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*Moskva and the  
Vision  
By Samantha  
Rodgers*

Upon arriving to this great city of Moscow, one cannot help but wonder about the many historic events that have occurred here. Many Americans have no concept of this city rich in culture that just celebrated its 850th anniversary in 1997. The United States can be compared to being a child when we think about it being only 222 years old. Only in dreams of the average college student could one imagine being here long enough to describe it. So close your eyes and try to imagine the visuals I will attempt to draw for you ...

The day begins with a brisk step into the snowy outdoors. The sky is very dim and many people are walking down the streets. The dark figures walk briskly along the ice covered cement walks. The smile on faces is seldom as everyone has a destination to reach. There is no time to stop for a friendly chat. The figures just keep moving ...

As we walk down an underpass to the nearest metro station there is a large market. A slight hint of dance-techno music can be heard framing the words of the Russian street vendors conversing. The locals can find anything they need for the home here. Such things as meat, vegetables, and, yes, bananas are available. Leather gloves, fur coats, and many shoes may

*Of Frying Pans and  
Students: An Interview  
with Vera Vladimirovna  
Samuseva  
By Jamie B. Rayman*

Skovoroda (ska-vor-ra-dah) - in Russian it means frying pan but to my anglicized ears it sounds very musical. Learning any new language for the first time is a daunting experience, but I'll wager that Russian is one of the more challenging Western languages. With a Cyrillic alphabet that comes from Greek, rather than the Latin alphabet that English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German come from, the first stumbling block for English speakers is learning the shape and sound of the letters. Fortunately, our INTAG team has some help in meeting this challenge: two very talented language teachers, Vera Vladimirovna Samuseva and Lidia Zakarovna Tenchurina. This first article in our series will profile Vera Vladimirovna.

When I asked Vera Vladimirovna what her favorite English word was she chuckled. I told her that my favorite Russian word is skovoroda because it has such nice ring to it. That made her laugh harder. She said that for me, as a beginner, it is quite usual to listen to the words musically. As for herself, a "rather experienced" speaker of English, the meanings of

also be found when the locals are looking for inexpensive clothing.

Most anything can be found here when looking for your basic needs if you have the money. Some items such as toilet paper may run a little expensive. The power of the American dollar to the Russian ruble stands in favor of the foreigner who carries dollars so purchasing items is very affordable. Just try not to look like a tourist, for the market street vendors will most definitely recognize the fear in your eyes.

Next we enter the world of the metro station. Many people cram in tight groups to reach the nearest escalator. In many ways the feeling is similar to that of sheep being herded into a very small fenced area. The escalator proceeds to move the many souls down to incredible depths of the earth. The steepness of the escalator happens to be due to the reasons that the stations were originally built to be bomb shelters long ago and that the soil was too poor to build at a higher level. After reaching level ground, we see the halls of the metro beautifully decorated with marble archways. All of the metro stations have different themes that could tell a thousand stories.

The everyday life of the Russians can be found here, but few stop to admire the round marble columns and metal figurines that look down upon them. It is amazing that this city has such a beautiful world directly beneath it as travelers find it the fastest and the cheapest way to move around the city.

The metro rides like any subway system found in the cities of America. People of all ages ride eagerly awaiting their stop to get off. After riding through several stops and we attempt a mad dash to get off the metro and back up to the surface of the earth. We reach the stop that

the words, not just the sounds, are ever present in her mind. Because of its meaning, she finally chose her favorite English word: student.

This word gives a peek into the psyche of Vera Vladimirovna. She loves to teach. Teaching was her ultimate goal when she entered Moscow State University as a student. She graduated with a degree in Teaching Russian to Foreigners (similar to our English as a Second Language in the U.S.). After graduation she got the position which she currently maintains, on the faculty of Moscow State Agroengineering University (MSAU). She has worked at MSAU for almost 15 years.

At MSAU her specialty is teaching Russian to non-native speakers. She also teaches Russian to Russians (this is similar to Penn State students taking English) and occasionally teaches English to Russian speakers. In her spare time she enjoys instructing private Russian lessons and some of her best clients are Americans living in Moscow who want to improve their language skills.

Vera Vladimirovna loves teaching. She finds her new students to be the most rewarding. "It's a joy to see beginners learn!" she beams. "One day they don't know anything and the next they can speak Russian." Vera Vladimirovna should be very excited about our INTAG team - we are all beginners, but learning fast.



## *Moscow Weather Report* *By Dax Fleckenstein*

**I** have come to find out that State College, PA is not the grayest place on earth. So far, over the past two weeks that we have spent in Moscow we have had two full days of sunshine. Every other day has been sporadic

maybe the most famous one; the stop at the Red Square. It is truly one of the most beautiful scenes as you walk upon the cobblestone street towards the red brick castle towers and get a glance at St. Basil's Cathedral.

The onion domes take your breath away as the colors swirl around the base of the rooftops. Night or day the feeling would be no different. Can you believe the cathedral's creator had his eyes burned so he couldn't design another like it? Ivan the Terrible always did live up to his name.

As the day turns to night, Moscow lights up like no other city with neon lights and streets filled with many cars. In a country that has limited daylight in the winter, there should be no surprise that the city continues life and is just as beautiful at night. People still walk as they first did when you left your hostel to venture out to see Moscow somehow it is different now. As we turn back to the metro to head home, the hidden mysteries of Moscow fill your mind. This city contains the life that the people have often hidden from our eyes. What a wondrous place...this Moskva.

combination of snow, rain, and slush. If nothing else, there seems to be a grayish haze that hangs over the city like smog. Visibility is definitely limited. As far as the temperature is concerned, it has hovered between mid-twenties and lower thirties. This is not unlike the temperatures we left behind in PSU.

However, word on the street is that temperatures are about to take a nose dive. So for us that means watch your step. Those small lakes that have formed on the roads and sidewalks from the recently melted snow are going to freeze. I'm sure a few more of our group members will be claimed by the ice demons hiding under that Russian snow.

Up until now we have not experienced the legendary wrath of the Russian winters, though our comrades tell us it's definitely coming. I, for one, will not feel that my Russian adventure is complete until it's cold enough to spit ice cubes.



*Russian class with Vera Vladimirovna*



*Joe, Bethany, and Jamie discover the wonders of the Moscow subway system*





*One of the oldest buildings on Arbat Street*

## *Ready for Anything!* *By Samra Willyoung*

**W**e've finally made it, and all our preparation has paid off! Our end of the exchange program spent a lot of time stocking up on warm clothes, planning what to pack and how much money to bring. We held several organizational meetings to plan for these upcoming four months of life on the other side of the planet, so naturally, we were curious about what our Russian counterparts did in preparation for our arrival.

Upon talking with one of the Russian students involved with the planning process for this project, I found that they also spent a lot of time preparing for our arrival. She said they first found other Russian students who could speak English and who would be interested in interacting with American students, and who would possibly be interested in traveling to the United States for a semester at Penn State. Upon organizing a group, they began planning weekend activities and field trips for us. They planned out many of our weekends right down to the day. However, they stressed that the agenda is quite flexible and we're welcome to do whatever we want.

Two teachers were selected to teach us the Russian language. So far we're all making progress. It's not been easy though! We all agree that the Russian language is definitely one



## *Alien Nation* *By Dax Fleckenstein*

**A**fter three months of preparing, the moment I had been anxiously awaiting had finally arrived. As I stepped from the plane I thought, "I'm going to take this opportunity and turn this city upside down." I think all in our group had the same mentality. However, I don't think that any of us were prepared for the inevitable complications.

Upon arriving we managed to blunder our way to customs to have our passports, visas, and baggage checked. After our passports and visas were checked, we found some friendly Russians who were more than happy to cart our baggage through customs and to our waiting cars. After we got loaded into the vans they asked us for a mere \$50 for their services. After all, they did have to haul our load a total of 100 yards. Lesson number one: Russian "entrepreneurs" know an ignorant American sucker when they see one.

The next stop was our to our dwelling place - hostel number five. After arriving we were treated to a meal prepared by some girls from MSAU. After dinner, for entertainment, the girls played guitar and sang songs from their native country. Not to be outdone, we, Americans, countered their folksongs about love and war by belting out our best renditions of The Brady Bunch

of the most difficult languages to learn. Fortunately, our teachers are wonderfully patient!

We've lived here now for two weeks and it's evident that our colleagues have done a wonderful job preparing for our stay. We've had excellent tour guides for our weekend excursions. The hospitality of our hosts has been better than we could ever ask for; our hostel rooms are great (they're bigger than Penn State dorms!) And we have a supermarket within walking distance from our rooms.

We couldn't really ask for a better deal. Preparation on both sides has been evidently thorough. I think it's safe to say all the students involved in this program feel lucky to be a part of this exciting venture.



### *Day by Day Schedule* *J. Rayman, E. Kelling,* *A. Roach*

1/13 - Left Newark for Moscow.

1/14 - Arrived in Moscow, dinner with our Russian hosts.

1/15 - Russian class with Vera, night out on Arbat Street.

1/16 - Tour of Kremlin (with Tom Hanks sighting).

1/17 - Saw Tanya's Indian dance recital, walked around Arbat, ate at McDonald's, hung out at Gorky Park.

1/18 - Russian class with Vera, ice skating at Gorky Park in the evening.

1/19 - Russian class with Vera, first trip to the market.

1/20 - Russian class with Lidia, dinner at a local hotel, Samra and Sam played pool.

1/21 - Russian class with Lidia.

and the Itsy Bitsy Spider. Through this we found that Americans don't seem to have the same type of campfire folksongs that our Russian counterparts do.

One thing I never really considered before this excursion was how the typical Russian person would react to ten Americans moving in for four months. There are many aspects of our culture that clash with Russian culture. From what I've seen bright colors and baggy clothing are not the fashion. I've grown accustomed to the stares and the occasional laughter directed at our group and myself.

Thankfully, none of us know enough Russian to know when we're being scoffed at. There was one incident at the university cafeteria that made it fairly clear to all that perhaps we aren't the most popular visitors to hit the scene in Moscow. How else can you interpret the words "Americans," followed by a thumbs down sign?

I'm sure that you've heard, and perhaps used the phrase, "Well they shouldn't be here if they can't even speak the language." When the tables are turned, one's perspective tends to change. I will be living in Russia for the next four months and my speaking skills of the native tongue are probably not even par with the local preschoolers. I can tell you that my name is Dax, my pen is red, and that I don't understand Russian. Unless you have been abroad and not known the native language, it is very difficult to describe the complexity of the situation.

1/22 - Russian class with Lidia, went to Discomania.

1/23 - Part of the group went to Izmailovsky Park, toured Pushkin State Art Museum, walked through Red Square for first time.

1/24 - Shopped at the department store GUM, "Nutcracker" at the Bolshoi Theater.

1/25 - Russian class with Vera; Jamie and Bethany spot their first cockroach in their bathroom.

1/26 - Russian class with Lidia, meeting with Pavel Sorokin.



*Balalaika Duet (soloists Marc and Erik)*



## *The Adventure Begins By Bethany Nelson*

As we all gathered in the parking lot behind the Agricultural Administration Building at Penn State on Wednesday, January 13, 1999, you could feel the excitement. The trip many of us had been preparing for all semester was upon us. We were all donned in our winter parkas and snow boots with suitcases bulging at the seams. As I tried to manhandle my suitcases into the van, I realized why everyone told me to pack light. After everyone had loaded the luggage, the time came to say goodbye to our families and friends and begin our Moscow adventure. However, I didn't realize how much of an adventure it would be just getting there.

Almost everyone on the trip had traveled before, however, some were more versed in the art of traveling than others. This was obvious by the way people had prepared for the trip. Some people had packed their things in easy to handle backpacks, small suitcases and duffel bags, and then there were

Andrew, on the other hand, was thrilled to find that not only did he and Joe have the same seat, but there was also someone else booked in that seat. After some minor readjustments in the seating area, we were ready to go.

Erik and Marc played computer golf for the main part of the flight. Jamie, Andrew, and Lincoln tried to get some sleep in those lovely reclining chairs. Samantha and Samra tried real hard to behave themselves, but to no avail. Samra got in trouble for trying to touch something on the flight attendants cart. After being disciplined, she thought it would be best if she went to sleep so she decided to rest her head on the man next to her. He really appreciated that. Meanwhile, Dax and I did our best not to go insane. As for poor little Joe, he got upgraded to first class and was enjoying a five-course meal, hot towels, and little red slippers. Poor guy, it was a real rough flight for him.

After about 8 hours, we arrived in Amsterdam. We were greeted by security guards with machine guns. What a pleasant change. We then had



those of us who thought more about fitting EVERYTHING into the bags than how we were going to carry them.

Our first objective upon arrival at the Newark International Airport was to get all of our paperwork for our classes. We were stuffing notebooks, assignment books, and printers in any nook or cranny that anyone could find. Samra was even stuffing notebooks in her coat pockets because her carry-on was too full to fit anything else. Then it came time to check in our luggage. As we made our way down the line, we were tripping and stumbling over each other. At one point, I almost knocked down an elderly woman ahead of me in line. Once everyone's luggage had been checked, we made our way to our gate.

We had a two-hour wait for the plane so we just sat in the terminal and got to know each other a little bit better. Time went rather quickly because we all had a lot to talk about. Around 5:30 p.m. we began boarding the plane.

As we began to board the plane, my carry-on got caught on a curtain and almost ripped it down. Then as I began to walk down the aisle, it got wedged in between some man's head on one side of the aisle and a woman's shoulder on the other side. Finally, a man grabbed my bag and threw it over the seat. I eventually made it to my designated spot and got situated.

to travel the entire length of the airport to get our next flight. Everyone made it through the X-ray machines and metal detectors unscathed. When we boarded the plane it was immediately obvious that the plane was much smaller than the one we were on before. We all crowded into our seats, but at least we all got to sit together. Our flight was scheduled to be 3 hours - the longest 3 hours of our lives.

We finally made it to Moscow and got our first taste of being on Russian soil. We wandered around until we found where we were supposed to be. Next came the task of claiming our luggage. Two big Russian men greeted us with carts and after 13 hours of traveling, we graciously accepted. It took three carts to carry all of our luggage. They pushed us through customs pretty quickly and Valery Leonidovich met us. He was a welcomed sight because we were all exhausted. The men loaded up our luggage, and overcharged us for their services. Finally, we were on our way to Moscow.

After we got over the fact that the car we were in had no seatbelts, the driver couldn't see out the windshield, and was driving about 90 mph, we enjoyed our ride. I didn't realize that in Moscow people are allowed to drive on the medians, sidewalks, and roadsides. It makes it an interesting adventure for pedestrians and passengers alike. As we arrived at the hostel, one adventure had ended and another was just beginning. I think the next one will be a lot more enjoyable.

