesting) dolls of U. S. Presidents. Washington, Lincoln, Nixon, Clinton, and both Roosevelts. Reagan was very popular as were current European leaders from England, France and Germany. I had to buy extra luggage to bring my things home. Surprisingly I had no problems with U.S. Customs nor in getting through customs when leaving Moscow. But the customs inspectors, learning very fast, expected a tip.

When I got home I showed my materials to friends, one of whom said, "Man that kind of stuff would really sell at the Republican National Convention in Houston." Paul was going to visit us at that time. So I made a second trip to Moscow and loaded up with Reagan dolls and books of the Gorbachev visit to the U.S with over one hundred pictures of President Reagan and Gorbachev.

Paul had arrived and accompanied us to the GOP convention where we had a booth. He had brought boxes of Lenin pins and other things to sell at the convention. I was apprehensive about some of the material but this is America and we boast of our freedom. Fortunately, the governor of a Western state came by with his wife and one of the dignitaries of the administration who picked up a Lenin pin and put it on his lapel saying "He kept us out of war for fifty years." relaxed and we had a wonderful time at the convention.

While in Fort Worth, Paul looked into enrolling for T.C.U. MBA program and enrolled the next year. He lived with us for the first year but later was employed by Alcon and moved closer to campus. When he finished his program he returned to Russia and was employed by Kodak. He visited us a couple of times since and brought us gifts. I have lost track of him over the past ten years. We had talked about going into a joint venture in Moscow but it never materialized.

I bought a bookstore that I operated for sixteen years in the Fort Worth Stockyards. The Poague Library at Baylor University bought my personal political collection which I had on display in the bookstore. I retired for the second time in February 2010 and am now writing a book about James, the brother of Jesus. I hope to finish it in the next eight months.

(There is much more that I did and learned in my two visits to what had been the Soviet Union three months before. My assignment was to tell how I happened to get the material for this exhibit and the above is probably enough. This paragraph is not part of the story. I could tell in much more detail the bureaucratic idiocy, the faith life of the Russian people I met, my visit to the circus that runs daily year round, my visit to a all female Lions Club that had received a check for \$200.00 from a Lions club in San Antonio and could not get it cashed. I gave them \$200.00 for it and became an international financier but all of these and much more are other stories unless you want them.)