Dan I. Slobin

Excerpts from a 1959 journal: U.S. Exhibition in Moscow
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Dan Slobin, age 20, in front of the main pavilion of the U.S. Exhibition in Moscow on opening day, July 24, 1959, wearing one of the official male guide costumes.
Introductory note, June 2009: Now, fifty years later, I’m going through my journal and photos from those days. At age 20 I was one of the youngest guides, spending the summer of 1959 in Moscow between my junior and senior years as a psychology major at the University of Michigan. I had grown up in a Russian Jewish secular family in Detroit, with a strong attachment to the languages, literatures, and musics of both cultures. Although I didn’t study Russian until I was in college, I had heard it through my childhood and had learned Russian songs and poems. My mother’s first languages were Yiddish and Russian, and both were valued in our community. The journal was written not only for myself, but also for my parents back in Detroit, and so it was sent to them in the form of a series of letters. Here I reproduce the parts that recreate that Cold War experience, leaving out touristic and personal experiences beyond the political context of that unprecedented confrontation of two worlds that had been long isolated and which now have changed so far from that Cold War era. The text is unchanged, though its youthful naïveté sometimes makes me cringe (and sometimes charms me). The photos are all scanned from my own black-and-white prints. Appendix 2 contains all the pictures I could find of fellow guides; Appendix 4 contains photos from another guide, Peter Maggs; Appendix 5 contains frame captures from 8mm films that I took in 1959.


In the years since, I went on to Harvard, where I got a PhD in social psychology in the Department of Social Relations and took part in what came to be known as “The Cognitive Revolution.” My focus was the emerging field of psycholinguistics, and I made good use of my Russian in studying and translating the richness of the Soviet explorations of that field, which antedated and often influenced our own. I went on to the University of California at Berkeley, where I’ve spent my entire career, carving out a niche for the crosslinguistic study of child language development and carrying out research in a range of languages and countries. I retired in 2003 and have continued research and writing in my central area of interest—relations between language and cognition. Long research periods in Turkey and in the Netherlands have shaped my interests, along with wandering and research through Europe and the Middle East. Details, bibliography, and papers can be found at http://psychology.berkeley.edu/faculty/profiles/dslobin.html.

I welcome your correspondence: slobin@berkeley.edu.
June 15

Skipping many preliminaries, the story begins in Washington, DC, where the group of guides were flown after our first meetings and preparations in New York. The government put us up at the Presidential Hotel. The next morning busses picked us up at 8:00 to go to the Executive Offices in Washington. It was a sudden change in scheduled plans that had brought us to the capital. Though none of us knew just why we were there, the rumor was repeated and repeated that we were to see the President. After all, anyone else could have been more cheaply brought into New York, where we were originally scheduled to meet. Only a meeting with someone very important could justify the expense of a special trip to the capital. But even in the Executive Office Building we were not yet sure. Mr. Allen of USIA [George V. Allen, Director of the United States Information Agency] gave us a pep talk and then, finally, our guesses were confirmed: We were to go across to the White House.

As it proved to be throughout our orientation period (and, I hope, not for the rest of the summer) disorganization reigned supreme. Mr. Francis [Clarence Francis, office of Special Assistant to the President], who was to lead us to the White House, apparently didn’t know the way, and only found the route after a quick about-face on a stairway. As we passed the various check points, Mr. Francis explained the origins of this meeting to us. He had been recently riding with the President up to the Lincoln Center dedication in New York when the conversation turned to Nixon’s forthcoming trip to the Soviet Union for the opening of the American Exhibition. The President expressed his desire to visit the USSR and regretted that he would never have the chance to do so. When Mr. Francis told him that 75 young American guides would have this opportunity, Ike said, “I’d like to meet them!” And so, at a word from the Chief Executive, the arrangements began to bring us to the capital.

The simplicity and sincerity of this gesture fitted the impression of the man which I gained from our interview. He spoke to us kindly, like an old father or grandfather. [2009: This from a third-generation Democrat.]

Having entered the Oval Office, I had the impression that the man was kept like some old lion in a cage. He was padded in to meet us, padded out to the Rose Garden with us, and padded back into his cage. The atmosphere of silence and the dignity of the office, the clean rooms and thick rugs, lent a feeling of awe and importance to the event. We filed in and shook the President’s hand, and then stood in a semi-circle around his desk and waited for him to speak to us. He told us he had called for us to see what we were like and to wish us Godspeed. He looked amazingly like the Herblock cartoons—old, tired, the wrinkled face with a broad smile. He warned us not to brag—that we should realize that we do not represent a perfect society. And then he said that he had also called us all together because he had never seen so many people in one room who all spoke Russian. Then he singled out the four Negroes in our group, whom he had greeted especially warmly when we had entered, and asked each one how he had come to study the Russian
language. Then, referring to the range of sizes of the guides, he remarked on a man of over six feet who weighed, “let us say 200,” and “a little girl of maybe 90 pounds.” He called her forward and asked her how much she weighed!

The President seemed rather embarrassed about the “mementos” which he gave to us: wallet-size pictures of himself that were wrapped in plastic “so they won’t wear out in your wallets—but you can throw them away if you like.” Then he invited us to come out into the Rose Garden to be photographed with him—giving “rabid Democrats” the opportunity to stay behind.
June 25

Disorganization was also the key word when we returned to New York. During the days, they kept us busy running to and fro from the Fashion Institute, where we were provided with clothes. The outfit is not bad, although ridiculous in some aspects. This is the male wardrobe: one gray summer cord suit, one heavier dark suit, a casual dark blue jacket, gray flannel slacks, a heavy blue woolen cardigan sweater, three pairs of shoes, a dress hat and a cap, a beach polo shirt, a heavy red shirt, and the promise of dress shirts, socks, and underwear in Moscow.

In the evenings in New York we had briefing sessions and panel discussions—fascinating, but I haven’t kept notes about them. Actually, much of what we were told
is supposed to remain private, confidential—security information, etc.

After three days in New York we took the boat train to Montreal. The ride was very pleasant, with much singing of Russian folksongs. We boarded an Italian student ship, the Irpinia, with destination Cannes.

I’m on board ship now, enjoying singing, dancing, drinking—with students of all sorts—that is, when we’re not hard at work preparing for Moscow. Our guide group is really superb. We’ve become famous on board ship for our frequent uniformity of dress and for our folksongs. The group is both good-looking and well-informed. The range in age and Russian capabilities is wide—from 20 to 35, from those who have spoken Russian all their lives to those who have studied for only a short time—in fact, for as short as three months! They come from many schools, with a concentration from Harvard Yale and Columbia; other schools include Vassar, Swarthmore, Michigan, Princeton, Georgetown, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Oberlin, Washington University, and Syracuse.

The range of backgrounds is also wide: students of Russian studies, international affairs, and linguistics are common; also students of psychology, physics, biochemistry, pharmacy, law, English literature, French literature, ancient Greek literature, and philosophy. We include translators, Library of Congress Russian librarians, people from the RAND Corporation and some government agencies, and several writers from the Current Digest of the Soviet Press. There are four Negroes and many Jews among us; other religious information isn’t available.

Our classes have, for the most part, been good and useful. There are two men from USIA who lecture, along with some experts on labor and public health. Happily, no party line or packaged answers are given. The viewpoint is quite liberal—taking account of American strengths and weaknesses—and we are encouraged to think for ourselves. There is a library for us here, and we are given many facts in the lectures. Broadly, we’ve been covering American civilization, dialectical materialism, and Soviet organizations and life. Probably the most useful aspect of the training program are the role-playing situations. Our two USIA men set the stage and pretend to be Russians, calling up one guide for a discussion. Afterwards, the answers are torn apart by the group.

The language preparation has, until recently, not been as good. They’ve been giving us “guide scripts” to learn and retell, and so we’ve been learning terminology for household appliances, sports, and daily life, rather than political terminology. But this is now being corrected to include the kinds of political discussions that are expected for Moscow.

[I’ve omitted the train ride from Cannes to Moscow, with memorable stops in Genoa, Prague, and Warsaw, where we met with local students.]
**July 13**

I’m sitting in my room in the Hotel Ostankino, typing on a borrowed, little “Hermes Baby” typewriter, listening to current Soviet music on the radio (one station) that is broadcast into every room. When I started typing at 10:00 this evening the sky was still very light, with a rosy hue of sunset. We’re so far north here in Moscow that it never really gets totally dark—just a sort of dark blue, with clouds still visible.

The room is comfortable, with two beds, sharing a bath with an adjoining single room. The bathroom has a shower, hot water, towels, soap, toilet paper; the room has a wardrobe closet, two night tables with lamps, an easy chair, a desk chair, and a little corner with a round table, a couch, and two straight chairs—all with red upholstery, and red silk spreads on the beds. My roommate is Jewish, like me; from LA with a BA from Stanford, currently a grad student at Columbia in Russian literature. The adjoining single room houses a writer for *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* and the Russian section of *US News and World Report*.

We came into Moscow at 2:00 in the afternoon about a week ago—the whole group of guides on the train from Warsaw. Busses took us to the hotel, which is on the outskirts of the city. We passed through much traffic and saw ongoing construction sites everywhere.

First thing in the evening, after getting settled, was a meeting with our real Moscow boss, Chad McClellan. Too quickly, our free time disappeared and we were obliged to begin work. The construction of the exhibition is behind schedule and our help is desperately needed to make sure that everything will be ready in time. And so, starting with the first day, we began hard work—from pouring concrete, to setting up of exhibits, to painting, to sweeping, and so on. But it has been a good experience working together with Russian workers. We’ve had many conversations and have been practicing Russian constantly. The Exhibition will really be great—fingers crossed. It will be finished, I believe, but with much work and no time to spare. I’ll be working in the supermarket display and will be the only Russian speaker there, working with an American “expert.”

In spare time, of course, I’ve been seeing as much of Moscow as possible. Right now it’s midnight and on the radio I can hear the bells of the Kremlin chiming the hour. Soon they’ll play the national anthem. This means it’s midnight, and I should get to sleep to get up for work tomorrow morning at 7:30.
from a brochure of the new Hotel Ostankino: “In the five-floor hotel there are 650 comfortable rooms. The hotel has two restaurants with a large selection of varied courses and snacks. There are postal, telegraph, telephone, financial, and barber services. In the lobby there are kiosks where it is always possible to buy current newspapers, magazines, books, and all kinds of souvenirs. At the service office it is possible to obtain tickets to theaters, concerts, airplanes, ships, and trains.”
July 21

I’m sitting in the model house in the main pavilion of the Exhibition. As I write at the dining room table, Handel’s *Messiah* sounds out from the excellent combination stereo hi-fi tape recorder and AM-FM radio console in the living room. The chaos of the exhibition preparations lies all around. I don’t see how we can open in a few days. To be sure, we will, and some exhibits will be open, but much will still be under construction. But it is certainly both beautiful and impressive. The supermarket exhibit is all set up—two freezers and a row of shelves of the type where cans slide down—all with real food. Now I have only to prepare my Spiel. I’m sure that Mikoyan will come to me, remembering his interest in supermarkets when he was in the States. [2009: He did not.]

Yesterday I had a fascinating experience just outside the Hotel Ostankino. Like most of the city, away from the old center and the Kremlin, new apartment buildings are going up and old log houses are coming down. The apartment blocks all look alike and are tremendously big and monotonous. They are quickly built, but provide people with much-needed living space and they are, as a rule, better than the previous dwellings from which their residents come. Directly across from the hotel are the remains of an area of log houses; further down there is a collection of big apartment blocks, many still under construction.

I came home from work and after getting a haircut for two rubles, went to the back of the hotel restaurant, where I bought some cheese and picked up the delicious black bread which is free in restaurants everywhere; for four rubles I added a bottle of *krem-soda* and had a nice little supper in my room. Then it occurred to me that it would be nice to take a stroll through the old Russian world that lies around the hotel. So I set off through the new area, where all was mud and dust, walking along a new street that was not yet paved. People were already living in some of the buildings, next to those still under construction. There were a few wagons selling food. Everywhere, children were running in the dust—playing ball, writing on the walls with chalk, and having a fine time in the early evening. There were young couples walking with infants, and old pensioners, and some very old women with white kerchiefs and black dresses. I was suddenly in another world—right next to the hotel—of which I had not been aware. There were slogans
posted on the walls, addressing the tovarishchi rabochie [comrade workers] to work harder and faster to raise the standard of living and speed construction. And there were slogans directed to children, admonishing them to support the Communist Party, leading the nation onward to Communism.

I cut through the construction site to the old section. It was like passing back through a hundred years. Narrow paths wandered among ancient and sagging log cabins and shacks. Chickens and geese wandered in the streets. Little fields had vegetables growing in them. I passed a field with some cows grazing in it. Dogs ran about. Old women carried pails of water from the common pump to their houses. I stared about me in amazement and thought to myself: “So this too is Moscow, the capital of the biggest country in the world!” There were pools of water in the road which had apparently stood there long enough to develop into little green, living ponds. And, not far off, I could see the bright neon signs of Gostinitza Ostankino [Hotel Ostankino].

The light of the setting sun spread a warm glow over the scene as I passed by a big farm field and then, along the road, came across a group of old woman. I said dobryi vecher [good evening] and passed on. Looking back, I saw them all staring at me, and, happily, I turned back to talk with them. It turned out to be a pleasant hour-and-a-half of talking with a group of people whose members kept changing. At first they thought I was German—by now a familiar response. When I told them I was American, the questions began to flow. These old people live in their own houses and are looking forward to moving into the wonderful new buildings, where there is hot and cold running water and a bath—and where a square meter costs only one ruble per month. They do all have television sets in their huts, but apparently no other modern conveniences. The most effusive old woman told me enthusiastically of the things that Nikita Sergeyevitch Khrushchev is doing for them, pointing repeatedly to the new buildings and saying again and again that they will overtake and surpass us, and—only then, when they can stand next to us, “shoulder to shoulder”—will it be time to become real friends. They don’t want us to look upon them as nishchie [beggars].

A woman of about 70 told me that her grandfather had told her that this land had belonged to a wealthy landowner who had had twelve wives. He divided the land up among them, and this part was called “Marfa” after that wife. These people had lived here all their lives and were apparently
descendants of the serfs who had worked this very same land. In the thirties it had been made into a *kolkhoz* [collective farm]. Now it is being turned into a housing area. Since these huts and shacks are private homes, the government pays a lifetime *strakhovka* [compensation] to these people in exchange for their land, as well as providing them with living space in the new buildings.

Of course, all of the typical questions came up and were discussed, as well as all of the personal ones. They asked prices of food; from there it was a short step to unemployment and then to “the Negro question.” We reached some sort of understanding on several issues, some people being more willing to find points of agreement than others. It’s very difficult to converse with people who have only one source of information, and I spoke to them about this. I can imagine that they didn’t believe much of what I told them, just as the old woman in the Kremlin shouted “Nein!” (although we were speaking Russian) each time I told her about my black neighbors and classmates in Detroit. Though this wasn’t overtly the case on this evening, I wonder if they believed much of what I said. I’m rather sure that they didn’t.

Everywhere here in Moscow people are concerned about the success of their own Exhibition in New York (which is written up in the press here as being very successful), and they are eager to get tickets to our Exhibition. The tickets are not in our hands, but are being distributed by the Soviet authorities through organizations and some theater box-offices—and they are hard to get. Although they only cost one ruble, I have heard that on the black market tickets are going for as much as 50 rubles. There’s great public interest in our Exhibition, and these people, too, wanted to know all about it, and how to get tickets.

And so we talked on and on, and it was very pleasant. I plan to take several excursions into this nearby old Russian and new Soviet world. Next time I’ll take some candy for the kids. But now it’s late again. The bells of the Kremlin on the radio have just struck midnight and the national anthem is concluding.

**July 28**

Finally, after much hectic preparation, the Exhibition was more or less ready for official opening on Friday night, July 24. Much was not ready, but enough order was created for there to be an actual Exhibition. We guides dressed up and formed an “honor guard” to receive the important guests. (Each of us has been given a wardrobe with a number of outfits, each uniformly prescribed day-by-day.)

In the morning, Khrushchev and Nixon, along with the Soviet VIP’s—Mikoyan, Kozlov, Zhukov, Furtseva, and others—had spent several hours at the Exhibition, but we guides were not informed. After so much hard work, we had been given the day off, and I happily spent it wandering about Moscow. Only in the evening did I learn, from some guides who had gone to work anyway, that our absence had been explicitly intended on the day of the expected walk-through of the grounds by the two leading figures—much to my regret.

The Party Chairman and the Vice President came again in the evening, talking and smiling—Khrushchev rotund and jolly, Nixon tall and handsome by comparison. They mounted the platform with the dignitaries, and the official ceremonies began. Khrushchev read his speech in Russian. Glasses on his nose, reading drily, he resembled an old teacher. English translations of the speech were passed out and there was no oral translation. He spoke of the accomplishments of the Soviet Union and
made some digs at the U. S. Nixon’s speech went more smoothly and had a more personal appeal. Again, no simultaneous translation took place; Russian translations of the speech were passed out. Nixon spoke excellently and handled the situation well. Khrushchev was rather cute, smiling and applauding at the right places and standing up at the proper times. Nixon handled him gently and tactfully, saying, from time to time, “Now I know you don’t agree with me. Mr. Chairman, but I have the floor.” The Vice President carefully delineated both the strong and weak points of our country, pointing out problems which remain to be solved—principally unemployment and the race problem. But he did not paint too black a picture, bringing in statistics to show improvement. His speech was reproduced in full in the Soviet press, even including the statistics.

The speeches concluded, the time had come to ceremoniously cut the ribbon and declare the Exhibition opened. The visitors of the first night were such as we had never encountered before. Attendance was by invitation only, and the entire diplomatic corps as well as the leading members of “the new class” were present. Champagne, wines, and other drinks were served. Most of the Soviets who came are not seen on the streets of Moscow during the summer, as they spend their time at their dachas. Never had I seen so many white shirts and ties—as a matter of fact, I believe this was the first time I had seen any in Moscow. The men wore suits, mostly Soviet style, but many of the women were dressed in the latest Paris and Western fashions. At first I thought that these were members of the diplomatic corps, but a few minutes of Russian conversation with those who came to my post convinced me that these were genuine Soviets, although barely recognizable on the basis of everyday experience on the streets of the Soviet capital. Here one could see peroxide blondes, eye-shade, and daringly high heels. Make-up, usually the exception, was the rule on opening night.

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After a very intense period of organization, followed by the opening ceremonies, things are beginning to get organized, as our work settles down to a regular pace. I work six days a week—three long days from 11 AM to 10 PM, and three short days from 2 to 10. This means that Monday, my only free day, is also my only free evening. There is now another guide working the supermarket with me, so I think we’ll be able to work out some time exchanges to free an occasional evening for each of us.

Yesterday was a day off and I had a good bit of wandering about Moscow. This is a huge and varied city. In no other great city have I seen any log cabins, but this city is full of them, and full of old wooden houses with ornamental carving, and off of the main streets one sees a good deal of horse-drawn transportation. The old wooden houses are quickly giving way to big, monotonous, heavy apartment buildings, but the old houses are still to be seen everywhere. Much of the city looks typically European and much of it looks only typically Russian, with Russia’s heavy, ornate architecture. Some parts
are shabby, some are impressive. Very little looks modern, in our sense of the word. There are at least a half-dozen vysotnye zdaniya [high-rise buildings], all similar, all resembling the ancient Kremlin towers, skyscraper style. The streets are amazingly broad. Most of them can accommodate eight to ten lanes of traffic. Traffic is fairly heavy, with public vehicles, taxis, and trucks predominating. Taxis drive like mad—there is no posted speed limit in Moscow—and some taxi rides are rather harrowing experiences. There are streetcars, trolley busses, and motor busses.

The Metro, of course, is glorious. It is like a palace, with statues, marble corridors, and beautiful chandeliers and mosaics. Each station is done in a different style, from Greek temple to rococo palace to Soviet modern. The escalators are the longest I have ever seen—fantastically long. I can see why the Moscow Metro is called the best bomb-shelter in the world. There are no slogans, no shops in the depths. It is clean and cool—even the trains are painted and polished. Traffic moves steadily and quickly. A train comes every few minutes.

I started off free day by taking a long Metro ride to the other end of town, to the Lenin Hills where the Stadium and University are. All around the Stadium the yarmarka [market] is taking place now. Big stores from around the country have set up booths to sell their products. Here one can see all of the goods the Soviet Union has to offer its consuming public—from shoes to curtains, from household appliances to books.

Books, of course, are especially popular. Everywhere there are bookstalls, adorned by quotes from such men as Lenin and Pushkin, speaking of the value of books as a source of knowledge and the joys of reading. One banner reads: Kazhdomu cheloveku nuzhna sobstvennaya biblioteka [Each person needs their own library]. Among the American books in translation there were copies of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Babbitt, Ten Days that Shook the World, and the stories of O. Henry. The Russian and Soviet classics were there, as well as many books of agitprop [handbooks for political speeches], antireligious tomes, party speeches, and so on. There are also books—all over the city, especially, it seems, close to our Exhibition—about unemployment in the U.S. The most popular is a 45 kopeck reprint of the speeches of George Meany, Walter Reuther, and other American labor leaders at the recent labor conference on unemployment.

From the Yarmarka, after being caught in one of several thundershowers which drenched the day, I went to the Pushkin Museum, one of the finest art museums I’ve seen anywhere. [...]

July 31

Opening night at the Exhibition everything was clean and neat, but it has certainly been difficult to keep up the cleanliness and neatness now that the public throngs and crowds and pushed through. There are long lines to get in, the exhibition halls are packed, and every guide and exhibit is surrounded by eager crowds all day long.

The people are fantastically curious about America, and are dying for souvenirs. Many of them will beg for
minutes on end for any kind of memento—a can from the supermarket display, a wrapper, a booklet. They are mad for znachki—the little pins and buttons that everyone wears, for one reason or another. People exchange them constantly and they are sold everywhere. We have been giving out little pins with the logo of the Exhibition, and there are always throngs demanding them. It often became a dangerous situation, this passing out of buttons, until we finally set up a system of distributing them one by one at the entrance gate. A guide appearing in the crowd with a handful of buttons could easily be crushed by eager visitors, or at least end up with a hand full of pinpricks. We have only two million and have had to send to the States for more. This is apparently a crucial part of creating good will. Many times, at the end of the day, an old woman or a little child has come to me, almost in tears, begging for a button. People come from far corners of the USSR, often especially to see our show in Sokolniki Park, and would leave with a bitter taste in their mouths if they couldn’t take something back with them—a symbol of the fact that they were here. I have received many Soviet znachki from people, often in exchange for American postcards, which they always want autographed. One day, when I get home, I’ll wear a chest of znachki, decorated like a geroi sotsialisticheskogo truda [hero of socialist labor]!

Every day at work I stand in front of a rack of canned goods in a mock supermarket. Each exhibit has one or two guides, wearing the day’s uniform, talking and talking. Each of us has a microphone and we field questions from all sorts—from friendly to hostile, from curious to provocative. You’re often not sure if a questioner is genuine or has been sent to keep us occupied. I’m kept on my toes constantly; my Russian gets more fluent. Visitors are generally patient as I work out an answer.

The Exhibition seems to be very popular. One measure of its popularity is the Soviet press itself—in showing its resistance to us. The number of anti-Exhibition articles has been very great. There has been one every day since opening, in Pravda and Izvestia, and usually in most of the other papers also. I’m keeping a file of them. Our “average” statistics have been attacked. Articles appear about race discrimination, unemployment, and expensive medical service in the U.S. The other measure of popularity is the black market on tickets, which are very difficult to come by. I have heard that the rate is now as high as 50 rubles for the one-ruble ticket. Until now, tickets have been distributed through organizations. (All distribution is in the hands of the Soviet
Government, by agreement.) They have just begun to sell some tickets through box-offices. But tickets are clearly not the only means of entrance. We have been selling 50,000 tickets a day, but attendance has been as high as 70,000 per day. People surge through entrance gates, often without tickets; others come over fences; or, if they are cute young girls, they wink at policemen and walk through.

Unfortunately, at least judging from the comments I’ve heard on the site, they don’t seem to be as excited after having seen what we have to show. At present, we are compiling guides’ impressions of the public reaction [see Appendix 1], but for now I’ll report what I have heard.

Khrushchev, in his speech, described our Exhibition as a picture of the near future of the Soviet Union, and, as such, urged his people to come and see how they will be living some day. The visitors themselves—many of them—seem to have expected to find something remarkable, and I’ve often heard the remark, “My ozhidali bol’she ot vas [We expected more from you].” Over and over again people have said, “U nas tozhe [We have it too].” Of course, to a great extent, this u nas tozhe expresses a patriotism, greatly made up of the traditional Russian feeling of inferiority. My dogonyayem! [We’ll catch up]. One of the big features, however, is the fact that we incorrectly estimated the interests of the Soviet people, just as they incorrectly estimated American interests in their New York exhibition (from what we hear and read about responses there). In this country, where technology and the industrial revolution are still new and exciting, there is a great desire to see stanki—heavy machinery, factory equipment, pictures of workers, and so forth. They are, as a rule, less interested in the products themselves than in the machines that made them. This is why they showed so much tekhnika in New York, which is, I believe, rather boring to the great mass of American visitors there.

If I estimate correctly, it seems to me that American visitors to the Soviet exhibition must be asking to see more of the way of life—the everyday products and living conditions and recreation of the Soviet Union. These are our interests, and we have set up an exhibition in Moscow that reflects these interests. There may be many Soviet citizens who share these interests with us, but they haven’t spoken to me—maybe only the complainers are articulate. I explain the lack of technology in our show on the basis of this difference of interests mezhdu nashimi narodami [between our peoples], and suggest that the next time there is an exchange of exhibitions, perhaps both sides will better know what to show, how to satisfy the interests of the visitors. This is, after all—I say—the first time that we have exchanged exhibitions, and we hope there will be more of such exchanges. My visitors usually agree and we end up on the note of mir i druzhba [peace and friendship].

August 2

As I said before, the desire for souvenirs is tremendous. At the supermarket one of the most popular questions is, “Are you selling anything?” When the answer is “no,” the next question is, “Well, can you give me something—anything—just for a souvenir?” Often others in the crowd will answer, “What do you want that for? We have the same thing. This is only an exhibition, not a market.” And then a discussion will follow among the visitors, one wanting a souvenir of America, his fellow-citizens criticizing him.

In the first days, visitors took all of the paper cups. They’re interested in Pepsi-Cola. Many people think it’s an alcoholic drink. They ask to see wine and whisky, many thinking that we drink a lot. Our dry law for youth surprises them. They’re proud of their Moscow vodka—stolichnaya—and want to engage in vodka
They also want to see cigarettes, which are not being exhibited. They're intrigued with chewing gum, which they picture as an American national custom; they seem to have no idea of what it looks like or what to do with it. We brought only a little to show, and it all disappeared quickly.

Many visitors, of course, don’t bother asking for souvenirs, but take them. In the first day or two alone, 20% of the book exhibit disappeared. In general, of course, we don’t object too much, since some of these books must fall into the “right hands”—that is, the hands of those who can benefit from their perusal. The supermarket, too, has suffered. We have given up the original display technique of open freezers, as they are found in the normal American store. Too many packages have been opened up. The ice-cream, of course, disappeared in the first day. Then the packages of raw, frozen potato-patties were opened and their contents sampled. Soon the freezers were in a chaotic condition and we have been forced to keep them closed. Many people are brazen, eating ice-cream before my eyes, or attempting to walk off with cans. If I tell them stealing is *nekul’turno* [“uncultured”—indicating lack of good breeding], they are not ashamed at all, but beg for a souvenir. One night, after the exhibit was closed, I noticed two young fellows carrying a can of blueberry pie-filling. I stopped them and asked them where it came from, knowing full well that the only place they could have gotten blueberry pie-filling in Moscow was as the supermarket display of our Exhibition. Their only response was to tell me they were from Baku and that they were dying for a souvenir of America. Well, it was late, and I didn’t want to argue, so I told them they could keep the can. We were standing by the book exhibit at the time, and, not satisfied with this gesture, they proceeded to ask me if I would give them some books. They claimed they could read English. But when I shoved a book at one of them and asked him to read, he did very poorly indeed.

Nevertheless, most of the visitors are very warm and friendly. After a while, having anticipated most of the standard questions at the supermarket, I’ve posted a list of standard American prices and have put labels on the cans and packages, telling the contents, weight, and price in cents and rubles, according to the 10:1 ratio which is now used by the Soviet press and which seems to be considered more realistic. This eliminates the standard questions, except for the continual and unanswerable question: “Why is bread so expensive in the U.S.?” Bread is a very important staple here, and is widespread and inexpensive in relation to our prices. Sometimes an explanation simply that our average wage is higher suffices (the average wage is also posted on my price-list), sometimes an argument on economics ensues. This is a nice aspect of working at this exhibit. There is a lot of time to stand around and carry on leisurely personal conversations, stopping occasionally to answer direct questions about the supermarket. From time to time, of course, my job is made difficult by a visit from one of the many agitators who seem to have been assigned to the Exhibition. These sessions are quite trying, as it is impossible to talk to such people. They don’t listen to answers, as they are busy preparing the next barb. Sometimes bystanders turn on a provocateur: *Ne nado!* [Don’t do that] “Leave him alone—he’s just a student!” “Go talk to Nixon!”

I’ve found that one technique in such situations—and the most enjoyable—is to play the crowd against the agitator. For example, a common agitator (and non-agitator) question is: “How do you like Moscow? What do you think of our country?” After saying that I like the people and the famous sights, I will sometimes add a complaint. One of the most obvious is the objection to censorship. Usually the agitator will deny
that censorship exists. Then I ask the crowd if they’ve read *Dr. Zhivago*, or if they can buy a copy of the *New York Times* in Moscow. The crowd will then respond that censorship does in fact exist, and a discussion ensues. Many of them regret that they can’t read more, and would like a fuller exchange of information. Others will defend censorship as a good and necessary thing, a device by which the state, in league with the Communist Party—the possessor of all truth—can look after the education and well-being of the people, which is inseparably united with the Party. The agitator will usually reply that no one wants to read *Dr. Zhivago* or the capitalist press, because it is all lies and falsehood and a waste of time.

Arguments about the American free press fall on deaf ears. The response is always that the newspapers belong to the ruling circles and that one must have money to publish books. It is, of course, difficult to generalize. It seems that some people are swayed by my arguments, some are indifferent, some incredulous, and some hostile. But all are friendly to me. All want to shake hands. All are glad we have met. Many ask me for my autograph, for post-cards, and even for my address. I have exchanged addresses several times already, both with young and old people who want to correspond.¹

Questions about Jews come up again and again—“the Jewish question.” Some Jews deny American charges of Soviet anti-Semitism, echoing the Party line that Jews don’t want their culture anymore and that there is no point believing in God. In general, Soviet citizens are not aware—or do not admit—that a Jewish problem exists, saying that all nationalities have equal rights in the USSR.

¹ Note from 2009: I carried on a lively correspondence after the Exhibition, with people from many parts of the USSR, until all contact was cut off after the U2 incident in 1960. Appendix 3—to be expanded later—contains some of those letters.

In the supermarket exhibit people are very impressed by attractive packaging. (The packaging here is uniform and drab.) They like the convenience of a supermarket and frozen goods. They think that we eat only concentrated and canned goods, which don’t taste good and which have no vitamins. I assure them that we eat frozen foods, and that our fresh-frozen products taste as good as fresh products, and that vitamins are preserved.

When someone asks if our firms are private and I say that they are, this is often followed by the proud response, *U nas nyet!* [Not here!]

People want me to tell Americans that they want peace. Why do we surround them with bases? When I tell them we are afraid of them, they are surprised. I say we don’t know what they are going to do, as we remember things that happened under Stalin and Beria. Few defend Stalin or Beria, admitting that mistakes happened, but insisting that they know better now.

They are particularly incensed about the “Week of Enslaved Peoples” that has been proclaimed in America. I agree with them that this is, in general a rather stupid thing to do, and especially unwise at the time of the Exhibition.

When I ask them about their newspapers, they are hard put to find a difference between them. One person told
me: We have four truths: *Pravda*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Pionerskaya Pravda*, and *Moskovskaya Pravda* [*pravda* means “truth”]. I’ve been told that Soviets don’t need to read the capitalist press: “It’s not objective. Ours is true.”

I’ve been gratified with responses to my Russian. In general, no one believes that I’ve studied Russian for only two years. In general, they all agree that their language instruction is poor. After many years in gymnasium (secondary school) or university, few can speak. More can understand. Conversational language instruction is apparently not employed. Criticism of their own language instruction is common. They are especially pleased with my pronunciation, and often call out *molodets!*—an expression of praise [something like “bravo,” literally “young guy”]. Of course, they all ask about my background. Am I a student? Do I receive a scholarship? (Many expect that I do, as they do; others think that education is terribly expensive in the States, and that only the rich can receive a higher education. I think my explanations of the scholarship system, based on a both ability and need, are valuable to them. By the way, their scholarships too are based on need and ability, and the well-do-to receive little or nothing.) What does my father do? How much does he earn? (Again, surprise.) Where do we live? Any brothers? And so on. I’m already growing a little weary of my autobiography, as I repeat it at least twenty times a day. It’s interesting, in return, to ask visitors about their specialties and backgrounds. Many come from far away. Their salaries vary. Their affiliations vary. But almost all of them strongly support their system and express satisfaction and hopes for a bright future.

Their impression of America is, however, discouraging. They are convinced that they know more about us than we do about them. This is, as far as I’m concerned, completely false. I’ve found very little here unexpected, after a background of reading, courses, briefing materials, and the Soviet press. They would be amazed by America. Their press has prepared them to expect slums, lynchings, bread lines, and violence. It’s maddening to see the propagandists speak out of both sides of their mouths. “Love the Americans!” “The Americans are bastards!” Of course, they rationalize this by saying, “Love the American people, who are fine and wonderful and want to be friends with you; but hate the capitalist-imperialist government, which oppresses them and wants to make war.” They are convinced that they have democracy, although they are willing to call it *diktatura*—the dictatorship of the proletariat. They are convinced that the Party, the state, and the people are one. And they can’t be blamed for their convictions. All day long, every day, this is poured into them. The parks are full of slogans, the radios play, the presses print. Sokolniki is a lovely park of “culture and rest,” with band shells, theater, many restaurants and outdoor stands, fountains, gardens, amusement rides, and dance-floors. But everywhere are the slogans: *Da zdravstvuyet nerushimoe edinenie partii i naroda!* [Hail the indestructible unity of the party and the people!] *Da zdravstvuyet nasha sovetskaya rodina!* [Hail our Soviet motherland!] *Slava KPSS!* [Glory to the CPSU! (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)] *Vpered k pobede kommunizma!* [Onward to the victory of communism!] *Da zdravstvuyet mir i druzhba mezhdu narodami!* [Hail peace and friendship between peoples!] *Vpered k kommunizme—svetloe budushchee vsego chelovechestva!* [Onward to communism—the bright future of all of humanity!]


The park itself is lovely. Flowers are sold everywhere, and there are hundreds of little outdoor stands selling books, candy, presents, toys, and all manner of souvenirs. As a matter of fact, there such little stands all over the city—a good way to avoid unemployment.

August 5

On the way to the site, coming back from lunch, I was approached by a young man who wanted to buy my clothes. Another guide had been approached on duty, with the request to sell his shirt on the spot. When he explained that it would be impossible for him to work the rest of the day in his undershirt, the Russian’s reply was *Biznes yest biznes* [business is business].

Today I was approached by a fellow, obviously at my post, obviously in Soviet dress, but speaking perfect New York English. His story was a sad one. He was born in New York, of Armenian parents. After the war, in 1947, when he was 14, they decided to return to Soviet Armenia. He didn’t want to go, but they took him. When he was 16, he took out—according to law—his Soviet passport, thereby becoming a Soviet citizen. In 1949, he and a friend tried to sneak across the Turkish border. They were caught and spent five years in prison. Now he works in a factory, is very bitter, and would like to leave. But this is impossible. He stared hungrily at the American products and asked me if I would find him some American publications. I came across a...
copy of *Time*, which I gave to him. He was very grateful.

A group of Hungarian students passed through, obviously not looking Russian. They were better dressed and a girl had a short Western haircut. From talking to students I've learned that a dormitory room costs 15 rubles per month, with an average monthly scholarship of 350-400 rubles (compared to a reported average wage of 800 rubles). Students say that the scholarship isn’t sufficient and that they rely on help from parents. As a rule, they don’t buy books but use the library. Attendance at lectures is compulsory—usually 36 hours per week (six hours per day, six days per week). Marxism-Leninism is studied in all fields, four times per week, for four-and-a-half years. They say there’s a 4:1 competition to get into a university.

I’ve been gathering some standard food prices from shops (in rubles):

- meat, 1 kg – 12.00-15.00
- butter, 1 kg – 27.50
- sugar, 1 kg – 9.40
- eggs, 10 – 7.00
- oranges, 1 kg – 11.00-14.00
- onions, 1 kg – 1.50
- dark bread, 1 kg – 1.20
- white bread, 1 kg – 2.00

Several meetings with a charming, 18-year-old *Komsomol’nitsa* [girl member of Young Communist League] have convinced me even more firmly that the most valuable part of the Exhibition is the personal contacts that it engenders. She approached me with the idea that everything I would say would be false. This girl had never met a foreigner before, let alone an American. She grew up on a kolkhoz in Siberia, east of the Urals, 150 kilometers from the nearest town. She had just come to Moscow, preparing to enter the University in the fall as a philosophy student. She plans to either teach philosophy or direct a *Dom Kul’tury* [House of Culture]. We talked for a long time, and she was amazed to find that we too are people, with many of the same interests and strivings as people who live in her country. At first she didn’t believe the things I told her, but, hearing similar accounts from other guides, she’s beginning to realize that there is more than one side to the story and that nothing is all black or white. This has been a most gratifying experience, and points to the value of increased contacts, especially of students, but also of tourists (provided they aren’t “ugly Americans”).

Sometimes I get into a conversation about Karl Marx and people are surprised that we read Marx. “You read Mark; we read Marx... Then what’s the difference?”

I’m often asked about my nationality. The answer “American” is never satisfactory in this country, as nationality [natsional’nost’] means to them what “national origin” means to us. The answer “Jew” often brings forth a “me too” from someone in the crowd. The other day I met a Jew from Leningrad and spoke Yiddish with him. He told me of the well-known phenomenon of the death of *Yiddishkeit* and the indifference of the youth. Then a Soviet bystander asked, in Russian, what language we were speaking. My *Landsman* answered, in Russian, that we had been speaking German. When I asked him, again in Yiddish, why he hadn’t told the truth, he said, *M’hot es nisht lieb, az m’redt of yidish* [They don’t like it if you talk Yiddish].

A medical student met one of the guides and said that he had written an anti-Communist article. After two months in jail, he was told that he couldn’t finish school. He bargained with the Director and was told that he could get his diploma if he repeated the last year. He did so, but the Director has been transferred and now he doesn’t know what will happen.

Although all of the services that we encounter are from the government,
private English lessons and some private medical consultations are said to exist.

One night I took a taxi back to the hotel from the Exhibition. The driver didn’t know I was an American and asked me if I had seen the Exhibition. He thinks America is a very cultured and technically advanced country, and that the U.S. and the USSR should trade and have peace. He’s sorry that the wartime friendship has disappeared.

**August 8 – Red Square**

[2009: These are not my photos, of course. I’ve included these musings of a twenty-year-old as a reminder that the Stalin era was still part of the world of the 1959 Exhibition. Stalin had died in 1953 and was denounced by Khrushchev in 1956. His body was removed from the Mausoleum in 1961. Lenin is still there in 2009.]

I walk along the Kremlin wall, within which lie the ashes of the Soviet greats, reading the names of the famous and the infamous. I pass between the wall and the Mausoleum, look out on Red Square, and descend into the tomb, down the cold stairs into the depths of the crypt, passing soldier-guards frozen like statues. Finally I enter the large, dimly-lit room, the ceiling ringed with symbolic lightning bolts: elektrifikatsiya. And there lie the two men, side by side, in glass cases, illuminated by an eerie red-orange light. Side by side in death, as they were not in life. Lenin is waxy. Stalin looks old, his hands strong and wrinkled, his double-chin sagging on his breast, a tired and determined look on his face. Lenin looks more kindly, peaceful. There is a world of difference between the faces of the two men. Lenin kind and wise, intelligent, fine features. Stalin hard and cold, peasant-like in appearance. And as I pass these faces, so familiar from photographs, I find it hard to grasp that these are the actual, material faces from which all of those photographs were made. That these men, who did so much and who mean so much for history, are here, now, before me. And I am shaken by the leveling power of death, which has left these two driving and driven men motionless, now ineffectual remnants, under the surface of the Moscow square, surrounded by the soil of Mother Russia.
August 10

Our work schedule has (mercifully) changed. I'll be working only 40 hours per week, with one full day off and two half-days free in addition, one morning and one evening. I’ve been rotated between the supermarket (3 days), plastic-cup machine (1 day), and home-workshop (1 day). The plastic-cup machine is the worst for me, though the visitors like to see a machine in action and enjoy asking technical questions about its operation. The machine makes 300 little ice-cream cups in an hour, each with USA stamped on the bottom. At first we gave them out as souvenirs, and they were very popular. But there isn’t much room around the exhibit and the crush of visitors reaching for cups became dangerous. Rightfully, the Soviet police has asked us not to distribute any more cups at the exhibit. But people still stand and beg for them. It’s not enough to explain the situation and tell them of the orders of their militsiya; they argue that the policeman isn’t watching so it’s OK to give out cups. Each person considers himself an exception and asks for “just one” cup for himself. They have amazing patience and will often wait and beg an hour or more. This is a really discouraging place to work!

The supermarket, on the other hand, has developed into a very pleasant place to work. The signs I posted have solved most of the usual questions, and I can stand back and converse with the crowd. A microphone makes the job easier, especially since people stand on the stairwell above and look down, along with the crowds facing me on three sides. Of course, I’m still repeating my autobiography all day long, but the questions still vary. The crowds are, as a rule, very friendly. They’re impressed with my Russian, and many come up to me afterwards and tell me that I explained America very well. I guess I have the advantage of being an obviously young student. It was a gratifying experience, the other night, when an old man came to me after closing time and told me he had stood for a half-day at my exhibit and listened, and that I explained things better than anyone else. He said, however, that I tended to be a little “tendentious,” but I explained to him that it probably seemed so because he had read the Soviet press all his life, which tends to exaggerate in the opposite direction.

Since the exchange of visits between Khrushchev and Eisenhower has been announced, the atmosphere has changed markedly. The papers have cut down and almost discontinued the anti-exhibition articles, and the crowds have become much more friendly, the numbers of agitators decreasing. Whereas before the announcement, the question, “Why do you surround us with bases?” was usually responded to by a chorus of “Yes, why?” now this question is met with opposition from the crowd. The common response to such questions has become “This is a peaceful exhibition—don’t bother a young student with such questions” or “Why go into that now?” The press is now filled with mir i druzhba (peace and friendship) and there are great hopes for the solution of many problems in the exchange of visits.2

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2 Note from 2009: The hoped-for exchange of visits in 1960 never took place. An American U2 spy plane was shot down over the Soviet Union and the thaw was over.
August 11

There are times when you want to tell them to go to hell—when you’re sick of explaining America to people who won’t or can’t understand. The sarcastic, “knowing” smile of disbelief becomes maddening, and then you don’t give a damn what they think of your country. The occasional agitator drives you to frustrated fury and the desire to curse and turn away. But then comes one of those lovely, long, friendly conversations, mixed with philosophy and an understanding exchange of facts and opinions—the kind of conversation that ends with thank-you’s and handshakes—and the glow following such an hour or even hour-and-a-half obliterates the previous despair and disillusionment. It’s all an experience you wouldn’t give up for anything, and you realize that, whatever the differences, it’s good to meet people and try to live together on the planet, however strange or unreasonable, friendly or hostile, warm or cold they may seem.

I found out today that they have a “childless tax” of 6% on all males above 20, married or unmarried, who are not fathers. And I was told that one-half of one percent of income goes to the union, which looks after kindergartens, summer rest-houses, medicines for the chronically ill, and so on. But they hope to be rid of all taxes by the end of the current seven-year plan.

The other day, one lady visitor thought that our posted prices were not accurate. The other visitors all turned on her, righteously indignant, and assured her that if they weren’t accurate they wouldn’t have been posted up there, in plain view, by the Americans. Such contrary attitudes!

I keep getting little gifts. In addition to the znachki (little buttons and pins), of which I must have several dozen already, I’ve received two books as gifts, both of them biographies of Lenin. This seems to be a popular gift. It’s presented in white paper wrapping, with a znachok attached. The inscriptions are long and flowery with ardent hopes for mir i druzhba, and with an address and the desire to correspond. This is a very warm and moving gesture. In addition, I’ve given and traded postcards (they always want postcards of America to be autographed) and ball-point pens.

The other day I was, I think, “picked up” by a good-looking young student—a girl—at the Exhibition. (One never knows whether these encounters are genuine.) [2009: There were some seemingly genuine little “summer romances.”] She is 22, studying English at the Institute of Foreign Languages. Her father is an engineer. They have a car and a dacha, and live in a three-room apartment in Moscow—obviously not typical, and it didn’t take long to get her to admit that all do not live equally in the Soviet Union. The big complaint in language instruction is that very little spoken practice is given. Though she studied English for six years, she refused to speak, saying that I speak better Russian in two years than her six years of English. The emphasis here seems to be on reading and translating. Music is very popular among the youth, but many of them prefer jazz to classical music, some saying that they are already tired of classical music because there is so much of it available. Some jazz can be heard here in Moscow—as a matter of fact, a jazz orchestra is performing now in the city.
Today an Italian interpreter—that is, a Russian who interprets Italian—took me out to lunch. He claims that spoken language training for interpreters is good. The Intourist guides certainly do speak good English. He said that the competition to study English is the most trying and difficult, and has concluded that theirs is probably the most difficult of the European languages. One girl said to me, *My sami muchimsya s grammatikoy!* [We ourselves are tormented by grammar]. The interpreter would like to read Italian books, but says they are very hard to get. Newspapers are available, but the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow publishes little in Italian. He has not yet been to Italy but hopes to get there, saying that now and then interpreters are sent to the countries of their language for practice. He has also studied Italian history, geography, and culture. We talked a little about nationalities. As far as he is concerned, no real problem exists, although there may be some friction between regional groups, as between Armenians and Georgians. But he claims that all have equal opportunity to jobs and education. He knew little about the Jews, and could not explain the absence of theater and newspaper, having heard but slightly of the Moscow Yiddish Theater. He thought there was a Jewish rayon [region] in the Far East, where Yiddish schools exist (that is, Birobidzhan), but otherwise does not interest himself with the question of nationalities.

**August 13**

Yesterday evening a meeting took place at the House of the Union of Soviet writers—a meeting between some of the American guides and members of the Soviet literary world. There were about thirty Americans and fifteen Soviets. On their side there were poets and writers of prose, including editors, critics, translators, and teachers. Among them were some famous names of Soviet letters; among us were students and teachers of Russian and Soviet literature, and non-specialists, like me. We had arranged for the meeting in advance, having exchanged a list of written questions with the Soviets, receiving about fifteen questions from them and giving them a like number of our own.

We came to the lovely old house at about 7:00 in the evening. It was still sunny as we gathered in the pleasant courtyard, waiting for our hosts by the statue of L. N. Tolstoy, surrounded by plots of flowers and sanded paths. The house, painted in the popular yellow and white of Old Moscow, had belonged to the Rostovs of *War and Peace*. Soon our hosts met us and we went into their club, settling in a big, comfortable room, around a long table covered with a green baize cloth.

First we were greeting by the Chairman of the Writers’ Union, Aleksei Surkov, a conservative ideologue wearing the pin of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in his lapel. He greeted us very warmly, with almost dramatic smiles of pleasure and broad, sweeping gestures. His opening message conveyed great hope. He referred to the coming exchange of visits between Khrushchev and Eisenhower, saying, “we are both tired of the cold war.” After stressing the value of continued exchange, he reminded us of the suffering of Russian in World War II, referring to six civilian relatives who perished in the siege of Leningrad. Regrettting that *mezhdu nami ochen’ mnogo disinformatsii lezhit* [between us there is a lot of disinformation], he threw open the meeting, following an
order of “absolute democracy”—a one-
to-one exchange of questions. He
addressed us as future colleagues and
noted that many of our questions
were very academic. He reminded us
that it was not absolutely necessary
to bring up Pasternak and Dudintsev
[authors he had worked against].

I won’t go over all of the
questions here, but will continue from
my notes, including only those points
I thought interesting to record at the
time. We had the first question, and
asked about the study of English in
the Soviet Union. Here are some of
the answers:

In the schools (pre-university)
of the RSFSR, the following languages
are taught, beginning with the fifth
grade: English (45%), German (35%),
French (25%), and also Chinese,
Hindi, and Urdu. In Moscow, 55% of
the pupils study English. There are
nine schools in the RSFSR in which,
beginning with the fourth grade,
English is taught, and in which such
subjects as English and American
history, geography, and literature are
taught completely in the English
language. There are English language
evenings and papers.

In the area of higher education,
the law requires of every student a
speaking knowledge of one foreign
language and the ability to translate
technical material. In fact, it is not
always such, as conversational
training in foreign languages is
admittedly weak. special institutions
for training of teachers and specialists
in English.

The idea of giving scholarships
for study abroad, in the country of the
language specialized in, is a recent
one, having started only last year, and
is more widespread in exchanges with
“friendly” countries than with others.
If the family income exceeds 800
rubles per month, scholarships are
not given to students (now referring to
the scholarship system in general.)
Students receiving our equivalent of
the grade of D do not receive
scholarships. There is a change in
stipend for married students. The
sum of the scholarship is determined
by the dean of the faculty.

It was next the turn of the
Soviets to direct a question to us.
They asked about the publication of
Soviet works in the U.S., and received
a fairly complete listing from one of
the experts who works in the book
section of the Exhibition.

They couldn’t answer our
question about American works
studied at the Moscow University,
since the professors were all out of
town on vacation, but promised to
deliver an answer to us before we
leave Moscow. On the other hand,
from the experiences of some of our
students, we gave them a thorough
answer on the Soviet works studied in
Russian Studies courses at Harvard,
Columbia, and other American
universities.

The Soviets then gave us a
detailed listing of all the major
American authors translated into the
Russian language, starting with
Benjamin Franklin and early Russian
translations, and bringing us up to
the present. There was too much to
take down completely, but the
following is what I caught in my
notes:

- Benjamin Franklin and Tom
  Paine were translated during
  their lifetimes.
- American Romanticism: Washington Irving was
  translated during his lifetime,
  and has been recently re-
  issued. James Fennimore
  Cooper became a Russian
classic and, as far as I can tell,
  enjoys a greater popularity now
  in the USSR than in his native
land. Reference was made to Cooper’s influence on Lermontov, through a famous conversation between Lermontov and Belinski.

- Of the naturalists, Thoreau was, and still is popular. *Walden* is read but, as far as we could ascertain, his “Essay on Civil Disobedience” has never been translated. Longfellow is, of course, very famous, especially through Bunin’s masterful translation of *Hiawatha*. There is very little of Emerson in Russian.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe enjoys a popularity almost non-existent at home. Poe is popular, there being many translations of “The Raven.” Hawthorne was mentioned.

- *Moby Dick* is considered too difficult, and is left to specialists in English, but *Typee* is available.

- Whitman is widely known.

- Mark Twain enjoys great popularity.

- Dreiser has become classic in the Soviet Union, with *The American Tragedy* available on almost every book-stand. *Tragic America* is also known. In general, the Soviets are impressed with the literature of the 1920’s. According to the theory of Deming Brown (with which they strongly disagree), the importance of this period has been exaggerated in the Soviet Union, probably due to the social content of its works, enjoying a popularity here not commensurate with its importance in America.

- Saroyan is now translated. There is little of Thomas Wolfe—only several late short stories. Salinger has not been translated. There is some Faulkner. T. S. Eliot has been little translated, and is not popular.

- In general, something like 230 American works, if I understood correctly, have been translated into 30 languages of the Soviet Union.

- Unfortunately, there has been little of American poetry appearing in Russian translation, just as there is little of Russian and Soviet poetry in American translations. Both sides regretted this incomplete exchange. There is one slim volume for the thirties, now out of print, including such names as Sandburg, Frost, Masters, Fletcher, Millay, Jeffers, and MacLeish—a collection of twentieth century American poetry. Wallace Stevens has not yet been translated: He is considered too difficult. No attempt has been made to deal with e. e. cummings. (“We don’t have all of those punctuation marks in Russian!”) In general, they said of American poetry, “Some we will not translate. We will not translate those poems which are riddles or grimaces.” Only “serious” American poets will be given attention. Sandburg, for example, is well-liked. (*Takoe litso Ameriki priyatno smotret’—ochen’ priyatno.* “That kind of face of America is pleasant to look at—very pleasant.”)

The next question from our side turned out to be the most successful—from an unplanned point of view—and one of the most
interesting parts of our meeting. We asked if any discussion had been devoted to the question of what literature will be like under communism—i.e., under the ultimate World Communism towards which present theory and practice are striving. We were answered by the poet S. I. Kersanov (“Seven Days of the Week”). He was very pleased with the question, and I will attempt to paraphrase his answer: “I liked this question. We Communists always think of the future and look to it; the future is more important than the present for us. And I am glad that you young people have understood this. We have no horoscope, but we know that literature then will not be like present literature. All of our life here consists in filling plans for the future, and this question of the future of literature shows that we are thinking of a New Man. The American press should understand this. In order to answer this question, we must understand what this New Man will be like, and, in order to do so, we must know something of the conditions in which he will live. As Marxists, we know that man’s activities depend on the material surrounding in which he acts. We are now preparing the conditions in which the New Man will live. A change to a six-hour day, five-day week will give two free days and two free hours each day to the worker. This will give him more time to read. A free higher education for all will create a more astute reader. All will have five years of university education. Thus the new reader will be free to read, without difficulty, the most complex and deep works of literature; will be capable of understanding the most beautiful works of art. Our literature must become deeper and more beautiful in order to fit the New Man whom we are creating.

“Western critics and opponents do not correctly understand Premier Khrushchev’s statement about the necessity of a closer tie between literature and life. This doesn’t mean that literature should be a dull reflection of daily activities. Literature is connected with the development and expansion of life, and is a humanizing element. It must be closer to the feelings and experiences of the common man, but must also be subtle. Communism being the best condition under which man can live, literature under Communism must be the highest form of literature created by man.

“Political disagreement among Soviet writers is also not correctly understood by the West. This is not a sign of dissatisfaction with the order, because no one disagrees about the present. It must be remembered that the future is the most important thing, and the only disagreement that exists is in the attempt to correctly understand the future and the course which it will take.

“The real writer is always a free personality. The New York Times says that we Soviet writers follow the party line and turn out propaganda, and that in America this is not the case, that in America the writer is free. This is not true. The writer is truly free only here, because he is working for the better world of the future.”

The poet was then interrupted by one of the American guides, who had recently seen a performance of the play Zolotoy Telenok [Golden Calf] by Ilf and Petrov. He quoted one of the characters as saying: “This country is building socialism, and I don’t want to. I have nowhere to go.” Undoubtedly, argued our guide, even under Communism there will be some people who “don’t want.” Will they be
allowed to write books and publish them? Will they be allowed to talk? Or what will happen to them? The immediate answer was that it would be “idiocy” not to want to build Communism. This is the same as not wanting to eat or drink.

This answer did not satisfy the Americans, not believing in the absolute validity of any system, and the conversation quickly left the planned question sheets and became a heated argument on freedoms of the writer and the speaker. Our Soviet hosts argue: “Neither you nor we have complete freedom. The question is, who has less.” Almost with glee, our chairman said, smiling broadly, “At last we’ve come to the real question! This is the chief question, and it is a very serious question. Man cannot be free in society. A man living outside of society is a result of social disorganization.”

We spoke, of course, of Pasternak, skirting the subject but trying to make the point that, in our opinion, freedom is lacking if the writer cannot publish as he wishes. The Soviets, in reply, spoke of Howard Fast, claiming that he had no freedom because he had to publish at his own expense—no one would publish his works for him. He had, in their terms, freedom to starve. They were unimpressed when one of our guides, a personal friend of Fast’s, said that he lives very well and had made a good deal of money from his personal publications. Continuing, the Soviet writers said: “We are free because all have the right to do what is correct. We have internal freedom. An American is not free to think as he wishes; for example, if he is an atheist, his neighbors will look down on him. We exist to abolish the state, hence we are free.”

The conversation followed a tortuous course, with both reasonable and unreasonable statements from both sides—of course, the effect heightened by the point of view of the listener. Our hosts reminded us of the vast improvement in the Soviet Union since 1917, in spite of the Western charges of totalitarianism. They appealed to “the instinct of self-preservation,” which demands that our two nations come closer together and reach some sort of agreement for the preservation of life.

Kersanov said: Posmitrite nas kak lyudei—kak poetov, kotorye stroyat obraz budushchego . . . Poety li my, mechtaya o novom obshchestve . . . ili nyet? [Look upon us as people—as poets, who are building an image of the future . . . Are we poets, dreaming of a new society . . . or not?]

In reference to Pasternak, who was only briefly touched upon, it was said that his work was “a fantasy of the past,” while the work of contemporary Soviet writer is “a fantasy of the future.” (Fantasia is a broad term in Russian, referring also the genre of science fiction, in addition to the usual connotation of the word.)

Referring to the importance of the collective, Kersanov said that what is wanted now is a kul’t lichnosti [cult of personality] and not a kul’t odnoy lichnosti [cult of a single personality].

The conversation reached a sort of peak when we turned to Voice of America and the freedom to listen to all sorts of opinions. Kersanov said: “We jam the Voice of America because it is stupid, false, and insulting.” But another speaker went further. He said that he had listened to broadcasts of Hitler’s speeches during the war, and had also listened to VOA, and, as far as he was concerned, Hitler had “a more liberal tone” than VOA.
At this point, both sides realized that it was time to terminate the quarrel and return to the peaceful, literary theme that had brought us together in Moscow, in what was probably the first meeting between a group of American students (and, at that, some of the cream of the crop in the Russian field) and representatives of the highest organ of the Soviet literary world. It was already late and most of the questions still lay before us. As good hosts, our Soviet friends invited us to return in a week and follow through the rest of the questions in an orderly fashion, leaving some time at the end to follow “the free-for-all” discussion which was obviously of great interest to both sides.

We left with an appeal for reason and time to listen to presentation and discussion from both Americans and Soviets, and warmly thanked our hosts for their hospitality and the favor they had done for us in arranging these meetings. They left us with an appeal not to give their literature over into the hands of “people who lost their homeland [rodinu] in 1917.” “We are two mature nations,” they said, “in whose hands rests the future of mankind. Please deal with our works objectively.”

Parting in a friendly mood, we looked forward to the next meeting and the continuation of our discussion.

August 18

I rode over to the second meeting with the Union of Soviet Writers, and had a delightful conversation with the taxi driver. We covered the usual theme of mir i druzhba. At first he took me for Czech (better-dressed person speaking fairly good Russian), and the usual molodets! came out when I revealed that I was American. He was eager to see our cars, which all Russians praise so highly, and I gave him a ticket to the Exhibition. He was, like many, surprised to find out that we have pensions and unemployment insurance and free public education and scholarships. Many Soviets think that all of these services and expenses are borne by the individual American citizen. He stressed the “all people are basically alike” theme, urging coexistence. He said that a people who sees placards for peace everywhere can’t be easily turned to warlike activity. (Many Soviets ask why we don’t have placards and ads for peace and friendship all over, and why we don’t have many demonstrations and mass parades. This is rather difficult to explain to them, and I haven’t found a really satisfactory explanation yet, except for the difference in national customs.)


The other night I went to an outdoor performance of the Leningrad Ballet. The theater is in one of those many wonderful Moscow parks, with a boating pond, theaters, restaurants, and so on. There was no orchestra, only piano accompaniment, and an occasional violin. It was a nice change—very peaceful sort of show with many short numbers and no complete ballet. I went there with a charming Russian girl—a Komosmol'ntsa, like most of the girls I've met—and one of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen. This, of course, made the evening even more pleasant.

**August 19**

An interlude away from work. The restful calm of late afternoon. I'm sitting on an ancient bench in the park behind the Ostankino Palace—the old palace of the Sheremetevs. On the other end of the bench, to the right, sits an old man, fingering his beard, his gnarled fingers intertwined with the gray and white hair of the beard. High forehead, Roman nose, bald head. And on all the benches sit old people. Deeply wrinkled babushki speak to each other in thin little voices or sit and stare at the overgrown paths and the weeds in the flower beds. I wonder what they are thinking—these old ones—in the fallen atmosphere of their fallen past. Big black ravens, white doves, and little sparrows fly about. They perch on the heads of the row of stone busts, Greek-like, lining the sanded paths; or they line the eaves of the palace, nestling in the big coat of arms. As they fly back and forth in the light of the dying sun, an old woman plods wearily by, looking at me quizzically. In the background is heard the murmur of the old women, the buzzing of flies, and the birds—their chirping, their flapping of wings. This near silence is broken intermittently by the cries of little children, running amidst the weeds, pointing at the statues and busts. The old palace looks on. Its rose paint is beginning to fade. The contrasting white pillars and niches with statues are streaked with the grey of many rains. The old move slowly, the young run quickly, and the birds fly constantly back and forth.

**August 21**

Evening break at the Exhibition. I just talked to a girl who had read Dr. Zhivago. When I expressed surprise, she simply answered that it was possible to get the book in the Soviet Union. Apparently she had read the University of Michigan Russian edition, because when I mentioned that my own University had published the book in Russian she seemed to know what I was talking about. She wasn't especially impressed with the novel itself, but likes Pasternak's poetry. She said that there is much untruth in the novel, and that it applies to the thirties, and not to the present. Nevertheless, she said, it's not harmful, and—as far as she is concerned—the narod [the people, das Volk] has enough “political literacy” to read the book without danger. But, she said, there were many better works that deserve the time and attention of Soviet publishers.

I'm always surprised when Soviet visitors tell me that they live better than Americans—that the standard of living of the Soviet worker is higher than that of the American worker. Very often they are...
contradicted by other visitors, but some of them are adamant. Often these remarks are silenced if I ask: “If you really live better than we do, then why do you have to ‘overtake and surpass’ us?” But they often have an answer for this argument, saying that they have to “overtake and surpass” the U.S. in the area of technology and industry, but that the average standard of living in the USSR is already higher than in the USA. All I can do is turn to other visitors and to another topic of conversation.

On the other hand, the other day one visitor asked me: “Are all of these products always available? Can a worker go into a supermarket any time and buy any of these products, or are they only on display here for us?” When I told him that these goods are in fact available all year round, and in any store, he seemed impressed, and murmured: “It’s not always that way here.”

Often in talking about our problems, I concede that we don’t have—or do we claim to have—a perfect system, just as they don’t have a perfect system in the USSR. Surprisingly enough, this simple statement often meets with harsh opposition. Many claim that they do have a perfect system. Others say that it is now almost perfect, but will be perfect when they reach Communism. As far as some are concerned, they will already be in the stage of Communism with the completion of the current seven-year-plan. It seems that many Soviets believe they will have overtaken the U.S. at this point. In addition, there will be no more taxes. On the other hand, some argue that even Communism won’t be a perfect society—that there will always be some personal strife between individuals, that society will always change and strive for improvement. This is, of course, outside of strict Marxist theory, as I point out to them.

They like it when I talk to them using Marxist terms, and when I show some knowledge of Marxism. For example, when they ask about our taxes, I often tell them that we have a progressive income tax, “just like Marx proposed.” They all laugh. They laugh at another point too. I tell them that in our universities—in certain political science and philosophy courses—we read Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev. They always burst out laughing and say to each other: Dazhe Khrushchev! [Even Khrushchev!] They never explain when I ask them why they find this so funny. One woman said, “We’re happy that you read Khrushchev.” Another found it funny to hear him treated along with the “classics.” I like to tell them that we read the speech from the closed meeting of the XXth Session of the CPSU [Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin], which has not yet been printed in full in the USSR. This in reply to their charge that we don’t print Khrushchev’s speeches in our papers. I tell them that his speech appeared in complete form in the New York Times. Some people told me they had heard the speech read out loud in their factories, though it hasn’t been printed in full. (According to Nixon, for every word of Eisenhower’s printed in their press, we print 100 words of Khrushchev in our press.)

Every day at work some little things happen to make the day worthwhile. For example, today some little boys approached me for znachki. I had none, but reached into my pocket for Lincoln pennies, which I always carry with me, and gave some to them. They were very happy and wanted to trade Soviet coins for the
pennies. Well, I accepted what they gave me, and they got the idea that I wanted to build up a collection of all the denominations of Soviet coins. They handed me everything except the 2- and 3-kopeck pieces, and promised to come back tomorrow and bring them to me. This evening, as I was on my way out, they ran up to me and pressed about a half-dozen 2- and 3-kopeck coins into my hand, thanking me again for the pennies.

When I talk to little children I find out about the standard subjects they study in school. They all report that they’re happy to be Pioneers. Little children don’t know anything about America, as they don’t study it in school. Some told me that they knew the U.S. wanted peace. They’re dying for chewing gum and little souvenirs. And they’re delighted with Lincoln pennies.

**August 25**

I just had a fascinating conversation with three schoolboys about their studies of Soviet history. Last week I bought a textbook of the history of the USSR for the fourth grade of primary school. The text started with prehistory and worked up to the present, going through the death of Lenin and World War II—but nowhere in the whole book was the name of Stalin mentioned once. The book was published this year, in 1959. Apparently it’s possible to complete liquidate an important historical figure if he’s hard to explain to children. The text merely commented that after Lenin’s death the Soviet Union continued along the path he had shown. The War was designated only as the “Great Fatherland War” or “Great Patriotic War” (Bol’shaya Otechestvennaya Voyna). The only mention of America and the Allies was in one sentence about the end of the war. Soviet troops went to free Germany, and there they met American and British troops who had come from the West.

I spoke about this one afternoon with a girl in her twenties. She explained that Stalin had made mistakes, and it was better not to mention him. Arguments about truth and historical objectivity had no effect upon her. She merely concluded that I didn’t correctly understand their system.

My conversation with the boys—probably around 12 or 13 years old—started when I asked them if they studied anything about America in school. They said that they learned that life in America was very good—for those who have money—but was miserable for the unemployed. They had never heard about unemployment compensation, and when I explained the system to them they said, “Of course, that’s very good...if it’s true.” Then I told them about this textbook, and asked them if they had learned anything about Stalin in school. They said that he had worked together with Lenin, but later had made some mistakes. They weren’t surprised that he wasn’t mentioned in the text, but added that he must have been a great man, or else he wouldn’t be lying alongside Lenin in the Mausoleum. They found it difficult to explain to me what “cult of personality” [kul’t lichnosti] means—something like one man wanting to make himself loved, portraits and statues all over, and so on. But it took a while to get this out of them. They said that there were other bad men in their history: Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Beria. Beria, they said, was shot. Under him it often happened that if people went away on vacation, they lost their apartments on return. This also happened if they
moved without *perepiska* [notifying the authorities of a change in residence]. That law has been removed, they said. One boy said that his grandmother had gone on a trip and that when she returned her apartment had been moved from the fourth floor to a different one on the first floor. They had also heard of Trotsky—but that was “a long time ago.” He had been a Bolshevik and worked with the Revolution, they said, but later turned Menshevik and “went to the Tsar.” When I pointed out that the Tsar had already been assassinated, they weren’t sure what had happened. They said: “Trotsky was a long time ago—in 1917.”

They were very friendly with me. They’ve been to the Exhibition three or four times already—at least—and like it: “If America is *really* like this it must be OK.” They were delighted with the chewing gum I gave them. (Everyone asks for it—even old ladies. They picture this as a national custom, and have no idea what it is and why we chew it. They just want to see what chewing gum looks like. They seem to imagine it as some kind of addictive habit—“like smoking.”)

Yesterday I had the opportunity to visit a Soviet journalist in his home. He and his wife and sixteen-year-old son live in one room, roughly eight feet by twenty feet, if I estimated correctly by eye. There was one bed, a couch-bed, a wardrobe, a desk, two bookcases, and, in the center of the room, a round table with three chairs. This is a huge new housing project, built within the last few years. It already looked at least ten or fifteen years old, but seemed to be comfortable. The project is built around several nice gardens, in which the residents can work, a playground, a basketball court, and garages. The area, like most of Moscow, is quite clean. The elevators work quickly, though they are small. Each unit has twelve floors. In the elevator are such signs as: “Ride the elevator: it is more comfortable and better for your health.” “Don’t let children ride the elevator by themselves.” “Let children into the elevator first; then follow them and close the door.” These signs reminded me of a ubiquitous sign: “Honor the work of the cleaning men: Throw garbage into the baskets.” In general, there are many signs all over—propaganda slogans and signs forbidding or encouraging all manner of activity. At any rate, this dwelling had been recently build, and they were glad to be living in it, although they, naturally, complained about its size. There are three rooms in the apartment, with a family living in each room and sharing the kitchen and bathroom.

My journalist friend turned out to be an excellent musician and singer. After a healthy lunch of cheese, ham, smoked fish, and bread and butter—healthily accompanied by vodka—he pulled out his accordion, and we sang some of the old Russian folksongs that I so love. The conversation we had was indeed very
interesting, touching on a large range of topics. Though it was Sunday, his wife had to work. Her boss needed her for something extra. They aren’t paid time-and-a-half for overtime, and you have to go if you’re called.

I was just interrupted by one of our Russian secretaries here in the office of the Exhibition Administration. She just wanted to comment on the fact that so many of our men know how to type, and wondered where we learned. And so I explained to her that one can study typing in school, and that in college there are many papers, and they usually must be typewritten, and so on. She kept remarking: *Nu, eto ochen’ zdorovo!* This is an expression of praise. And, of course, she went on to add that she had heard that soon this would start *u nas tozhe* [here too]!

**August 29**

A popular exhibit is the IBM RAMAC 305 computer. Visitors can select one of hundreds of questions about America and receive a Russian printout of the answer (7” x 12”). Here’s an example [next page] of a question about rock-and-roll: “American rock and roll has its origin in traditional jazz. In the majority of cases this is a 12-beat jazz model with stress on the second and fourth beats. It first appeared in 1910 in the form of rhythm and blues, after which it became popular again only in 1954. Rock and roll music is usually danced to by adolescents. In the development of American popular music rock and roll plays a very insignificant role.”

I’ve also printed out answers to questions about “the American Dream,” psychology in the U.S., support of university students, American jazz, Louie Armstrong, typical American wardrobe.

On the back of the printout there are four paragraphs about the wonders of the computer. (“In the United States several thousand electronic-calculating machines have been set up.”) The last paragraph lists uses of the computer in accounting, industry, and statistics.

[Note from 2009: As I type this up on my IBM ThinkPad, I learn from Wikipedia that the IBM RAMAC 305 was introduced in 1956, at a cost of $160,000 or a monthly lease fee of $3,200. It weighed over a ton and had a disk storage memory of about 4.4 megabytes. It was revolutionary in the introduction of magnetic disk storage, serving needs for real-time accounting in business.]
Everywhere in Moscow one must wait in line. People are amazed to hear that we have no lines, and usually no shortages of goods.

For example, the other day I went to GUM (the central department store in Red Square) to buy a fur cap to take home. (Winter clothes are sold all year. I guess it’s a matter of *carpe diem*—buying things when they are available.) Many people were already buying winter hats. First they stand in line to look at them and try them on. Two women wanted the same size for their sons. The saleslady gave one of them a cap. The other, in a desperate tone of voice, asked if she had another in the same size. Luckily she did, but I’ve often seen it happen that one size runs out—and “that’s it!” After waiting in this line for about a half hour, the next step is to wait in line at the *kassa*, where you pay and get a receipt. And then you wait in line—the third—at the packing counter, where the correct cap is wrapped and handed over to you in exchange for the receipt. There are supposedly a few self-service stores in Moscow. I found one for the first time today, but it was closed. It looks like a small grocery store without counters. But self-service is only beginning in the grocery world, and is unheard of in other areas.

There seems to be a general pessimism in asking for goods in stores. The usual approach is something like: *Shapki nyet u vas?* (You wouldn’t have a hat...?) Or: *Devushka, vy ne skazhite...?* (Girl, wouldn’t you say if...?) The question is typically phrased in negative...
terms, as if easing the way for a negative reply.

The competition in the lines is fierce. If a person tries to cut in front, his fellow-citizens turn on him and condemn him on the spot.

“What’s wrong with you, comrade? Can’t you see that there’s a line?”

“What are you trying to do? I’ve already been waiting a half hour—you can’t just cut in like that!” And then the salesgirl will turn on the intruder and refuse to serve him. In general, the Soviet is eager to punish for any infraction, and the smallest act of imprudence, if performed in public, will be a matter of public interest and shame. Each takes advantage of this situation; each now has a chance to punish someone else. Criticism will be sharp, fast, and angry. In the same way, each is highly concerned with himself. I’ve seen this over and over again at the Exhibition, where each will beg than an exception be made in his case. Each thinks that he’s something special. This is also evident in Soviet lines, and the begging is sometimes almost shameful—or, put in other terms, shameless. And then there is the rushing in the Metro, when each tries to get ahead for himself. This is the private aspect of the collective society. Some very interesting outlets of regimentation are seen. Often children are the butt of such outlets, since everyone can bawl out a child who does something unacceptable. Every adult is in a superior position vis-à-vis a child, and can rugat’sya na ti [scold using the familiar pronoun].

* * *

Last night was a rewarding climax at the Exhibition. It was the last Sunday of the show and we had the biggest crowd yet—and, as far as I’m concerned, the most friendly. They eagerly listened to my explanations. There was little heckling. They were loath to leave at the end, and told me that they expect great things from me, even asking when I would become senator or president. They laughed when I told them I don’t want to be president, just as I’m sure that none of them would like to be in Khrushchev’s position now.

[After the close of the Exhibition I went to Tbilisi and Kiev with two guides, Martin Horwitz and Jane Gary. In Tbilisi we visited the University, causing such confusion that classes were canceled for the day. From Kiev I took a fascinating unauthorized side trip into the countryside, 200 km to the South to Uman’, where my mother was born. On the return flight from Moscow to New York the guides were extensively debriefed.]
Appendix 1 – Selections from Visitor Comment Books
(Translated from Russian)

- The life of the people is not shown at all. It is a pity.
- Humanism of the photo exhibit is remarkable. [The Family of Man]
- The photo exhibit is wonderful. It is excitingly beautiful. How good it would be if all people on earth could so feelingly understand one another.
- I would like to taste chewing gum.
- I visited the Exhibition and liked America very much, but I do not know whether it is all true or only a show.
- The Exhibition does not give enough information about American life and about the development of industry and agriculture. Only bits of America are shown. The only thing that is really attractive—the automobiles.
- The American Exhibition convincingly shows that private enterprise produces more, and in stupendous quantities, of the very best goods in the world. Greetings and best wishes to the cleverest American people. An electrician.
- Away with atomic bases!
- Let us start with trade between our countries.
- The Exhibition is very good and useful. Would be even better if the “Great Technology” was shown.
- Dear Friends! I visited your Exhibition and was very well satisfied. Everything is good, made a good impression. Best of all I liked your people, who had smiles for us all.
- I am surprised that you have found such badly mannered and rude guides.
- Good lads are the guides.
- Lively and intelligent.
- Everything can be touched and examined. Americans are very likeable people. We want to be friends with you. An Engineer.
- If this is the American way of life, then it is the American way of life we should overtake.
- I want to commend the good technique of your photography. Several things are presented with great taste. I am visiting your Exhibition with pleasure for the third time.
- Seeing the U.S. Exhibition, I think it was one of the few things I have
enjoyed in many years. I can’t say which part I liked best, because I liked everything.

- It is time now to teach our governments to live in friendship.
- Dear Americans and all capitalists: Why do you show us, workmen and employees, what we have seen and known from childhood? We want to see something good and you don’t show us what we want. This exhibition is only for children of preschool age. A workman.
- Dear comrades! I liked the Exhibition very much. Everything is very pretty. Simply remarkable!
- I am disgusted to the bottom of my heart with your art exhibit. Don’t American people have great artists?
- The Exhibition makes a poor impression, especially the abstract art and sculpture.
- We liked everything very much, except the abstract art. Incomprehensible.
- The abstract art shown at the Exhibition testifies to the paucity of spiritual life of Americans and provides the young generation with a possibility to forget the beautiful art created by human genius in the course of centuries, and might lead to destruction of monuments of history without pity. The abstract art insults the best sentiments of simple men.
- Dear Americans, you seem to think that we are so benighted that we do not understand art nor beauty. Your Exhibition does not astonish us!
- More of such exhibitions instead of missile and atom bases on the continents!
- In one thing you will always have the precedence: the use of atom bombs on human beings.
- If one does not believe the rumors that the USA is well-developed in technology, then from the Exhibition one could not know what first-class quality you have.
- We liked the Exhibition very much. If everything is as we are told and as we can see, then the peoples would not have anything to be afraid of.
- May Lord bless your labors! A pensioner.
- I am not with you but I congratulate you.
- We did not like your Exhibition because it did not reflect anything serious. A group of Moscow students.
- Good and fatiguing advertisement.
• The most interesting is associating with people. I wish you would make this Exhibition permanent. Only then would it be possible to take a serious step forward in the rapprochement of the two great peoples.

• I liked your exhibition a lot. Got an especially good impression from your geodesic pavilion. I like your people—talkative, happy.

• I am delighted with the American Exhibition. It opened our eyes. Excellent!

• First I met you on the Elbe in 1945. I am glad of this new good contact between our peoples.

• I even feel a little pity for Americans. Their leaders could not find more interesting exhibits to demonstrate the American way of life. It is interesting to compete with strong and clever rivals. I won’t speak about power, but the organizers lacked brains to organize a really good exhibition. An engineer.

• Don’t your children get scared by your toys?

• I was disappointed by the Exhibition. It is a pity that technology is almost not shown. Many exhibits like, for instance, the Miracle Kitchen, are simply exhibition attractions and do not reflect real life in the U.S. An Engineer.

• You Americans cannot astonish us with this.

• We think that a country that has existed without wars and destruction from external enemies for about two centuries could show greater achievements in technology, science, culture, and even everyday living. Is it possible to consider kitchens and cosmetics as a cult of the person [kul’t cheloveka]?

• I expected more and am disappointed. Is it possible that you think that our mental outlook is restricted to everyday living only? There’s too little technology in your exhibition. Where is your industry? A technician.
Appendix 2 – Pictures of Guides
(names to be added – please contribute suggestions)
Appendix 3 – Post-Exhibition Correspondence

[This is a draft of an unfinished article, from 1960, about correspondence with young Soviet people who visited the U.S. Exhibition in Moscow in the summer of 1959. I wrote it when I was 20, completing my senior year at the University of Michigan. Eventually I’ll fill it out with more letters.]

Sokolniki Park in Moscow is quieter now than it was last summer. The characteristic indications of the U.S. National Exhibition—the ever-pressing crowds, the often-friendly, often-heated conversations with Americans—these striking indications of the presence of amerikantsy in Moscow are no longer to be found in the park. The 75 young American guides are scattered once again across the USA, and the three million or so Soviet citizens who spoke with them at the Exhibition in Sokolniki are scattered once again across the vastness of their land.

But the conversations haven’t been completely stilled, nor has the presence of amerikantsy in the USSR been completely removed. I was one of those 75 American guides in Moscow in 1959. In the months following the departure of the last Soviet visitor from the exhibition grounds, I, like many of my colleagues, have been carrying on the quieter, slower conversations of the written word with many of those Soviets who exchanged addresses with us during our work in Moscow or during our travels through the country.

My correspondence has been mainly with young people—students, factory workers, technicians. They come from various Soviet republics, but all of the letters are in fluent Russian. What do these people have to say to an American? What occupies their minds? Let me introduce you to some of them through the lines they have written to me.

First let us meet a young fellow from one of the Baltic states—a factory worker. Let us call him Kipros. By now he has written five letters to me, and I will translate excerpts from them. The first few letters opened with the salutation “Greatly Respected Dan” and closed “With Respect.” But now Kipros writes simply “Dear Dan” and closes “With Friendly Greetings.” First he wrote to me about the Exhibition and about his life and interests:

Greatly Respected Dan!
I found out that the American Exhibition closed recently in Moscow. Your Exhibition left a good impression on me, personally. I remember especially your cars. Besides that, I liked the electronic machine RAMAC, color television, cameras, books, refrigerators. I think that you left little space in your pavilions for the heavy industry of the USA, for your factory machinery, for your equipment of physics and chemistry. But, in general, I liked your Exhibition.

I am very happy that we will exchange letters. I will find out more about you and your country, and you about our country.

Now I work as a mechanic in a factory. I finished secondary school—11 grades. And now after praktika [practical job experience] in
the factory I will enroll in university. Here in the USSR everyone who finishes secondary education must spend two years in praktika in the factories of our country. This helps each one to be a self-supporting and strong person. But large, praktika is of great advantage to each individual later on in life. During practice time one can choose a specialty for oneself, and learn a lot. My work is interesting. I have already been working for half a year.

I know something, but not much, about your country. Ask, who in the Soviet Union does not know your genius Van Cliburn? Or who doesn’t go to hear concerts of your musicians? Our concert halls are always overfilled, and our sports arenas, when the teams of your country appear. I was astounded by the performance of your magical Negro players—the Harlem Globe-Trotters. I am interested in your basketball players, your sports. Please send me pictures of rugby, American football. I will send you views of our city. About your city—Detroit—I know that this is the city of automobiles. Here they manufacture the remarkable Fords, Chryslers (I mean the automobiles). Please send your picture, write about yourself.

Do svidaniya,
With respect,
Kipros

Now let us meet a young man from the Caucasus—from Tbilisi, the capital of Soviet Georgia. Let’s call him Shota, after Shota Rustaveli, the great Georgian poet about whom he told me so much. He is in his early twenties and is a student at the Stalin University in Tbilisi. His letters deal less with politics and world affairs, but devote themselves to academic endeavors, great national pride (in Georgia), and an occasional witticism. Here is a composite of selections from the three or four letters Shota has written to me thus far. He knows some English and mixes it in with the Russian of his letters. I have left the English lines unchanged (underlined); the rest is translated from Russian.

Dear Dan,

I think you are glad to be again in the USA: East or West home is best. (You see how I take advantage of every opportunity to throw in my knowledge of English. Please write to me in English, Dan.)

We live in amazing times, my dear Daniel! Soon we will make dates with girls on the moon. But, on the other hand, it seems that there is enough earth too.

I am certain that you are in good health, and don’t spend your time badly at the University of Michigan, in that town with the delightful name of Ann Arbor—“it so musically resounds.”

It would be interesting to know if there are Georgian studies in Ann Arbor. Do you have an Oriental Department which devotes attention to the Caucasus? All of this interest me deeply—it runs in my blood.

It’s a pity that musical records break easily. If not, I would send you our national music—it doesn’t have anything in common with the East, very original. We have discovered the secret of reading the ancient Georgian music notation system—magnificent!

...
I managed to look through the Stanford literary magazine Sequoia—rather interesting, especially the Art Section. Our University also puts out a similar publication—Pirveli Shkivi (First Light), in which we are sure to print translations from English, Chinese, Persian, Russian, Czech, etc.

It would be very interesting to find out what you read, how you spend your time, what concerts you go to, etc. I myself am a zealous worshipper of Wolfe, Hemingway, Dos Passos and John Steinbeck and their colleagues.

Write me in detail about everything, about life and studies, write, not trying to make it easy for me to understand your English.

I wish you good fortune in feelings, in activities, in studies.

Your Georgian friend

Shota [signed in Cyrillic and Georgian scripts]
Dan Slobin (LSA, '60) spent two months last summer in the Soviet Union, where he worked as guide at the U.S. National Exhibition in Moscow. While there, he met two girls studying at the Pedagogical Institute (“Ed School”) of Kursk, a city of southern Russia, near the Ukrainian border. They agreed to exchange letters for publication in the newspapers of their respective schools. Below is Mr. Slobin’s translation of the first of such Russian letters which he has received.

December 6, 1959
Kursk

Dan!

Our ancient city sends you and your friends its warmest greetings.
Here it is winter already, though not that winter that you Americans are used to call “Russian.” Mountains of snow, blizzards, snowstorms—all of this is still ahead. But we have frost already.

In truth, we students don’t notice the cold. Sometimes we’re even very warm: classes start in a week.

We are juniors, studying in the historical-philological department. We study history, Russian language and literature, and also, as future teachers, we study psychology, education, etc.

Lectures, seminars, books now take up all of our time. (In our institute, as in other institutes of our country, attendance at lectures is compulsory.) In addition, the students of the Pedagogical Institute visit the schools. This is practice for us future pedagogues. Right now are children are already preparing for the New Year, and we must be with them as frequently as possible.

But we try not to miss good concerts. This season we were visited by Valeri Klimov, First-Prize Holder of the Tchaikovsky Competition, Svyatoslav Richter, the Borodin Quartet.

We regularly attend literary-musical evenings. In November we observed the Jubilee Year of Schiller, many of whose ballads and plays enjoy great popularity here.

In the movie theaters, as in Ann Arbor, old and new films are shown, our films and films from abroad. (Right now your Marty is being shown.)

In the Institute there are, of course, sports sections, and clubs of artistic self-expression. Many students are interested in scientific work. We have a student scientific society with various sections, where each individual can work, under the supervision of one of our instructors, in an area which interests him.

Right now, in the foreign literatures course, we are studying the works of Edgar Poe and Fenimore Cooper. Even the children in our country read Cooper.

You ask, in what do we believe. Once it was easy for people to answer such a question: “I am a Christian.” But, of course, for us there is neither god nor devil. We believe very much, Dan, in the friendly hand, in the happy smile, in everything worthy and good. We are confident in our won strength, in our own future, in the fact that everything depends upon us ourselves. We believe in Man.
And we still believe in the prediction of the great Hugo: “Peace—this is the name of the twentieth century.” We know too well what war is, what horrors, what grief it brings to nations.

And in what do you believe, Dan—you and your friends? Write to us about your university. We are very interested in the American educational system. In short, write in detail about everything.

Your letter called forth great interest among our comrades. (It was printed in the student newspaper.) You may also print our letter in your paper.

Allow us to wish all the best to you, to your family, to all the students of the University of Michigan—to all who value friendship and peace.

With warmest greetings,
Tamara Braginskaya
Marina Shakaminis

* * *

Also from The Michigan Daily:

Reds Give U-M Guides New Insight on U.S.

ANN ARBOR, Oct. 15.—It was the Russians who did all the asking, but the very nature of their questions gave the Americans some answers, too.

The Americans were three students from the University of Michigan, serving as guides at the U.S. exhibition in Moscow this summer.

“How much do you weigh?” was the question Russian women most frequently asked Doris Johnson, of Penns Grove, N. J.

‘REALLY SPOILED’

“It seemed to worry the Russians that American women were so thin,” Doris explained.

“Actually, every American woman should go to Russia. I knew American women were spoiled, but after I got to Russia I found out how really spoiled we are.

“Russian women do the same work as men. They really have equality, but I for one don’t want to be that equal.”

The nature of the Soviet ci-

zens’ questions to Dan Slobin, 2974 Collingwood, Detroit, revealed to him that “the Russians have a concept of capitalism in the United States today as it existed in the 19th century.”

“They don’t know anything about such U.S. social benefits as pensions and unemployment compensation.

“Some of them also found our standard of living hard to believe, especially when they compared an average Russian’s salary of about $80 with his American counterpart’s of about $300.”

HOUSING PROBLEM

Mark Kaminsky, of Edwardsburg, noted that “new apartments are cheap” to rent, but that “Russians sometimes have to wait long periods to get one.”
Appendix 4 – Pictures from Peter Maggs

The White House Rose Garden with Ike in the center
Aboard the Irpinia
Moscow
Appendix 5 – Frame Captures from 8mm movie

last-minute construction of the site
opening night

Edward Steichen
Carl Sandburg   Edward Steichen

Martin Horwitz   Carl Sandburg