

“I Love You, Do Svedanya”

Daniel P. Friedman

Preliminary facts

There are lots of people referred to in this chronicle. First, there is Dove Adoption International, Inc., out of Portland, Oregon, our agency that was run by Orvalee and her daughter and our main contact, LaDonna. Second was YUNONA in the United States. This was run by Ivan Jerdev and his Russian friend, Alex Nikolenko, of Napa, California. Third there was Stella, her son, Sergei, her daughter Maya, and Maya's boy friend, Eugene all working for YUNONA out of Moscow. Finally there was the heart of YUNONA out of Krasnodar. At the head of the family was Anatoly Jerdev, and his wife Vera, both fifty seven. Their three sons, Vladimir, thirty-one and his wife Rita, the aforementioned Ivan, twenty-nine, and Victor, twenty-seven. Also there was Tatiana, the director at Otradnaya where our children lived, Boris, the director at Sochi, and his daughter Anna. Then there were the Americans: The Gill couple, the anonymous couple, Brent Mager, Lee Ann Richarson and Kraig Markland, and their respective spouses, Michael and Allison, who stayed at home. At the end of the trip two more couples arrived that I did not meet: Sue and Art Ham, from Pittsburgh, who adopted the Popova sisters, and Linda and Ed Switzer of Philadelphia.

Looking Back

Here it is, December 22, 1998, and I am thinking that it is time to write about the experience of adopting Rachel and Sarah. But, rather than write about how they are now, I am going to tell you about how it has been since Brian's death and what has led us to this new world that we have entered.

Mary and I have talked off and on about adopting during the past fifteen years. There is no doubt, however, that our son's death on March 10, 1993, acts as the catalyst that has led us to adopt. Just prior to that moment, I am forty-eight and Mary is two years younger. We do not feel old. We have more energy than many people half our age. I am content. I have a loving wife, two wonderful sons, both inquisitive about the world and clearly going to be successful at whatever they choose to do, great friends, a wonderful job with graduate students, who like me, care about teaching. I have just finished a book the preceding August that my co-authors and I have taken ten years to write. We are confident that the book will be well received by our target audience. All is right with the world. The only personal sadness that I have felt over the past decade is the accidental death of my nearly eighty year-old father the previous year. Following cancer surgery on his face, the doctor failed to prescribe an antibiotic and two days after he returned from the hospital, his infection from the operation erupted and he died that same day. All in all, it has so far been a mostly good and very interesting life.

Brian has just been accepted at a school in Chicago that is going to make it possible for him to become involved in the movie industry. He is going to be leaving Indiana University in the fall, but he will be relatively close and we are already looking forward to helping him find an apartment in downtown Chicago.

The night of the day that he dies he is throwing a party at his house. He is heading to Martinsville on a back road, the one that he would always take on his motorcycle, to pick up some sound equipment that he is having repaired so that the music would be just right for the party. Mary is making some food for the party and has just spoken with him about an hour before he dies. He is driving his car, a BMW M3, to Martinsville. It has become cold, and windy and ice is forming on the roads. Brian loses control of his car, hits a limestone bridge, is thrown from his car even though he has his safety belt on, and dies instantly.

The details of shiva, the seven day period following the burial, are just a faint memory. I recall that many of his friends come by to pay their respects and that there are hundreds of people at the funeral and at the cemetery. Beyond that, all I can recall is that we are being inundated with books that contain advice on how to become a successful griever. What a strange combination of words: “successful griever.” Basically, it is felt by these authors that somehow it is necessary to return to your old life, regain your self-esteem, and become a productive member of society once again. That is, of course, the furthest thing from your mind at the time. The only thing that you can think about is just how much it hurts.

Of course, we are very grateful to our friends and relatives who come to see us, but soon they have departed and it is Mary and I left wondering what on earth we would do with the rest of our lives. Every book that I read about grieving, even those that are about grieving the loss of a child, say that you should not make any major decisions for at least a year after you have lost a child. We waited thirty days. Then we decide that we are too young and too full of energy to just go quietly into the sunset. Raising Brian and Rob has been exciting and hard work and we want more of that. Research just does not seem that it

would ever be something I could think about again and Mary's business enterprises were overwhelming her and all she wanted to do was stay close to home. So, we decide to add a little girl to our family. We really do not feel that we have experienced enough of life, since we have only raised two boys. So, we start to think about adopting a girl.

During the fall of 1993, I receive an invitation from the University of Nice to come and visit for three months starting in April and do some teaching and speaking there. At the time I receive this invitation, I know that this would be the best thing for Mary and me. We would get away and be alone and try to figure out what we would do with the rest of our lives. Well, we are not quite alone. We are visited by Dorothy, Jacob, Lola, Rob, Meredith, Goldie, Danny-Mike. and a former student and friend Jim Marshall. So, I would hardly describe this as being alone with our thoughts. But, we do have a pleasant stay: it is Nice after all, and I get back into the groove, thinking about research. It is a very worthwhile trip. We cap the three-month stay off with a trip to Mykonos Island and return to the States from Athens following our stay at this magnificent island of perfect weather and strong sea breezes.

We arrive back in time to get ready for classes and the next year is very much a blur. Mary and I are still quite sad and the ache is not going away. We want to raise more children and we are studying the paths to make this possible. There appear to be no acceptable paths for us. We are uncertain about raising someone who is of a different race; we are fearful of adopting a child who has been removed from its home by the state due to abuse; and we do not want to worry that the biological mother would some day come to reclaim her child. We have so many conditions that it seems that we are not all that serious about adopting. Nothing could be further from the truth. We study

the books that offer lots of advice and we are following our heart trying to find a situation that we can live with. That is just not happening. We are moping around feeling sorry for ourselves and that is just not like us.

I have a couple of back-to-back meetings in La Jolla the summer of 1995. I ask Mary, as I always have, if she wants to come with me to the meeting. The last time we were there, we had a great time. So, I figure that this would be an ideal trip for her. But, after three months in Nice and a couple of weeks on Mykonos, as well as three trips to Paris and two to Florence the previous summer, La Jolla does not seem like much of a prize. I finally convince Mary to go with me. I think she goes begrudgingly, but she joins me. A weekend is sandwiched between the two meetings, so we have some free time to enjoy each other. We decide that on Sunday morning we would go to Hotel Del Coronado, where “Some Like It Hot” was filmed. We had heard that it was a beautiful hotel and we would just have breakfast there. On our way back to our car, we notice the headline on the front page of the newspaper. It reads “Russian Adoption Successful” in such large letters that it looks like they are declaring peace after World War II. Mary’s and my heart are uncontrollable. This is what we were hoping for. The books that I have read do not know that Russia is opened up as a new source. We go back to our hotel room and read and re-read the articles about Russian adoption. We now know what we want to do. We are going to adopt a girl from Russia.

Soon after we return from the West Coast, Mary starts looking for the right agency. She hones in on RAFS. This is “The Russian Adoption Facilitation Service.” It is run by a Russian Lawyer, Victoria, who would travel to and from Russia facilitating all sorts of things for you. It seems perfect. One day she tells Mary that she wants the next conversation to be between

the three of us. She insists that I be present. She asks some questions. One of which is, "Would you be willing to adopt siblings?" We look at each other and immediately agree. Siblings would be fine. At that moment, we both know that we are not going to adopt a Russian girl, but we are going to adopt sisters. It is like magic. We both know it. At that very moment, it is so obvious to us. We have been in contact with Victoria for about a month at that time and we have yet to see a single picture. She asks us how old we want the girls to be. We say that it does not matter, but we do not want to get them so young that they would still be in diapers. When we sign off, it appears that we shall be adopting two sisters, both under the age of six.

Victoria tells us that it is time to get a "home study." This is where the community sends in a social worker to evaluate whether you would make a good home for children. Our social worker is an attractive, under-thirty woman, who interviews and watches us go about our day-to-day business. This all happens during the first month of the fall semester. We do not dread this, as I have heard and read that others do. If it is felt that we are unfit, since we are not young, there is little we can do about it. We feel that we can financially afford the girls, that we can emotionally support the girls, and that we can do a good job, but then, don't most people who have children think that. We ask some of our friends to write letters on our behalf and they are good friends, since we are not only told that we can adopt two children, we are told that we could adopt three; this is quite good. Some of the countries would not let people of our age adopt. Our social worker tells Rob, "I would like to be adopted by your parents." The time spent answering the questions posed by our social worker is not an intrusion. We enjoy answering them and talking with her. It is a pleasant nine hours spread over three visits. But, it is now over and

Victoria has come through for us. Mary is becoming chummy with her so everything is going smoothly. Victoria asks us if we would mind flying to Moscow, taking a nineteen-hour train ride to pick up the girls and another nineteen-hour train ride to return to Moscow. We tell her, “No problem.” What we are thinking is another story. Oh my, Russia, Moscow, train ride, gak.

It is a couple weeks into the fall semester; things are going smoothly. Chris has arranged for me to have a new computer, a Sparc 5, and it is powerful enough to support this thing that they called “Netscape.” You know it as the Web or the Internet. I have watched Chris use it in his office and it seems pretty easy to use, so I am pleased to have it, but I have no idea what I will do with it, since I am busy preparing classes, doing research, worrying about Mary’s dealings with Victoria, and helping Rob make life-decisions following graduation from Indiana University. Soon after I get it home, I start playing with the search engines. Most of what I get is drivel. It seems that it is a waste of time, yet every once in awhile, I find something interesting. But, it rarely happens. In a moment of weakness, I ask Mary to name any topic, and I will find something interesting about it. Well, dear readers, that is the start of our real adoption process.

What is on Mary’s mind is clearly Victoria and the adoption that we are slowly working out with Victoria. She says “Russian Adoption.” No sooner does she say that, in a flash, I am sitting in my office looking at pictures of children from Russia who need parents to love them. My heart skips a beat. But, surely these children have been spoken for already. They must be loss-leaders. (A “loss-leader” is a marketing term where you advertise something spectacular just to get people into the showroom, but alas, by the time you get there, they are gone.) Nevertheless, we are seeing and downloading real pictures of real

children. With Victoria, we are looking at abstract children in our head. She has shown us nothing, whatsoever. The thrill of seeing these children is overwhelming me, but it is having the opposite effect on Mary. She is content with staying with Victoria, who is not only a lawyer, but a woman from Russia. What could be wrong with that? This is over the weekend. A week goes by and Goldie comes to visit. We show her the website and she is enthusiastic, but Mary will have none of it.

I am thinking to myself, “What possible harm can come from making a small phone call to Portland, Oregon? What possible harm can there be in my making a call to Dove Adoption International? Why is Mary being so obstinate?” We both agree that we would be thrilled if the two girls that we picked out from the net were available. But, she does have this relationship with Victoria. We have done our home study through Victoria, and we are going to adopt with Victoria. Next, we get a phone call from Victoria. She tells us it that it is now time for us to retain her; that is, it is now time to send her some money to make the arrangement official. It isn’t a little, but surely isn’t a lot. But, it is an amount that you wouldn’t just give away.

Here it is Tuesday. Mary is going to lunch with Karen. She has adopted ten children from Korea and she has never left the country. We want to adopt just once from Russia and we think we will have to not only leave the country, but fly to Moscow and spend thirty eight hours on Russian trains. The thought of this terrifies me, but if that is what it takes, so be it. Tuesday is the day that I spend on campus lecturing and talking with students. That evening Mary and I are sitting in the hot tub on a beautiful early fall evening looking at the stars talking about what her friend had told her. We cannot stop thinking about the fact that Karen has never left the country on any of her adoptions. Wouldn’t it be nice if we were offered the same deal?

Now it is Wednesday. I decide, in a bold move, that I will just call Dove, despite Mary's protestations. What possible harm can making a little call do? I ask for "LaDonna." The person on the other end of the conversation says that she takes Wednesdays off, but she will call tomorrow. Mary points out to me that this is just like dealing with Victoria: more phone tag. She says, "This is a waste of time. Why are you bothering?" I really did not have a good answer. Perhaps I was hoping that we would not have to travel to Moscow, *etc.* Perhaps it was just curiosity, but whatever it was, it drove me to make the call that day.

Now it is Thursday morning. I am waiting for eleven o'clock to arrive, since that is when it will be nine in Oregon. Like clockwork, the phone rings at eleven and it is LaDonna, returning our call. I am not very excited. Mary has convinced me that nothing is going to come of it and so now I am just going through the motions of asking some questions about how things work. I ask some standard sorts of questions about the charges, *etc.* Then I ask if the girls we have seen on the net are still available and she says that they are and that there are others. This surprises me. Then I ask about the trip to Russia and she tells me that we shall not have to leave the country, but that we shall pick them up in San Francisco. Now, this is the kind of news I have hoped for. In reality, Dove does not know that the rules have changed, but Victoria is well aware of this change. So, the inaccuracy of Dove's information excites me. LaDonna says something about pictures and tapes, but I feel that it is time for Mary to talk with LaDonna.

I call Mary in from outside where she is gardening. She talks with LaDonna for another 20 minutes or so and then tells me what she has learned from her. She says "Tomorrow we shall receive a tape of the available children." Mary is very excited. She likes what she's heard from LaDonna and I could see that

some of her loyalty to Victoria is dissipating. LaDonna gives Mary the names of five families who have successfully adopted Russian children through Dove and that afternoon and evening she calls them and is thrilled by their enthusiasm for Dove and the process.

Now it is Friday. I know that I have an important faculty meeting today, so I ask Mary not to look at the tape until I get home. It would not be fair of her to see the tape before I get back from school. She agrees and off I go to campus. Sometime in the morning she calls me and lets me know that the package from Dove has arrived. I go to my meeting and return home and am greeted with the question "Is there an Olga and Anastasia on the webpage?" I check and sure enough there is and furthermore, they have no disabilities or diseases. What has happened is that yes, Mary has not looked at the tape, as she has promised, but she has looked at the accompanying photos and she has bonded. She is ready to adopt Olga and Anastasia. We look at the photos together and we look at the tape and now we are both certain that it is Olga and Anastasia Demina we want to adopt. It is around three in the afternoon. I call Leo, my best friend of my youth. He is a very successful lawyer in Portland Oregon. I ask him if he would find out about Dove. He says that he will try. About two hours later, he calls back with news that he has spoken with two lawyers that he knows that handle adoption and both of them give the agency high marks. That is the information I need.

It is still Friday. It is now six in the afternoon, here, but it is only four there. I call and ask LaDonna what do we have to do in order to assure that we will get Olga and Anastasia. She says, get this "Just tell me you want them." That's all it takes. We say we want them and that is that. We have been told that Olga and Anastasia are ours and ours alone.

Now comes the difficult part of this process. How are we going to tell everyone our news? We have been assured by all the people that we have called that we should have our girls in three to five months. That is really quick. Of course, these people, including Dove, do not know about the change in Russian Law that contradicts this information. But, still three to five months is what we are thinking and that affects what we say to people, especially our relatives. When are we going to let people know? We have decided that, like telling about a pregnancy too early, we will be wise and keep this information to ourselves until we know more about our chances. Rob, however, is of a different mind. He has already told some of his best friends and wants us to tell the family. We decide that we will tell everyone after Yom Yippur, but prior to breaking the fast. That way, they will be able to tell everyone that they are with about the pending change in our lives.

Simple plans are not always the best plans. Prior to going to Stacey and Hank's for break fast, we try to reach either my mother or my sisters. Neither are home. Also, Mary's parents are not home. We go to the break fast boiling over with our secret. We get home and get on two phones. Mary calls her parents on one line and I call my mother on the other. My mother is overjoyed by the news. Mary's mother is in shock. She is concerned that her daughter and son-in-law have bitten off more than they can chew. Of course, she comes around, but she is concerned. We call my sisters and now everyone knows. Until that evening, some three days after we have identified Rachel and Sarah, only Rob and Goldie know of our plans. Now nearly all of the family knows.

Of course, the very difficult part of the process is ahead of us. How do you carry on your life while waiting for three to five months to pass? The good news is that there is plenty to do.

Dove sends us a packet with forms in it that are almost impossible for mere mortals to fill in. The amount of guesswork that is required is astounding. The number of times I sign my name is uncountable. I could have taken the materials I was getting and redesigned the forms so much better that if I had done so, I would likely have put Dove out of business. These forms were throw-backs of a by-gone era. All this stuff should have been on the net, and all of this should have been menu-driven. Instead of taking huge chunks out of many nights, the whole process should have taken, at most, one evening. Of course, we do have to go to the local police station to get fingerprints to send to the FBI so that they can determine that we are not criminals and then we each have a physical. But basically it is these tiresome forms that have to be filled out, notarized, special stickers had to be placed on them, and even a special seal had to be embossed by Indiana's Secretary of State on several of them. In all, there were about twenty forms, ten for each child, and Mary has to go to Indianapolis on two or three occasions. We get all the paperwork done as soon as it is possible. We are hell-bent not to make a mistake and to be one of the lucky ones who pick up their children in San Francisco in three months, instead of five.

The months drag on. Soon it is December. Stacey, Audrey, Barbara, and Ruth, (Mary's Mah Jongg group) host a "baby" shower for Rachel and Sarah. Everyone brings gifts for the two girls that would soon be entering our lives. Mary has a great time, but still we have no idea when we are going to San Francisco. I don't recall when we found out, but sometime before we picked up the girls, in early 1996, we are told that the plan to go to San Francisco is no longer an option. We have to go to Moscow, after all. But, that is not so bad, but please let it not be in the dead of winter. Moscow's weather in the winter can be very cruel. Of course, there are even more rules changes.

Our girls are to be put into a database. Then for three months, anyone from Russia who wants to adopt the girls, would trump us. These are scary times. We are frightened that the girls that we have bonded with are going to slip through our fingers.

The month of April has come and gone and we are still here. Mary and I are a mess. Even my sister, Nancy, is so upset, that she calls Dove to find out what is happening. Now that's a nice sister. Our torture is growing by the hour. In early December, we pick up Russian travel visas from their consulate in Washington. We comply, then, as luck would have it, we don't get to go and the visas expire. Now, we must apply for an additional one. No problem. We are told that we are nearly ready to go and that we should get airline tickets to Moscow. Our final decree has not been signed, but it should be any day now and then we are to leave as soon as possible. We discover that the cost of tickets to Moscow via an American airline is astronomical. We gamble on Aeroflot. (The America side of Aeroflot is handled by Delta Air Lines) We order tickets, we change the date, we change the date, and we change the date. Aeroflot is quite conscious that we are adopting since we order two tickets going and four returning. They are quite understanding. They know of the bureaucracy that we are dealing with. We still do not have our decree and we have become completely unglued. We tell Dove that we are going with or without the decree (or their permission). They will have to deal with us. They try frantically to convince us to stay home, but we know that others that they are working with are over there now and we are going, too. They put us in touch with Lee Ann, who has exactly the same idea as we do. Lee Ann starts to get cold feet. We urge her not to back off and her feet start to get warm. We are not to be denied. We are going now.

The journey to a foreign country

We are getting prepared for our trip to Moscow and the subsequent flight to Krasnodar. The remainder of this story is best appreciated using the time frames I have chosen below. These are almost exactly my words and thoughts as they were written on our travels. When I returned home from overseas, I simply transcribed my writing to a more eye-pleasing medium. The trip begins innocently Friday morning, May 31, 1996.

Saturday: June 1st, early in the morning

Yesterday, we drove to Chicago, left at 10:30 in the morning, arrived at the Westin around 3:00 in the afternoon. Had lunch at L'Appetite's outside on John Hancock's Plaza. I had incredibly garlicky Italian seafood salad and Italian potato salad and Mary had a rice ball filled with meat and sauce. All was quite tasty. We strolled around, looking for a sweater for me and at 6:30 in the evening, I went to a bookstore and Mary took a nap until 7:00, when she arose to get a hair cut. That evening we went to a Lebanese restaurant, Zalens, and had a great meal. I had kafta (Casablanca's is much better) and Mary had duck.

Sunday: June 2nd, early in the morning

We arose the next morning, ate our complimentary breakfast and headed to the Keilin house. Mary and I along with Mary's sister, Goldie, did some last minute toiletry shopping, met our nephew, Cory, and niece, Staci and ate at the California Pizza Kitchen, where what we ate is no longer of any concern. There were bigger things on our minds.

We were quite excited. Within three hours, we were heading to Russia to meet, face to face, the girls that we had watched on video for the last nine months. The anticipation of the moment was clouding all natural thought. Mary and Goldie ran out to pick up scissors to cut the girls' hair if we had the time. Now we were off to O'Hare.

When we arrived at O'Hare, we were one of the last ones and we quickly dropped off our luggage, showed our passports, travel visas, and identification, and worked our way to the gate. Mary had arranged with Lee Ann Richardson that she would be carrying "The Limited" bear and Lee Ann immediately recognized Mary and we had met our new friend and traveling companion. Lee Ann had met Alex Baclawski, who was here adopting his second child from Russia and we had another friend on our trip. Aeroflot made our flight to Moscow very pleasant by not filling the seat next to Mary, so we had a great chance to get to know Lee Ann. Once we arrived at the Sheremetovo II Airport, we learned first hand the meaning of the Russian mantra, "Hurry up and wait." Three of us, Mary, Lee Ann, and I entered a queue (if you could call it that), but only one (Lee Ann) got through.

What happened was anything but pleasant. When our visas were inspected, the attendant noticed that our visas had expired and we were immediately escorted to another part of the dark and dreary waiting area. We were sure that we were going to be deported. We were calm about it, but inside we were seething at what seemed like a ridiculous reason to return to Chicago. Actually, we were lucky that the attendants in Chicago had not noticed the mistake. The good news is that we got a new visa that was valid for three weeks, which we hoped would be enough time. We were asked by the person in charge if two weeks would be enough time to transact our business, but ever

mindful of a bargaining situation, I suggested that we would be better off with three weeks. Fortunately for us, Mary had the good sense to bring along the invitation from YUNONA, which clearly stated that we could stay through the month of July.

We lost a bit of time waiting for the new visas. Then we had to get back in the queue and this took another hour. Again, fate was smiling on us since Lee Ann rescued our three pieces of luggage. Finally, we emerged through customs, a little shaken, but still excited by the great adventure that was still to come. We were told that while in Moscow we would be met by “Stella.” This was not totally accurate, but it was close enough. We were met by Serge, Stella’s son and his friend, Eugene. Because of all the lost time at customs, our chances of making our flight to Krasnodar were diminishing. We rushed from the international airport to the national one, Sheremetovo I airport, a drive which normally takes ninety minutes was accomplished in under sixty minutes. We felt that we were in a race for our lives, yet all we were trying to do was make a plane for Krasnodar. Moscow zipped by so fast that all we were able to do was help our respective drivers steer, if you get what I mean. When we arrived at the airport with just enough time to make our flight, Eugene and Serge asked for our tickets. We did not have tickets, yet. We were disappointed again. There was no way we could buy the tickets and make the flight. The race was all in vain. We met Eugene’s girl friend, who just happened to be Stella’s daughter, Maya. She mentioned some gypsy fights she and the two men she had picked up at the Sheremetovo II had witnessed that afternoon at Sheremetovo I. As much traveling as we have done over the years, finding a toilet in Sheremetovo I was too big of a problem for me to do alone. Fortunately Maya was able to help. Nevertheless, we waved goodbye to our plane as it headed south to Krasnodar. We headed for a small restaurant associated with

Canadian Moosehead Beer. I had a hamburger and the other five had Buffalo Wings. We all had fried potatoes with Heinz's Curry Ketchup. Delicious.

We were driven to Stella's, where Maya procured linens for our unexpected overnight stay. We zipped over to the apartment and found out that we were about to go to sleep in someone's apartment. It was filthy from head to toe. The bathroom and kitchen were the worst. Lee Ann, Mary and I were not too happy with the apartment and spent the next couple of hours trying to make reservations at a hotel near Red Square for our return from Krasnodar. Unfortunately with the Russian election only a few days away, nothing could be found. Furthermore, we were a bit concerned about offending our very gracious hosts. We toughened up and went to sleep about midnight, all of us rather exhausted. Because of Alex's little story about waking up with a rat on his chest, when he had been to Russia with his wife adopting on a previous visit, we slept fitfully. To ward off roaches, Lee Ann slept with the light on in her room. I do have a bad back and it gets worse when I sleep on lousy beds. I had convinced my hosts that the bed that I would be sleeping in would be very bad for my back, but without Mary signaling me that we should leave, I gambled that it would be okay. In any event, I set the stage for turning down this apartment on our return.

Monday: June 4th, early in the morning

Eugene picked us up as promised by 7:20 and we headed to the airport. He took very good care of us at the airport, apparently calling in favors left and right and the next thing we knew, we were southbound to Krasnodar in a plane that had seen too many years of use. We hoped that the old machine had a few

more flights in her. We arrived right on time to see sprawling farms, whose borders were delineated by rows of trees. We wondered if we were going to see our new children today. We knew we were being met by Anatoly Jerdev, but just as with Stella, that only means that someone of his organization would meet us. We said “Nyet” to all the cab drivers as we entered the airport, but one of them, our driver, translator, and son of Anatoly, we thought was a cab driver. He had written neither “Richardson” nor “Friedman” on a piece of paper, so we had assumed he was a cab driver. As it turned out he was holding up paper currency from the United States. After five minutes of panic, thinking that we were stranded at the airport, Vladimir (Vova) entered our lives. A short ten minute drive and we were at the Jerdev apartment. It was rustic, but spotlessly clean and quite large by Russian standards. We were starving, having eaten nothing so far for that day, I pulled out my dairy card that was prepared by one of our graduate students, Dmitri Gusev, and handed it to Vera. She told me what I could and could not eat. We met Dr. Kraig Markland and Brent Mager. Brent napped while we ate. Mary had some delicious soup, but I skipped it since it contained sour cream. I had great sandwiches of white bread and black caviar, topped with some cold cuts. I do not know how many of these open-faced sandwiches I ate, but I was stuffed when Vera, Anatoly’s wife, arrived with potatoes made especially for me. I struggled through the last potato and Kraig pointed out to me that Vera had just given me another plateful. I didn’t touch this new plate, but Vera’s *modus operandus* was clear.

Lee Ann, Mary and I, along with our new friend Kraig, chatted seriously about the great life adventure that we were all taking. Lee Ann is a manager at GE CAP from Kansas City. Lee Ann in her own words “could stand to lose about thirty pounds.” She is a very sweet, attractive woman of thirty-one.

She, herself, is an adoptee, so when various pregnancies went awry, she and her husband Mike, decided to adopt. When she downloaded Misha from the net, she knew it was he whom she wanted. Kraig is a chiropractor, an extremely pleasant person, who is adopting for the first time. Kraig's wife, Allison, had undergone in vitro fertilization and Kraig could not stand to see the pain that she was having, both physical as well as emotional, so they decided to adopt Sasha.

After that big heavy meal, we all decided to take naps and the next thing we knew, it was time for supper. I finally had an opportunity to clean up. One of the problems with "Hotel Barton Fink," my pet name for where we stayed in Moscow, was that the bathroom was so filthy that you could not bear to enter it. I emerged, clean-shaven. We were told that we would be seeing our children tomorrow. Vova invited us on a tour of the city and we strolled through the "Paris of Russia." Lest I forget, by this time Brent Mager has emerged from his cocoon. Brent has already adopted two children, one from Ohio, a boy and one from Russia. He is here for a third one. Brent is our guru. He understands a lot of the process and the emotional state of the children. He says that the children don't really know what to do, but I think our girls will. Brent's stories regaled us just prior to supper. The experiences that he has had with his daughter were so genuine and emotionally gratifying that you knew that you were here for all the right reasons. Brent and Kraig were both from Warren, Ohio. Brent is a concert promoter. Brian would have loved talking to him. After our stroll through downtown Krasnodar, we returned, ready to wait for two couples who were with Vova's brother, Victor, and Anna, the daughter of the director at Sochi. They had just picked up their long-awaited children.

When the couples arrived, the scene was ecstatic. Everyone was so excited to see that it really does happen. Four total strangers with their new very young children entered the apartment and chaos reigned. Everyone brought out their camcorders to record the celebration. The new parents were elated by the experience. The Gills from Portland, Oregon, the home of Dove Adoptions International, Inc., were an unusual couple. The father was on his second marriage. In his first, he had a child of twenty-nine and two children slightly younger. He is a grandfather three times. The mother, one of ten siblings, is on her first marriage. Although she looked disheveled, you could tell she was very pretty. Their daughter, Hannah, was a beautiful two-year old with dark curly hair. Mary immediately bonded with Hannah. The celebration went on for quite a bit with Vera being by far the most excited. Vera is fantastic and quite good looking for a woman who has raised three men, Victor, Vova, and Ivan, who works for YUNONA out of Napa Valley. She reminds me of Mary's mother, Lola; very excited about everything and feeds you until you want to burst. The other couple, who wish to remain nameless are from Pittsburgh. This is their first. They adopted a boy Andrew, whose nickname was "Lenin."

We are given a new plan. Instead of Tuesday, we will see our girls on Wednesday. The "plan du jour" as Mary likes to refer to it is: Lee Ann will go on Tuesday to pick up Misha. Kraig volunteered to go with her to the Timashevsk so that he could film the event for her. That was quite a nice gesture. Then on Wednesday morning, Tatiana, will come to Anatoly's apartment, where we have been staying. She will chat with Kraig and bring Sasha to the apartment. Sasha is an absolutely beautiful five-year old girl with curly blonde hair and deep blue eyes. Then after they are done, Mary and I will go with Tatiana to their summer home on the Black Sea. We will pick up the girls on

Wednesday afternoon and head back to the apartment. Neither Lee Ann's, Kraig's nor our adoption decrees have been signed, so we could be there quite a long time. In Russia, you cannot assume anything is going to happen in a timely fashion. But, we are hopeful. Brent and Kraig are asked to sleep elsewhere. While Lee Ann is picking up Misha, Brent is picking up Alexis. It should be another exciting day at the Jerdev's. It is about seven in the morning on Tuesday, it has been raining all morning and there is a kind of melancholy overtaking the apartment. We are hopeful that tomorrow is our day. Mary is sound asleep and I'm starving,

Wednesday, June 5rd, early in the morning

Yesterday was as exciting as the previous day. While the Gill's and the other couple were preparing to leave, Lee Ann was picking up Misha (a bundle of energy if I ever saw one) and Brent was picking up Alexis. Mary and I could think of only one thing. How on earth was this day ever going to end. We met Alex Nikolenko and his wife Corinne. Alex, also now living in Napa Valley, is one of the translators who works for YUNONA. He is a close personal friend of Ivan. Corinne is an American who was sent to Krasnodar to study Russian as part of Bates College training. She improved her Russian and married one. First Misha returned with Lee Ann. He is absolutely edible. As a reminder for those who have seen the April 1995 tape, Misha is the first person on the tape. Lee Ann was told that Misha was six and brought clothes for a six-year old, but Misha is two years younger, or so Lee Ann was told. Everything she brought was way too large. Misha will be a great soccer player some day. Lee Ann is concerned that Misha is too skinny. That is not the problem. He is just non-stop motion. A bit after Misha

arrived, Alexis showed up with Brent. Alexis is quite different from Misha. She is quiet and shy, but under the guidance of Misha, Vera, and Anatoly, she begins to flower, eventually smiling and taking on a real personality. Mary was asked by Brent to bathe Alexis and Mary was thrilled to oblige. In the afternoon, Mary went, what else, shopping with Lee Ann, Misha, Alex, and Corinne. Mary did not find the jackets that she was looking for, but she did find some gifts for the family. I stayed behind and had a great chat with Kraig about all sorts of things. The day was punctuated by news for everyone. We had a toast at lunch that Vera proposed "To the great health of our children." Vera took Alexis with her to her chorale and dancing class. Brent, Alexis, Alex, and Corinne left for Moscow and only Kraig (who was getting Sasha in the morning), Lee Ann and Misha, and the Friedmans were left. We all finally poured ourselves into bed. I think that Misha was still awake.

Mary and I chatted for an hour about our anticipation of the next day when Tatiana would bring the cherubic Sasha to Kraig and Mary and I would take a three-hour ride to the Black Sea to their summer home to pick up Rachel and Sarah. The suspense and excitement continued to rise. How is the day going to go? Will the girls be excited to go with us? A million questions occur to us. We find out that only a couple of weeks ago did the girls learn about our coming to get them and take them to Amerika. Actually, I am somewhat relieved. I wondered about how such young children would be able to cope with waiting such a long time for something so important to their lives as this. It is getting close to six in the morning and Mary wants to be moving by eight. If everything goes according to the current plan, we should be leaving for the Black Sea between nine and ten and see the girls around noon. So our wait has dwindled down to a precious few hours of anticipation. There are still technical loose

ends to clear up like first getting the final adoption decree signed and then getting their passports. I hope that will happen today or tomorrow. We are hoping to make it to Staci's graduation party in four days. If all all goes well, we should be getting to the Keilin house by about seven in the evening. We are getting closer to our goal.

Thursday, June 6th, early in the morning

No day in my life compares to the roller coaster of emotions that yesterday brought to Mary and me. We woke up knowing that this was the long-awaited day, when we would meet and take the girls home to the wonderful Jerdev apartment. We also knew that Kraig's Sasha would be coming to the apartment. If everything went according to "The Father's" (i.e., Anatoly's) plan, we would all have our children; we would still all be awaiting the decree, and when the decree arrived, we would be heading to Moscow for the closing moments of our extraordinary life adventure.

In a surprising punctual event, Tatiana brought Sasha to Kraig, who did not even have time to shave and shower. These acts are no longer hygiene acts I take for granted. The water system was such that it was on from 5:00-11:00, am and pm. If you did not get your shower, etc. by 11:00 in the morning, you waited until 5:00 in the afternoon. If you needed toilet facilities during off hours, you took a bucket into the room with the bath and scooped water out of the tub that was filled just prior to the start of off hours. As you can imagine, you tried hard not to need the facilities when the water was off. Shaving has become a look in the mirror act and showering is like in France where you stand in a half-bath and use a hand-held spray. All of this takes place using a Rube Goldberg contraption for adjusting

the temperature of the water. Kraig was elated. Sasha was even more beautiful in person than her absolutely stunning pictures. The day had started off well, heck perfectly.

Once Tatiana had arrived, I bumped Kraig from the shower queue. Mary and I thought well its time to go and see Rachel and Sarah. But, that was not to happen for at least an hour. Tatiana pulled out a tape of the Otradnaya Home's celebration of twenty-five years of service of some of the teachers. We watched in total awe how Rachel danced and sang in every act. She was a year older and a year more beautiful. The way her hair was fixed and the way the cameraman filmed the acts, Rachel looked ten, not seven, in her beautiful dresses. It did not seem possible that this was our little Rachel. Also, Sarah appeared in one of the acts and she sang and looked beautiful, too. When was the tape going to end and when were we going to depart?

Otradnaya was 350 kilometers from Krasnodar and we were going to the summer camp, which was on the other side of Krasnodar, so Tatiana had a long ride ahead of her. We left the apartment in her tattered mini-van, which contained four rows of seats, two of which were occupied by teachers from Otradnaya. We picked up a nearly useless translator (a fifteen year-old boy with a supposed vocabulary of 2000 words), and we were off. The elation that Mary and I felt as we slowly wended our way through Krasnodar could not be described. We knew at that point, that if our driver survived his driving, which has been an issue since we arrived in Russia, we would see the girls soon.

I asked Tatiana how many kilometers the ride would take and she said "Novorossijsk" and pointed to a sign that had 123 kilometers and the countdown began. We stopped twice on the way to the summer camp: once to get gas from a road-side gasoline truck and once to get a bag of cherries at a road-side

market. Ever mindful of the risks, Mary and I skipped the cherries. At each sign I recalculated the kilometers to miles to get a sense of just how many more miles were left. 92, 71, 63. 44, 27, 18; we were getting closer and closer. The ride was taking forever and our hearts were beating faster and faster. Our driver was smoking and we hardly noticed. Inside the vehicle it was quite warm and we barely cared.

We conversed through our interpreter with Tatiana, but Mary was finding sign language and her little bit of Russian far more effective. We learned many things about the girls from Tatiana. They had been found abandoned on the street by a woman who gave them her last name, Demina, and she gave them first names after Tsar Alexander's daughters, Olga and Anastasia. It was three years ago, so it was easy to determine through dental examination Sarah's age, but not so easy to determine Rachel's. We found out that no one fought with each other at the home, that the girls were good eaters, and that Rachel loved to "change clothes" often.

Just as the "kilometer" clock was winding down and we were about at the summer camp, I asked Tatiana how many more kilometers until we arrived. She spoke with her driver and she said "seventy-two." She named a new target town, Gelendzhik, and a new kilometer clock was started. It seemed the closer we got to the camp, the further away the camp. This was not unlike the dream where you do not quite reach your goal. But soon we arrived at Gelendzhik and it was time to unload the four women passengers at the bus terminal, wherever it might be.

As if we had not been tortured enough, Tatiana points out our camp entrance as we drive by it. The driver is trying to find the bus terminal. Ten minutes later, after asking several Russian citizens, the terminal is found and we unload the women. If I

am accurate, we need only drive back less than a kilometer and we will be at the camp. There is a two-person guard (two ten year-old boys at the gate). We do not enter the camp grounds in the bus. Tatiana takes the clothes she has brought to the girls, so that they will look pretty and she says that she will need to talk to the girls a bit since she has not seen them for awhile.

We also learned from Tatiana that the girls said “They would be happy to learn English.” We learned that the reason that she told them that we had not picked them up was because I was ill. (Of course, the reason had to do with the new Russian Law, but Tatiana did not think such young girls could understand that. The Law required that the girls be placed into a databank so that if a Russian citizen wanted to adopt them, they would have first preference. Thus, the magical date of April 30th emerged as the date that they would be released from the databank.) She said that the girls asked about us every day.

Mary had to use the toilet facilities, so we found our way, with “The Limited” bears, into the camp after all. After Mary emerged, we started walking back to the van. About half-way there, we spotted the girls. The girls spotted us. The girls took off in a gallop with their arms open wide ready to kiss and hug us. Oh my. All our wondering was over. We had our new daughters. They had new parents and nothing, not even if we had to wait through my sabbatical was going to change that. All the pictures in the world could not recreate that moment. All of our long waits were over. All of our questions were answered. Rachel and Sarah were beautiful beyond any dream we might have had. Rachel looked like a seven year-old, not a ten year-old that the pictures made her look. Sarah was the cute six-year old we had expected. The children in the flesh were more than I could have imagined. No more watching thirty seconds of tape and then rewinding, over and over again. We were touching

and hugging their flesh. Rachel took my hand and Sarah took Mary's and they marched us to their cafeteria. The girls went away while we lunched on Russian cabbage borsht, then noodles and meat, again foregoing various cold vegetables. We took a few pictures with the girls after lunch. Then something quite interesting happened.

Mary and I had wondered what the "parting" from camp and friends would be like. Would the teachers cry? Would the children hug each other and cry? Would the ones staying behind cry? Would our girls cry? We really did not expect what happened next. At Tatiana's advice, we had about twenty pieces of candy with us so that the girls could hand them out to each of their friends. Rachel took the lead and dispensed the candy. She hugged Irina and Eugenia Popova, the girls who had attracted us to Dove in the first place, and Rachel turned to them and said in a loud clear voice, "I love you, do svedanya" and hopped into our van. That was it. No crying, No regrets. That was that. The other girls were being adopted and coming to America soon and our girls just happened to be the first to go. Mary and I were pleased to find out that Irina and Eugenia had been identified and it was only a matter of time until they would be with their new family.

The ride home went very fast. Mary started dispensing the little toys that she had brought for the ride back to the Jerdev's. We showed the girls the last picture that was taken of the four of us before Brian died, and Sarah asked if they had two "Brahts." We told them, holding back our tears, that the boys were called "Brian" and "Robby," but that was all. "The Limited" bears made a great hit. They would not let go of them for the first hour of the ride back. The trip went routinely until we were stopped by the police for speeding (good!) and Tatiana asked the girls if they wanted to "pee." The girls jumped off the van and did their field work.

We arrived back at 7:00 pm. The entire trip took about eight hours. If you are feeling sorry for us, think about Tatiana, who traveled 350 kilometers to get to Krasnodar and had the same number left after she left us. In all, I would say she traveled over 1000 kilometers that day. We arrived to the apartment populated by only Anatoly, Vera, Sasha, and Misha. Where were their parents? Where were Lee Ann and Kraig? Where was Vova? We found out. Kraig managed somehow to lose his passport, travel visa, and plane tickets in a taxi in the late afternoon. I was excited for myself that our girls were finally with us, but disturbed that my new friend had such an event. Kraig did not seem too upset. He felt that it was more of an inconvenience than anything worth worrying about. Then I found out that Vova's car had received a dent while being parked on the street, but everything seemed to be under control.

The girls knew that they had to change their clothes and return their outfits to Tatiana. They grabbed Mary by the hand and said "Pashlee," (i.e., "Let's go") and went into the bedroom, disrobed, and changed. That was the first time we saw their, little, well-fed bodies. Mary dressed them in a jeans jumper and a white, girlish tee-shirt. They looked stunning. I could not take my eyes from them. Later that evening Lee Ann filmed the girls taking a bath together. Did the girls ever enjoy that! Just before supper Anatoly came into our bedroom waving a blue piece of paper (The decree had been signed!!). The gamble of coming before the decree had been signed seemed to have paid off. Only the physical and the final visa interview were left as a possible roadblock. As far as I could tell, we were home free.

As much as we want to be at Staci's graduation party, our loyalty to Lee Ann (and Misha) is our first priority. Our decree was signed, but Misha's was not. Everyone but Lee Ann is getting their passports later today, but Lee Ann cannot leave for Moscow without her decree. We will stay with her until hers is signed.

Now if some Russian would return Kraig's tickets, etc., we will all be happy again. Of course, any unpleasantness associated with losing these papers is well offset by the arrival of Sasha. There is no real reason to be upset and Kraig understands that. Only once this week have the Jerdev's slept in their own apartment and last night was not one of them. Each morning, everyone but me is awakened to the booming voice of Anatoly, "The Father", chewing out someone who has not followed out his orders. Kraig quipped, "I think that there are some Russians walking around with no butt." Mary is sound asleep and I am once again starving.

Friday, June 7th, early in the morning

The apartment is beginning to show signs of exhaustion. The children are starting to understand the freedom of their new lives. As we awaken to another sumptuous breakfast, there is anticipation that the two families, whose adoption decree has been signed, may be heading to Moscow before the day is over, and if this is true, we would make it to Goldie's in time for her daughter's graduation party. Our anticipation is further peaked when we hear that we are taking the children for passport photographs.

Right after breakfast I catch a few winks and am awakened just in time for lunch. I awake to good news. Kraig's passport, travel visa, and tickets have been found and he must pay a reward (\$60) and he will avoid any inconvenience. Kraig is elated. In the afternoon, the children are cleaned up and prepared for the photo session. Kraig tries to convince Sasha that she should take a nap and she will have none of it. Sasha gets Kraig to understand that she is a woman and the boss. Not bad for a five year old. Our girls make our bed and insist that we lay down for a nap after lunch. They are very clever. They know that at Tatiana's that they must nap after lunch, so they avoid the nap by putting the nappers to bed before they are placed there themselves. Our girls watch over us, playing with their teddy bears. They also put the teddy bears down for a nap. Mary and I now hear our two girls, Rachel and Sarah, whisper non-stop for the next ninety minutes. Mary gets up, but I actually fall asleep to the repeated sounds of the book Goldie gave us for the girls: "This is a phone, ring ring, ring." As I emerge from slumber, the mood in the apartment is starting to deteriorate. Vova brings by the passport photos, which means that there is no chance that we will make it to Goldie's party. We are trying to find out when we will be going home.

We start eating, having received very little new knowledge. Lee Ann is coming unglued. Sasha, Rachel, and Sarah have decrees, but still Misha's is unsigned. Anatoly came home and downloaded the news of the day to Vova. (Grateful appreciation to Kraig, our chiropractor, for describing the process) The news as translated to English by Vova is not good. Still no decree for Lee Ann. We all get our next official paper, a certificate of adoption. There is still neither a birth certificate nor a passport and each will take a business day. So we are told that the best scenario is that we will leave Krasnodar Tuesday on the three

o'clock plane or worst scenario at midnight. Now, both women are upset. They shouldn't be, of course, they are getting what they came to Russia for and losing maybe a few days in the process. Lee Ann says "Heck, we came without an invitation, why not go home the same way." Obviously, she is joking. Supper is anything but pleasant. We still do not know if we are the guests of Anatoly and Vera or if there is going to be a whopping room and board bill at the end of our stay, which is clearly getting longer. We wonder how much more it will cost to fly back to America now that our tickets are for a time we cannot make. Lee Ann is concerned about what she will say to Mike, her husband, who through our stay hears only a few words from Misha. Mike is feeling the frustration almost as much as Lee Ann. Lee Ann mentions to us all that the Rossiya Hotel in Moscow received a good review from a friend of Alex's and it is only \$100/day and quite close to Red Square. Kraig tries to console Lee Ann and it seems to be working. Mary isn't helping the situation since she is upset, too. She wants to know how on earth Brent got out so fast, and I remind her that his decree was signed before he flew here. Slowly Mary begins to realize that there is little to be gained by complaining. Our gracious hosts want us to be allowed to leave as soon as possible, but they all too well understand the ways of Russia. We learn of Vera's "white lie." She tells our girls that they were stolen from us, then we went to the United States, and now we are coming back to find the girls. Coming from Babushka Vera, this must be true. We will figure out how to explain this to our girls one day, but for now, we will live with the illusion. I begin to worry that after five more days of such close living, the girls might answer the visa interview question "Nyet, We do not want to go to Amerika."

We decide that a little outing would be best for the spirits of all of us. Vova takes the Friedmans in his car and Kraig drives Anatoly's beat up 1984 Mercedes 240D with automatic transmission. Kraig's car has the two "single" parents and their children. We try the open air market, but an earlier rain caused most of the booths to fold up their tent, literally, for the day. Next we take the kids to an ice cream parlor. Everyone gets a vanilla ice cream sundae with chocolate topping. Not me, of course, I just watch. Mary describes it as the worst ice cream she has ever had. Even here, Vova negotiates the price. This seems to settle everyone down. Kraig and I are unflappable during all of this, but now the woman are a bit more relaxed.

We are becoming more and more like Vova. We are learning to joke about our situation. Without Vova's understanding of human nature, we would indeed be a sorry lot. Vova points out to Lee Ann that he could get her a job and asks Mary if going home on the 21st would be okay. These questions are meant to remind both women that Tuesday is not nearly so far away. We get home around 9:30 and the nightly bath ritual follows. It is uncanny to us that the bath is as powerful a bribe as candy in getting the children to behave. Rachel asks Mary at least ten times a day if she will be getting a shampoo and bath tonight. Slowly it becomes clear that the only house phone is no longer functional, so calls from America, the only way to hear from family, will stop. Goldie was supposed to call us at 9:30, but now we are down to a fax machine. Speaking of being broken, the light switch to the bathroom is quite a piece of work. There are two switches together. One for the room with the toilet and one for the room with the sink and tub. The light switch no longer works, but by placing a cardboard tile at the right end, it holds down the switch. Vova tells us that we will meet his English teacher, who is complimented if she is told that her

English sounds American, but will be disappointed if her English sounds British. His teacher has a satellite dish so we will be able to watch American T.V. I frankly don't miss it at all. I do wonder what is going on in the world, but it has managed without me for many years and I see no reason why it cannot do without me for a few more days. All the children behave quite well. Our girls sing and dance in the afternoon. Misha does somersaults and tries to stand on his head. He is quite remarkably agile. Sasha walks around the apartment, smiling. If we can keep the adults from self-destructing, the next few days should be easy. Mary is sleeping and I am starving.

Saturday, June 8th, early in the morning

Yesterday, I awoke to my morning ritual of writing in my journal, shaving and showering. between the bed and the shower, I did something to my lower back that made it impossible to stand up. I laid on the carpet and did some simple exercises that Kraig showed me. Wasn't I lucky that this happened with a chiropractor in the house. Again we had a sumptuous breakfast, but instead of eating at the table, my breakfast was served to me by Mary on the floor of our bedroom. Kraig suggested that I take 800mg of Ibuprofen. I had been taking 600mg for my right thumb and I brought along a bottle of 200mg, so I started taking one of these little pills as well. Kraig went with Vova in the morning to help him fix Vova's car. Next thing I know I am on my belly on our bed and Vera is giving me an amazing massage. She poured some mixture of olive oil, I think, and peppers on my back and then rubbed it into every pore of my back. It felt so good. It must have lasted twenty-five minutes and it was quite intense at times. Mary watched and I knew she wanted Vera to do the same thing for her. I would not

be surprised if the group catches my back problem. When she was done, she placed a plaster pancake on the spot with the pain and tied a sweater around my back to keep the pancake in place. I spent the rest of the day on my back, mostly sleeping, but occasionally reading a bit of "Bandits" by Elmore Leonard, the author of "Get Shorty." At 2:45, I arose, and joined Vera for lunch, since the rest of the party was away for the day.

Kraig, Lee Ann, and Mary, along with the children piled into Vova's little car. They visited Vova's English teacher, Lira, who took them to Sam's Pizza and following that went shopping. Misha got a beautiful almost leather backpack (approx \$20) and our girls each got a toy make-up set. While at Lira's, they watched a tape of Oprah and some Tom and Jerry cartoons, dubbed in Russian. Lira asked the girls their new name. They replied, "Please, you will have to ask our mother."

The news of the day was good for Kraig, Mary and me. We now had the birth certificates of our children and only the passport was needed and we would be on our way out of Krasnodar. We are told by Vova that we will leave Tuesday evening at midnight. In all the excitement and handfuls of candy, supper got skipped. Vera knew that I could not eat egg and Lee Ann volunteered that she got sick when she ate egg. Mary somehow communicated a lack of interest, so we had bread, caviar, and hot tea.

Following the nightly bath ritual, the girls, Rachel and Sarah, put on a thirty minute dancing and singing recital. It was beautiful. Rachel is such a graceful dancer and Sarah can really belt out a tune. Their act was quite good, with Misha adding an impromptu interpretation. After dinner, Vova and his parents leave for some well-deserved entertainment. We get together in the "War Room," our bedroom, to see if we can find out what

kind of questions we should ask Vova. We need to know, in advance, if we will be paying like we did in Moscow or if we will just pay \$65/day/family. We try to find out if there is any rational reason for Lee Ann's delay. Now we are told that she should get Misha's decree signed on Saturday.

The plan for the weekend is emerging. The family will take the group to the Sea of Azov. It will be cold there, so we must be sure to dress warmly. It is this trip that inspired us to find out if there were any hidden entertainment or translation costs. We are assured by Vova that there will not be any.

After the recital, all the children were excited and getting them to sleep was, for the first time, a chore. Rachel and Sarah kept popping out of bed and coming into our room. They are experimenting with this kind of freedom. They want to know just how far they can push their new parents.

Kraig's Sasha is very strong-willed. He confides in me that, like me, he is concerned that the visa interview question asked of his child about going to Amerika will be answered in the negative. We pay "The Father" \$100/passport and spend the rest of the evening just chatting about what we will do, eat, and drink first when we arrive back in the states. Everyone, but me, will have a tall glass of ice water. Lee Ann wants a big juicy steak from Houston's of Kansas City, Mary wants to walk barefoot on her lawn, Kraig just wants to see his lawn. The rustic conditions and the dirtiness of the streets are getting to everyone. A long, hot shower is everyone's dream. I'm content just waiting peacefully for Tuesday evening, but will try our luck in automobiles for the 140 kilometer trip to the sea later today. I think this is a mistake but will tag along. Mary is sleeping and I am, as usual, starving.

Monday, June 10th, early in the morning

The weekend was filled with merriment and surprise. We headed to “The Father’s” beach house around 8:30 am, after what could only be described as a quick breakfast. Vera was anything but calm. I had not seen her so excited before this. We drove in two cars. Vova’s wife, Rita, joined our group as well. The Friedmans were in the back seat of the Mercedes. In the front seat was “The Father” and Vera, all the others were in Vova’s little car. We made a stop about half-way to the sea for drinks, like sodas, and to pick up a recently live chicken, feathers and all. We had already packed about nine loaves of bread, some homemade strawberry-cherry drink, and several large pickle jars full of homemade wine. We all packed for a one-night stay. Three and half hours later, we pull into one of Anatoly and Vera’s friend’s cottages. They treat the children to mounds of cherries and pick up some fresh vegetables from their garden. We are offered a bag of ginger snaps, with very little snap, which Vera takes along. We meet the woman of the house, Zena, who is a charming woman, clearly full of love. We make another stop and pick up a young fellow, who is deposited at some construction site to work with his father. Just a few more minutes and we are at the seaside beach house. I am hoping that Mary has taken pictures of the inside of this beach house. Let me describe it anyway. The cottage is shaped like a house trailer, with the long side perpendicular to the beach. On their property, the only bathroom facilities is a movable outhouse with plastic covering for the seats. The way the movable outhouse works is that when the “hole” is filled with various excrement, the outhouse is picked up and moved about three feet over a new unused hole. At this point the old hole is filled with sand and the process repeats. This is not very appetizing, but it does work. As you enter the beach house in the center of the long

side, there is a cooking area, about six feet by eight feet. Off either end of this little cooking area is a single room. Mary, the girls, and I slept on one side, Lee Ann, Kraig, and their children slept on the other side. The eating area, which is outside, is directly under our window, and is covered, so that you do not bake while you are eating. Behind the dining area, is a large table used for preparing the food. At the end of the dining area, is a bucket that contains water suitable for cleaning and a bar of soap. The bucket works by pushing up a stick, which causes the water to “overflow” out of the bottom of the bucket, and that is how you cleaned your hands before eating. Vova and Rita slept in their partially remodeled, recently purchased cottage, and Anatoly and Vera slept in the Mercedes, with the seats all the way down. The weather could not have been more perfect. It hovered around 80 with a strong sea breeze. The children starting by wading in the sea with all their clothes on, except of course, their shoes, but soon all their clothes, except undies, came off. We covered their alabaster bodies in the “50” tanning sportscreme I happened to bring along and watched as the children ran into the sea about two feet and ran out of the sea. In and out; in and out; there were no swimmers among them. Vera brought out some bathing suits, but used and perhaps not laundered suits was no temptation to any of the Americans.

For lunch we had potatoes, bread, Russian coleslaw, some soft drinks, and lots of wine. After lunch, Anatoly and Vova pull out the nets and catch supper. It was extraordinary. It was as if the fish wanted to be caught. They caught more fish in half an hour than the ten of us could possibly eat over the weekend. To add to this, Kraig joined some of Anatoly’s buddies and caught a bunch more. Kraig said, “I caught one about every six seconds.” There is not much sport in that. We had Pike, Perch, Smelts, and various other kinds of fish. The children were quite adept

at eating the fish and avoiding the bones. Following supper, we headed for the summer camp grounds along the beach. It was as close as a football field to Anatoly's parcel of land. When we arrived there, in various states of inebriation, we discovered that the gate was locked. But, this is Russia, of course, and no one would be at the camp for three weeks, so we climbed the six foot high fence, and entered the camp's "swings area." The children, after their climb over the gate, were delighted. There was a merry-go-round that we all remembered from our youth. You get in and sit down; hold onto the bars for your life, while the people on the outside turn the unit around as fast as possible. It was going so fast some of the time that it was as hard for the adults to look at it as it was for the children to ride it. An hour or so of this and we were ready to climb the gate again and put the children down for the night. At the time the children go to bed, we see a completely clear sky over the sea. I imagine staying up all night to look at stars. Sometime after supper, Vera and Rita are ready for a massage lesson from Kraig, and my back is going to be the textbook. I lay down on the floor of our room and they start giving me the massage of anyone's life. First Vera, then Rita, then Kraig, then Vera again, then Rita, etc. I call it "dueling massages." I do not know what they were doing, but since my first massage, I have been able to walk despite long car trips, etc. When the children were in bed, Anatoly made a campfire and we sat around it and stared into the night sky. The fire had two functions. First, it warmed our bodies as the evening took on a chill and second it kept the mosquitoes away. I may have been bitten once, but Lee Ann seemed to be the mosquitoes target. Eventually the fire died down and we ambled off to bed.

First Brent, next Lee Ann, then Kraig, and now I experience a kind of alienation from our children. We want the children to love us instantly, as if we had raised them from birth, but that is not what happens. Brent and Kraig have daughters whose only teachers have been women, so their children naturally cling to the women in the group. Misha loves Lee Ann, but naturally clings to men, and I am outflanked by Mary, who has plied the girls with gifts and knew far more Russian than me. The girls instantly bond with her. She seems to understand all their needs and she is with them for baths. I am not concerned, but it does bother the havenots to see the haves (i.e., Mary) so successful at bonding. Kraig is visibly shaken by this. Lee Ann is too upset by the lack of her decree to enjoy anything. It is quite sad to see the initially buoyant Lee Ann so unhappy at the “Miami Beach” of Russia. We all take turns trying to get her to look on the bright side, but Kraig is rather upset with Sasha and his alcoholic consumption makes him anything but useful as an advisor. We have all tired of Lee Ann’s constant state of unhappiness. We have problems of our own.

At the dinner table, talk turns to Russian elections and then U.S. elections and Kraig, Mary and I relentlessly attack the one Republican in our midst. We all felt bad about doing this, but it was so easy. Sometimes I wonder how in 1996 could a reasoning being vote as a conservative when they are pummeled by such symbolic leaders as Buchanan and Limbaugh. Didn’t they learn anything in school about “argument?” Do they really believe that laws can legislate morality. Of course, it certainly works well with capital punishment. Who could guess how many more thousands of murders there would be if we did not have the death penalty. And I am certain women would stop getting pregnant if abortion were illegal. Why would anyone waste their time talking to a Conservative Republican about politics?

I awake and pay the price of the wine by visiting the outhouse at four in the morning. When I emerge, the sky has some stars, but the threatened cloud cover is now quite complete. My hope of seeing a sea of stars, with no light in sight for miles, was dashed earlier and things have not improved. I go back to bed for an hour and am awakened by the sounds of Kraig and one of his fisherman buddies. I throw on some clothes and head out hoping to catch a sunrise, at least. It was a short ten minutes later that I witnessed a sea sunrise. All the times I had spent on the Atlantic Ocean, I had never seen the sun emerge from a body of water. Wow! Breakfast on Sunday was a repeat of supper. The children follow Vera a long way down the beach and Mary, Lee Ann, and I follow along. This is ostensibly a seashell hunting expedition for the children, but I am looking for unusual rocks to show the girls. When Vera and the children reached the lagoon, where the water was like glass, all the children completely disrobed and frolicked in the water.

Lunch was from two to three, of course, fish, and chicken fricassee. I could not look at another fish and I did not want another fish looking at me. Anatoly and Vova went fishing again. Cleanup was from three to four and we headed toward home. Vera picked some beautiful flowers and soon we would find out why.

Shortly after we arrived at Temrjuk, Anatoly drove to a cemetery. We were given the option of going to the site of Vera's mother and brother's grave. Vera's mother was going strong at eighty-two. While crossing a street she was hit by a car. Vova told us a story about her and the tire ride. Just before she died, the grandchildren were sliding into tires and rolling down a hill to the sea. She wanted to do it to. Her hair was gray and so he asked us to imagine what it looked like with an eighty-year old woman inside a tire with gray hair streaming out and rolling

down the hill into the sea. He said that he laughed until his sides hurt. Vera's brother had an aneurism and died at the age of thirty-five. On the gravestones were actual pictures of the deceased. Vera placed flowers at each site, which were adjoining, and carefully wiped off the top of each stone.

We arrived back to civilization around 7:30. Then all hell broke loose. My sister, Nancy and then my mother called. They were concerned, since we were out of touch all weekend. This was nothing and easy to resolve. Then Mike called. Lee Ann had a very short conversation with Mike. This was not a good sign. Then there was a longer conversation. Mike told Lee Ann to come home Tuesday with or without Misha. He called Ivan and threatened to disrupt the process and sue YUNONA if something wasn't done immediately. Exhausted, Anatoly and Vova scrambled around looking at Misha's dossier. The ugly American had really turned ugly. The Russians cannot understand the urgency of getting things done now. Anatoly has been building a summer home on the outskirts of Krasnodar for ten years. We do not do things like that in the U.S. We want it now. Mike's call to Ivan and Ivan's subsequent call to Anatoly seems to have relieved Lee Ann's stress. With people like Lee Ann and Mike, whom I have not met, each day is quite costly. Lee Ann is missing classes and work and the plan they had to get to know Misha together, since both work, was starting to unravel. Mike has had it with the promises of "tomorrow" it will be signed, etc. Now the unflappable Kraig is upset since we have been promised that we would leave Krasnodar by Tuesday midnight, the latest, and if Mike's salvo undermines us, Kraig and Mary are going to be upset. I am hoping for the best outcome, but refuse to be upset by waiting another twenty-four hours. We have what we came for: the girls. We have them and another twenty-four hours seems like very little to pay.

Sometimes I think that Kraig might be looking for a way out of bringing Sasha home. She has been anything but loving to him. She has bonded with every woman here, but not with Kraig. I keep reminding him that Sasha is only five years old and it will take time, but it is his first child and he wants everything to be perfect, and it isn't.

As night falls, we think that Anatoly and Vera will be leaving for Otradnaya at four in the morning and will return around four in the afternoon. I loan them my calculator/alarm clock because there is no electricity in the place that they have been sleeping. We may get our passports for the three children by nine tonight and if, so, we will fly out tonight at midnight. If not, we expect to leave sometime on Tuesday.

We had a few interesting events over the weekend. We saw just how bonded Sarah is to Rachel. It is apparently okay for Sarah to kiss Mary without Rachel's permission, but if Sarah wants to kiss Papa, she must get Rachel's permission. On the way back to the apartment, Sarah had a kissing frenzy. She could not stop kissing Mary for a couple of minutes. I think this upset Rachel. After Sarah fell asleep in the car on Papa's and Mama's lap, Rachel started to weep silently. We do not know why, but this went on for about twenty minutes. Either she was feeling her control of Sarah was dwindling or perhaps she thought we were taking her back to Tatiana's. Whatever it was, it disappeared immediately when we arrived back at the apartment. The girls were the most friskiest yet, constantly jumping out of bed at night, making funny noises, etc. They seemed very happy.

On the way home we stopped at Zena's. Mary, then I, and finally Kraig used the real "brick shit house." The number four in Russian is pronounced "chiteria." I pointed out to Mary that I felt that we all used the "shiteria." Got a good laugh.

Tuesday: June 11th, early in the morning

Yesterday morning we piled into the 240D. Only two adults in the front, and the rest in the back. We drove to a money-changing place. While there, Lee Ann and I took all the kids to a two-story department store that had some toys on the second level. The children, who owned nothing while living in Russia had a “buy me” frenzy. It is hard for us to understand the transition to ownership, but it certainly is natural. The girls hit me up for “little girl” sun glasses and some gold plated plastic headbands. Before I knew what had hit me, I had a whopping bill of 24,000 rubles, 12,000 for each child. Combined it was a little over five dollars. They must have asked for ten different items before we left the store. The children are like pack rats with everything they own. They always know where their backpacks are and what is in them. They always know where their toiletry bags are. They always know where Meska (their teddy bear) is and where Kukla (their doll) is, etc. If we have given something to them, they know where it is.

Finally, Mary, Kraig, and Vova arrived and some peaceful coexistence once again prevailed. Next we took the children to another toy store. Our girls homed in on two dolls, one for each. The doll was called “Our beloved Annie” (Like a Barbie doll, but European style), The price of toys went way up. The dolls were 28,000 rubles each, so we escaped this binge for under eleven dollars. The girls were ecstatic. Then we drove to YUNONA to see where everything happens. It was a 2-room building, rather dark, with a waiting room and a work room. Off the workroom was a closet where supplies were stored. The toilet was three outhouses, side by side. I passed up the opportunity to use them, but it was like Kraig said “If it is outdoors, no matter how fancy it is, it still stinks.” We left YUNONA and strolled

down to the street of the administration building. Next to it was a fancy bookstore. They had “? for Dummies” for various ?, something on Tex, and Norton Utilities, etc., all in Russian. I regret to say that there was no copy of “The Little Schemer.” I simply wanted a map of the Krasnodar territory which had all the points of interest: Otradnaya, Krasnodar, Gelendzhik, Timashevsk, Temrjuk, and the Sea of Azov, but in this store, which had quite a few maps, none could be found that satisfied my criteria. On the second floor of the bookstore, were displays of Matruska Dolls. These are the dolls, which contain dolls enclosed within them, etc. We had the girls pick out ones for their grandmothers and their aunts. I wanted one for myself, too. In addition, we bought some jewelry boxes. The grand total for this extravagance was about eighty dollars. We asked for a proof that the store was legally able to sell to foreigners. Lee Ann and Kraig both bought similar gifts for their family members. Lee Ann and Misha had been there earlier in the week and Misha being so lovable, the staff recognized him. They gave him a cute little wooden toy that had five chicks on the top and a string connected to each chick. As the string was moved, the chicks gave the impression of eating. Well, it is the thought that counts.

As we headed back to YUNONA, Vova and I stopped and got a few snacks (bread and ham). When we arrived, the adults had tea and the children had the open-faced ham sandwiches. I was introduced to an attractive woman, who I was told was a professor of massage. Someone has to teach it. I was placed on a table and the massage du jour commenced. Twenty minutes later, I emerged, a very satisfied client. This was the best massage yet.

We got back in the car and Vova mentioned to us that Rachel had said that “Mama has all the money.” They may be young, they may not know the language, but they do not miss much. We arrived back at the apartment for a sumptuous meal.

Vova asked, who amongst us could help our cause by helping him to translate documents using Microsoft Word for Windows. This was Victor’s job, but he was in Moscow with Anna, trying to procure a visa for her. So the job fell to Vova, who is an English teacher. Naturally, I refused. Fortunately, Lee Ann and Kraig were quite prepared to use this tool. Just before they left to get the computing equipment from Victor’s bachelor pad, Vova received the long-awaited news that Misha’s decree had been signed. So, instead of doing the translation, they went off to the administration building and deftly procured the decree. A process that might have taken ten more days was done in under two hours. Since Anatoly and Vera were not yet back from their 700 kilometer journey, Mary and I took charge of the four children. About this time, the Pepsi Cola I had purchased that Mary had imbibed, against my better judgment, kicked in. The caffeine in the soda led to a serious heart palpitation. When Mary gets this, she must sit very still, since it is as if she were running 20-30 minutes. The girls sensed Mary’s pain and brought a blanket to cover her. All the children mercifully behaved well in the afternoon and soon Mary’s marathon was over. The Jerdev’s returned and right away Vera wanted to give me a massage. Following my bath, I got my second massage of the day. The others returned with the necessary computing equipment, like a laptop, and dinner was served: potatoes, pasta, sausage, and cabbage and onion slaw: a great meal. Following dinner, all the equipment and the “WORD” users went to Victor’s and returned with everything done by 1:30 in the morning. There Lee Ann discovers that Misha is, indeed, six.

We also have post-supper plans. Vera takes Mary, whom she has grown very fond of, and I along with the children on a long stroll through various parks and apartment complexes. The amazing thing about this walk was seeing that almost everyone of all ages enjoyed being outdoors and doing things with each other. There were groups of children of various ages playing together. We saw lots of dogs and no dog fights. The people seemed very happy and the co-mingling of ages seemed quite natural.

When we got home from our long walk, Mary and I fielded two calls from Kraig's wife, Allison, and learned for certain that the American Embassy in Moscow would be closed all day Wednesday, because of Russian Independence Day. This was the day that Yeltsin stood on the tank. This was also the day we were to have our visa interview. This is starting to feel like one of those dreams. You are trying to get somewhere and when you just about get there, you discover another hurdle. It appears we will either leave Moscow with a stopover in New York on Friday or go directly to Chicago on Saturday. If so, we will have been gone a full two weeks. Everyone's spirits are pretty high. Kraig's bonding with the strong-willed Sasha is starting to happen. Lee Ann finally got her decree signed. I know we are likely heading to Moscow this afternoon, and hopefully will get the girls through their physical later this afternoon. After being supper to too many flying critters, Kraig, Mary, and I have resolved to sleep in a hotel with air conditioning tonight in Moscow. As usual, Mary is sleeping, and I, like the Pavlovian dog that I have become, am starving.

Wednesday: June 12th, early in the morning. Russian Independence Day

Yesterday started quite early. Brent Mager called Kraig, I think mostly to give him some inside knowledge on the process we would face in Moscow if our children's passports would ever get signed. Then I got an unusual call from Ivan, asking me do to a small personal favor for him concerning Anna. Anna is currently stuck in Moscow. Her request for a visa to America has been denied without a hearing, since she is an unmarried Russian woman. The request from Ivan is simple. Please bring her case to the attention of Michael Marine, since no one has ever looked at the file given Anna's marital status. I agree to do Ivan this favor. The debriefing from Kraig and this phone call take place before five in the morning on Tuesday. After our usual big breakfast, Mary and I, along with Kraig start packing for our expected flight to Moscow later that afternoon. (Or, as Vova reminded us, worst case would be the midnight flight.) We had no particular plans that Tuesday. Once we were all packed, we sat around and waited for lunch. Vova did not come by the house this morning; only Vera and Rita were there to feed us. Neither was good enough to be our translator. Lunch was good, too. After lunch, Vera, who along with Anatoly is fifty seven, took all four children for a walk. I think she did this as much for the preservation of her apartment as for the opportunity to be with the children. All we knew was that for the first time in quite awhile, the apartment was silent. It was just around 1:30 and we expected Anatoly or Vova to come through the apartment entrance waving the passports in the air. With absolutely nothing to do, but wait, I suggested that perhaps Lee Ann and Kraig might enjoy hearing the chronicle of their days at Anatoly's and Vera's apartment. Apparently that

was a good idea. They enjoyed it and they assured me that when I sent them text files, they would try to remind me that there were facets of the trip that I had overlooked. I reminded them that writing without rewriting is not writing, but if they forgave my writing and oversights, I would proceed. Several hours later, I was done reading the chronicle and we were definitely not on any plane from Krasnodar to Moscow. It looks like we were wrong again. It is now around four in the afternoon. Vera has returned with the children, which accounted for the elongated reading hour. She is off to the dentist, then her singing and dancing courses will follow later in the afternoon. Vova finally makes an appearance. He looks quite tired and has no news. Kraig has had it with the children getting into every drawer and closet in the apartment and so he asks Vova to tell the children that such behavior must stop. I decide that it is time for the children to know that soon we will be heading to Moscow and so I sweeten Kraig's reprimand with a little sugar. All the children are asked if they want to go to Amerika and they all say "Da." A day of sitting and relaxing is slowly turning into a day of no news. But, that is not to be the case.

Around 5:30, "The Father" proudly walks into the apartment. Says a word or two to Vera and hands Rita a letter of some political importance. Vera is all excited, so we think that perhaps there is some good news. A conversation between Anatoly, Vera, Vova, and Rita ensues. (It dragged on for ten minutes.). We think that we have our passports, but "The Father" has not done his "passport" dance that we had seen for other families. Mary, Kraig, and I look at each other wondering. Before I tell you what happened next, I will tell you what Vova said when he got to the apartment. Vova told us a story about the person who was to sign the passport. He had a visit from a friend and he hasn't been seen since. But we have noth-

ing to worry about for he will most certainly be back to work on Thursday, the day after the Russian's holiday. If you have become adept at interpreting this story, it means that we will be here, again, over the weekend, and Thursday could just as easily be Friday or perhaps Monday, but don't worry, we will get you out before it snows. I know that Vova enjoys these little tales of torture and that Kraig and I are not too concerned. We know the Jerdev's are doing all they can for us, but the women, Lee Ann and Mary, are visibly bothered by the latest story. If Vova knows the news, he is certainly keeping it a secret. The father tells Lee Ann good news: the next paper she needed signed has been completed. With this, she now needs only the birth certificate and the passport.

Then Anatoly went into his briefcase and out emerged three passports: one for Sasha, one for Rachel, and one for Sarah. Pandemonium erupted. We quickly found the girls and hugged them and kissed them and lifted them (bad back and all). They understood completely why we were so excited. We took out our passports and showed them once again to our girls. They saw their pictures in the Russian passports that we had procured. This celebration, which included Kraig and Sasha, went on for fifteen minutes. Mary, the girls, and I were going to Amerika. The final big hurdle had been crossed. If there is a true defining moment that represented everything, it was the giving of the passports to our girls. After the celebration died down, I got another massage, but this one was given by Rachel and Sarah. They had watched when Vera had given me a massage and wanted to do the same thing for their Papa. They made me turn my head as they searched their toiletry kits for hand lotion to rub on my back. They must have had me there for thirty minutes. I suggested "Mama massage." They brought her into our room and gave her a ten minute massage and then I got

another twenty minute one. The girls are all over me. They are roughhousing and hugging and kissing me non-stop. Children of this age have boundless energy. Papas of my age, don't, but playing with the girls might be a way to change that.

At 7:35, Anatoly and Vova become glued to the television. There is a soccer match between Russia and Italy. We all rooted for Russia, but they lost 2-1. The Italian team is like "The New York Yankees" baseball team when I was growing up in the 50's. It only mattered who would win the pennant in the National League, since it was a foregone conclusion who would take the American League. Although Vova and Anatoly were disappointed, there was still work to be done. Vova and Anatoly took Kraig and Mary to the airport to get tickets for tomorrow's flight to Moscow. Anatoly asked Mary and Kraig on the trip to the airport whether having the children right away was a good idea. In principle, we are only to get the children when they have their passports. We all agree that getting them earlier is much better, especially given that we have Vova and Vera. We get to know the children and the children us though our interpreter and host. Also, Anatoly tells Mary that if she would stay another month, she would speak Russian fluently. Somehow I think Mary will pass up that opportunity. While Mary was away buying the tickets to Moscow, the girls go wild. The level of roughhousing has escalated. To put it bluntly, the girls are out of control and I am no match for the two of them. They are strong and determined. They pin me to their bed and giggle and laugh at how much they can accomplish when Mama is not around. Yes, it was really happening.

Lee Ann had been distraught since "The Father" had told her she would leave for Moscow on Friday "A weekend in Moscow; no thanks."). She announced to the Jerdev's that she was leaving for America on Saturday and she had better have her passport.

She spoke to LaDonna at Dove, who spoke with Ivan and she managed to agitate enough people that she honestly went to sleep thinking that she would make it. If she does, it will be quite impressive. We all keep reminding her that this is Russia, the land that “on time” forgot. Lee Ann talks to Mike in the wee hours of the morning. He calls Allison to have her call Kraig. Allison calls Goldie to tell her to expect us on Saturday on the only flight from Moscow to Chicago. I try to remind Lee Ann that we should treat the Jerdev’s as the good friends they have become and avoid creating any unpleasantness between Anatoly and Dove. It felt like 100 degrees in the war room as the meeting was ended by snoring sounds emanating from Mary’s direction. It is hard to believe it, but once again, Mary is sleeping and I am starving.

Thursday: June 13th, early in the morning, at the Metropol Hotel in Moscow

When we arrived at Sheremetovo I, the day had gone as expected. We awoke, ate breakfast, packed, waited until noon, had some tea, said our goodbyes, and went off to the airport. I knew deep in my mind that things were too good to be true. It could not possibly be as easy as it appeared. Just get a color photo of the girls for their visas and medical, a doctor’s approval, an interview at the American Embassy, and we would be home.

I had forgotten that Boris, the director at Sochi and Anna’s father, had called me and told me that he had left a letter and a package for me at Stella’s. Boris had asked me personally, as did Ivan, to plead Anna’s case at the American Embassy. I agreed to do this for him. Kraig had a letter from his congressman asking Michael Marine to help out in any way. After looking at

a couple of rooms at the Metropol, we chose a beautiful room that we only had to pay for two of the three nights and there would be no VT (20 percent tax). Even though it was expensive, it was worth every penny. Of course, choosing to go to a hotel, and the Metropol at that is probably a great shock to Boris, who left me an envelope with instructions at Stella's. In the exhausted state that I am in, having lived rather modestly for the past twelve days, I was thrilled to move into the Metropol. This apparently upset Boris very much. Boris's plan to get Anna a travel visa was unraveling. We decide that since Moscow is a bustle with free concerts, etc., on Russian Independence Day, that we would eat at the Metropol restaurant. Big mistake. We ate almost nothing and it cost seventy-six dollars. But, during our meal, I received a phone call. It was from Boris. Boris starts the conversation with "You have a vacation tomorrow." This sounds quite ominous to me. Tomorrow is supposed to be the day of the children's perfunctory physical examination and the day we get their color visa photos. Friday is the day we are to get our Embassy interview. If we have a day off tomorrow, we will not be able to get out of here for several days and my visa expires in eight days. I must comply with Boris's demands. I am beginning to feel like a character in a LeCarre novel. I think that Mary and I could do all this ourselves, but with our visa deadline arriving soon, who knows, it might take weeks to get the examination on our own. Anatoly's doctor is who we are to see. The original request from Boris was to have Anna's file looked at by Michael Marine. I think the stakes have escalated. Now, I think that only a successful day will do. I fear that the envelope with instructions contains a healthy bribe and that somehow accepting it would put me in jeopardy.

As our conversation continued and Boris's tone became more stern, he stated that I would meet Victor and Anna at the lobby

between 8:00 am and 8:30 am. They would give me the dreaded envelope of instructions and take Kraig, who had the letter from his congressman, and me to the Embassy. I don't think that Kraig is aware of the situation. He is happy to comply. I don't think he realizes that Anna's fate is our fate. If she gets a visa, we will get our children, but if not, we won't and my visa expires next Saturday, and Russian bureaucracy being what it is, it could be months before we return, and I do not even know if I can get our visa extended. We cannot confirm our flight yet because of Boris's daughter's visa problem.

The girls quickly acclimatize themselves to their new surroundings. After dinner we took the girls for ice cream. Each cone cost 3000 rubles. Then we headed to our room. The girls went ahead of us running through the corridors of the fifth floor, and to both Mary's and my surprise, they stopped right at 5567, our room. We must keep reminding ourselves that these are smart Russian children. It is good to return to the lap of luxury, but I hope the cost to our personal lives will not be great. CNN is here and I am close to going to the press if things are not resolved by Saturday. Everything is up to Stella and Boris. Mary is sleeping and I have pretty much lost my appetite.

Saturday: June 15th, on the plane going home

Here we are on the plane, having suffered the indignities of leaving Russian soil. Anyone who has ever left from Sheremetovo II must know how we feel. First, there is an hour wait where someone takes your declaration of products purchased. We kept ours under \$200. Next, there is a forty-five minute wait and that is just to have your luggage checked and boarding passes presented. Finally, there is another hour wait where the passports, visa, and children's papers are inspected. There was not

one smile from anyone in any line or by any agent. Got there at noon, waited in line for three hours for a flight that was intended to leave at ten of two. The moral of this story is that if you want to spend any time in duty-free shops, you must get there four to six hours before departure. The real losers in all this waiting are the owners of the duty-free shops. The shops always seem to be empty.

Even getting to the airport was a bit more than we had expected. Eugene told us that he would pick us up at noon, but he showed up at just a little past ten, interrupting our eighty-four dollar breakfast. Each meal was twenty-eight dollars and each child was charged half of that. It was a huge buffet breakfast. I think there were six tables of food, including Japanese cuisine. We left our hotel with Eugene, who then proceeded to connect with a friend of his, who drove a taxi. We led his friend to Hotel Barton Fink, where he picked up Lee Ann and Misha. If all goes as predicted, we should see Goldie, her husband, and Mary's parents around 6:00 pm, Chicago time, after a ten hour flight.

Thursday was no picnic. Having been intimidated by Boris's call in the middle of our meal, I was up early on Thursday and ready to greet Victor and Anna at eight. A short taxi ride and we were at the American Embassy. Kraig was picked up by Serge and joined us there. One advantage of being an American is that you do not have to wait in line when entering the embassy. No one has made an appointment with Michael Marine for the simple reason that you can't. Without going into details, we waited three hours in a hot, sticky room and I spoke with Clerk #3 for about 5 minutes and he listened and denied Anna's request for a visa. I tried quite hard to convince the fellow, but he recalled Anna's case from two previous attempts. The denial was because there was no evidence of her returning.

I got back to the Metropol around noon, a beaten man. Not only did I sit and sweat with nothing to read, but I lost the case. But, to make matters worse, I had to come back to the same sweltering building again on Friday. and that was assuming that everything went well the rest of the day. We were told that at one we would have our children undergo their physical. We arrived approximately one hour late for our medical. You can imagine how hysterical Mary was. It was Thursday afternoon, we thought that we had missed our physical and that we were going to have to stay in Russia for at least four more days. I think at this point, Mary would have been upset if she were told she would have to stay in Russia four more hours. Nothing was wrong with arriving late to the physical. This is Russia. You are one hour early when you arrive one hour late. The doctor was very nice. He did a perfunctory examination; he said, "This is mostly a bureaucratic examination." He determined that both girls will need some orthodontia, they had a good sense of humor, and that they had received little or no formal training. Next, the somewhat calmed, but still nervous Mary had us go to Aeroflot to get seats home on Saturday. Except for the girls, especially the ring leader, Sarah, being a bit rambunctious, everything went off perfectly and we got our seats. You could measure the tension pouring from Mary's body. Finally, we got color visa photos for the girls. We were not exactly in compliance with the law, since the doctor was supposed to get the color photo and staple it to his evaluation and seal the envelope. We ended up doing that.

That evening we walked around a bit and had dinner composed of salami sandwiches made in the room from a grocery store near the hotel. This was much cheaper than the meal we had the night before. The bath was followed by a skit that the girls put on for us. Unfortunately we did not understand what

they were saying. It did appear to us that one of the girls was a papa, one a mama, and the teddy bear a baby. We went to sleep knowing that if all went well tomorrow, the girls with whom we had been living for nine days would officially become our children. We rehearsed our answers for the dreaded visa interview. Around 9:30 that evening we called Stella to find out if Lee Ann was coming in, but Stella had heard absolutely nothing. Mary went to sleep quite upset about Lee Ann's plight. I just worried about the visa interview.

Friday finally arrived. We were picked up and driven to the embassy by way of the medical center. Lee Ann had, in fact, come to town on the midnight flight with all her papers in tact. It took some doing on her part like bribing an official at the passport office with candy, cognac, and tears, but she got what she needed. She arrived and was met by Victor and Anna and by the time they got into Hotel Barton Fink, Lee Ann ended up with about two hours of sleep. We were there to make sure that her medical examination had gone off without a hitch. But, we are dealing with Lee Ann, here. Nothing was working for her. Mary and I had thought that she was to have another weekend by the sea. It was hard not to laugh thinking about it, but I am sure Lee Ann would have been very upset. Lee Ann paid the taxi driver eighty dollars for getting her from the airport. When we met Lee Ann at the embassy, she told us that the medical history had been omitted from Misha's dossier. She was told, however, not to worry, since it could be faxed from YUNONA. Kraig and Sasha had been there since 8:30 and we arrived at 9:30. We handed in our papers to a graduate of a Big Ten school and waited for our name to be called. When our name was called, we were given a bill of 400 dollars. (\$200/child) that we paid with traveller's checks. We were told to go to another room and wait for the dreaded visa interview. I was watching as

each couple had their interview with an agent behind a window, much like a bank teller. A couple we had chatted with earlier from Birmingham, Alabama, seemed to be at their interview forever. It had to be at least ten minutes. These interviews are supposed to take five minutes. Now I was really starting to sweat. Finally our name was called. The interview started out by our girls having a short conversation with the agent. That seemed to go smoothly. He seemed quite friendly. He asked us if we knew that the children were found abandoned in the streets. We said "Yes." At one point he asked us where we were from. We proudly said, "Bloomington, Indiana." He kept handing us papers through the slit that separated us. Then he asked us again, where we were from. Again we said, "Bloomington, Indiana." He told us how beautiful the girls were and how we would be in for a peck of trouble in six or seven years. We agreed and that was that. All this panic over nothing. Kraig and Lee Ann were done within a half-hour of our interview. Even Alex Baclawski showed up. His promised three-day wonder turned out to be two weeks.

After we got back to our hotel, we invited Kraig and Lee Ann to tour with us. Lee Ann accepted. We took the kids for hotdogs in GUM, the mall that is across from Lenin's Tomb at Red Square. We toured Red Square, including the most unbelievable St. Basil's Cathedral. We bought some touristy things like Matruska Dolls from street peddlers, took some photos and ambled back to the hotel, amidst various toilet visits.

We knew that we were to be back at the hotel by 5:30 to receive our visas for the girls. We had a couple of hours to kill and the girls desperately needed shoes. We went to a city-block wide four story building that sold only items of interest to children. I could have spent all two weeks there and not seen it all. And I would have enjoyed it. When we returned, we had

a few minutes to wait for the arrival of the long-awaited visas. I received a call from a harried Eugene, "Is Lee Ann there?" Would you believe it, Lee Ann had yet another problem. She handed Eugene the papers that he needed. Eugene said that he would be back in forty minutes. Two hours later. Eugene returned. In the eighty minutes that were not accounted for Lee Ann is imagining another weekend in Russia. This was very upsetting. But, he returned with success. The only one left at the embassy on Friday afternoon was willing to take pity on poor Lee Ann. As Eugene confided in us later, "I could not have written Lee Ann's story because I do not have such a vivid imagination." Although we were going to take the children to McDonald's so they would get their first taste of Americana, we decided to skip that trip because it had gotten rather late and was starting to drizzle and I felt that less driving in Russia was a good idea. We finished our culinary experience with herring and more salami from our now favorite grocery store.

On the ground at O'Hare

The first official we meet at the international terminal greeted us with a big smile and said, "Look what mommy and daddy brought home from Russia." It was good to be back home. Next, we handed in the unopened visa packets and the children were on their way to becoming citizens of our country. We waited at immigration with our aliens until they called our names and told us that their "green card" would be arriving in eleven months. The ordeal was over. We met our family at the airport and were headed to Bloomington about an hour or so later. We arrived in Bloomington around one in the morning on Sunday. I am happy to say that Mary was not asleep, since she was driving when we arrived, but regrettably, I was starving.