

Dearest Uncle, Aunts, Sister, Brother, Cousins, wife:

It has been three months since my memorable trip to Moscow with Uncle Tedi and Aunt Elli; I am late in writing to you all about it, but not neglectful. To give you the best flavor of our trip, I will reproduce nearly verbatim my diary of those emotional seven days in May (editing out only irrelevant personal items), when I met that part of myself I scarcely knew existed, our family in Russia. Any errors are strictly my responsibility.

The Diary

May 9, 1990

Aeroflot - not even Bangladesh has such a disheveled airplane - the seats show rips, tray tables fall down on their own, the toilet is a crude, square, and rough napkins pass for toilet papers, no overhead reading lights, I'm not sure of the rivets on the wings (they look cobbled), people smoke in the aisles and one man contentedly exhales vast blue clouds from a cigar. One hopes maintenance is different. I like the silver samovars they pour coffee and tea from, however. Stewardesses are predictably bulky and peremptory: "You! seat! go to 27C! Seat!" Poetry, says Robert Frost, is the part that's lost in the translation.

Moscow - first impressions (so limited to speak so soon; "War and Peace'?" says Woody Allen, "Why it's about Russia."): broad tree-lined boulevards pointing to the center, red flags, little traffic, no litter. Victory Day has just been celebrated, victory over the Nazis who got as far as the outskirts of Moscow, we pass the Memorial on our way in from the airport. Flat, green; high-rise grey tower blocks for residences, no neon lights, no billboards, shops and stores seem scarce. We are at the Kosmos Hotel, an Intourist 5-star, 1700-room megalith (built, however, by the French) with a huge lobby and heartless decor, like a train station that doesn't care for people; a giant aluminum mobile dangles from the ceiling, looking like a series of bicycle wheel rims and parabolic cones. We get our key card, the keys are gotten on one's floor from the key lady (Irina is on the day shift - she is plump, coiffed like Margaret Thatcher; when she is on the night shift she pulls up a sofa and sleeps across from an open guest room so she can watch the color t.v.).

Tedi and Elli are tired after too long a journey, so I try my luck at dinner in one of the six restaurants. The maitre d' looks as if he wishes I'd go away, only reluctantly gets up from his desk to point me over to a table which I share with a young Belgian, a petro-chemical detergent salesman. He shares his good wine with me while I wait a long time for the one waiter in a black tux - he looks like Theodore Bickel - responsible for a dozen tables (the half dozen waiters in blue jackets can only serve alcohol; a crowd of Russian generals and their wives are making good use of them). A loud band plays a set lasting ten minutes, during which time Russian generals and foreigners dance furiously, something like a tango, and then the band leaves. I order red caviar and "baked sturgeon, Moscow style." The caviar, with vodka, is sensational on dark bread. The "sturgeon" looks and tastes suspiciously like pork in potatoes Julienne. Even if I weren't half-kosher and a vegetarian, and felt starved, it still would look awful. The Russian generals look like David Ben Gurion, they dance with each other in a combination of disco beat and

kasatzkeya, arms out at the shoulders, palms up; it sounds like weddings I've seen in New York.

At the bar - Heineken only, hard currency only - several buxom women, well dressed and over made up, sit around. I think they are working women.

The rooms are plain, clean (the meaning of 5-star; 4-stars, says a Miami Herald newspaper Tedi sends me later, come with mice and vermin), the shower is blissfully hot, the towels thin, soap bar tiny, toilet paper waxy, and a lovely full moon shines into my window as - I swear it! - someone in the dark outside is singing, "Moscow Nights."

May 10

It has been light since before 6:00am. I'm off on my morning run and the city is going to work by seven. Lots of trams, few cars, so I can appreciate what cleaner air is like, and no clots of traffic. It's too bad that being wealthy means fouling the nest you live in. The Moscow Botanical Gardens is grown slightly wild and woodsy; pedestrians have cut many dirt paths into the woods off the asphalted lanes - Muscovites are not Swiss burghers. There's a duck pond for boating, a carousel. Back near the Kosmos is the space monument dedicated to the Cosmonauts - a granite base nearly a quarter mile in circumference with bas relief etchings like the Egyptians once carved, topped by a titanium gnomon, over 100 feet high, at the tip of which is a model spacecraft.

Very rude lady in a tight leather skirt at the information desk; it seems I don't quite understand how breakfast works, her English is poor, my Russian is non-existent and my look as blank as a village idiot's. She does what we all do in such a situation - shouts slowly at me in her language. But it turns out that if you want to eat breakfast for free, go upstairs, turn in your key, retrieve your key card, show the card at one of the two restaurants serving an all-you-can-eat buffet breakfast. Without the card, it costs 1.26 roubles (coffee is extra at half-a rouble for a cup of espresso, tea is free) - about US \$0.25. The rouble notes are thin, narrow scrip; it becomes difficult to spend the \$50 I'd cashed at the airport, and now I know why the cashier looked astonished. Breakfast: sweet cheese puffs, soggy thick pancakes, tea, very sweet and green juice of an unknown flavor, hard-boiled eggs, boiled vegetables, black and white bread, rolls, jam, butter. Imagine the subsidies that support such food prices. At the hard-currency kiosk and foreigners' state-run shops (berezoikas - "birch tree") the prices are stunningly high. In America when they say, "Where did you buy that?" they mean what label does it have; in Russia they mean, how did you find something like that.

A old woman with a kerchief sweeps the traffic ramp leading to the main entrance of the 5-star hotel with a broom made of twigs of broom, tied with laces of straw.

And here comes the family. I fall in love with my cousin Ruth at first sight. She has a quiet, regal air, shy, silver-haired. still handsome at 54 (a photo at age 18 shows a mid-eastern princess). I see my grandmother Migdan, my sister Linda, cousin Evelyn in her face. Her eyeglasses keep slipping. I learn that she was born on June 7, 1936 (and I on June 8, 1938 - so we are twins). Iso (Isaac), her husband, is the "strong, silent type," - the one you'd want

on your side in an emergency - an ex-major in the airforce, he served 27 years as a flight engineer in Irkutsk on the China border (not so far from Alaska). He speaks little in any language, washes dishes, plays a mean game of chess, adores his grandchild. (How we converse: Ruth speaks German fluently, knows some English; I speak German with terrible grammar, but understand nearly everything; Tedi helps out when I try to get into a deep philosophy of life. Hanya, of course, also speaks German, Roma - her husband - speaks Yiddish; at worst, it's English to German to Russian.) Ruth's son, Ilyusha, is a young man of 23, married to Sveeta (Svetlana) - "kids in love" and their 18-month old baby is Anya (named after Hanya). Anya has an eye-condition, one eye deviates outward (it was worse at birth) for which Ruth blames Chernobyl (although I think I see the same in Iso's and Ilyusha's baby pictures). The young couple met in engineering college, they have one room in Ruth and Iso's largish apartment which is just outside Moscow to the southeast. You would recognize this apartment, brother and sister, the dark credenzas, oriental scatter rugs, soft plush chairs, no wall decorations.

Roma (Reuben) is a grand old man at 84 - funny, loves to sing cantorial fragments, wears his beret like a crown, carries his medals from the war on his jacket (some utility besides pride: you get to the front of queues if you're a vet). He had been injured three times during the war; as an officer, he was sent back to the frontlines the first two times; on the third round, he realized that enlisted men were less valuable, so he tore off his epaulets and they decommissioned him to Alma Ata, in Asian Russia; Hanya and Ruth had managed to slip out the north side of Moscow ahead of the Nazis near-capture, and joined him. He writes articles for a Yiddish periodical, authored a book of reminiscences in Yiddish which he inscribed to me. I was too - is ashamed too strong a word? - to confess I could barely read it.

Aunt Hanya looks but a bit more lined than in 1967, in those frantic two days I saw her just before the Six Day War broke. She is 80, her hair stays brown, her eyes sparkle; only one ear is a bit deaf. We kiss and kiss on the lips and kiss again to see each other. She says I look like my father. She says I don't look Jewish (button-down English shirt, Scottish plaid tie, Italian pants, Harris Tweed jacket, Nordica eyeglass frames, an Indiana Jones wool hat; what does she mean I "don't look Jewish?").

We show all our photos - everyone's children in America, and grandchildren; Larry and Marla's photo booth special - Linda's photos of kids and herself and David, alas! got left behind, but I promised they'd be sent - and photos of a new wife. After the Russian vodka, and the French champagne I'd brought, I make the toast that to find relatives one had never met was like discovering a new world. Not so trite, considering I did it in German. Now Hanya says I look like my father and, for the first time in my life, this really pleases me.

It turns out that the Hirschhorns aren't much for drinking on any continent and it is Roma and I - now and at subsequent meals - who polish off the bottle of vodka between us, each time a toast.

We eat wonderfully, lunch and supper: cold meats, sole, salmon, caviar, cucumbers, coleslaw, brown bread, tomatoes, pickles, pickled beans, pea-potato salad, apple juice, home-baked raisin crullers. Between meals we go walking in the busy suburb to visit the local shops. Uncle Tedi has a mission:

to document ordinary life in Moscow, to report back to his Verein in Boca Raton.

The women's clothing shop had a few items each of a large variety of outfits: housecoats, dresses, raincoats (virtually the only garment with color in Moscow), wool overcoats, a few sweaters. The quality is not bad, says Uncle Tedi with a practiced eye; but you hope for the right size. A coat costs about a month's salary of a professional.

A department store had a few beads and trinkets, hundreds of black naugahyde briefcases, some toothpaste and soap.

A produce shop is overstocked with cans of fish meal that looks like our cat food; with too many jars of "salad" - all beets or all cabbage (my public health doctor's nose smells botulism), cellophane bags of grey-looking pasta and noodles, some white margarine, a bit of butter, a few eggs. The bakery nearby has lots of very cheap bread. All the food is cheap; it's just terrible, you wouldn't want it - or, it's unavailable, you can't get it. Roma comes into Moscow twice a week by train from his' more distant suburb, carrying a cloth shopping bag, lines up many times to load up, home by evening. If you are a housewife, you do this; if a working wife, you do it on your lunch hour and if you take too much time, your work-mates resent it. No one gets up in the morning saying to themselves, "Hmm, I think I'll buy some cans of Bulgarian baked beans today," but when - magically, inexplicably - they show up from the back of a truck on some street corner, you rush over to queue up and buy as many as they'll let you. Never know when you'll see Bulgarian baked beans again. Once Ruth rushed by a sale of spools of thread - she had to get home to Ilyusha - and she didn't have thread for three months. When we eat supper, it tasted both better and worse, knowing how hard won it was, knowing how honored we were.

The breaking out of the gifts: we have brought extra suitcases with clothing, books, Linda's cassette tapes, jeans, chocolates, bric-a-brac. I just don't know where the fine line is between generosity and the Salvation Army. But they accept everything graciously - if we have been crude or grandiose, they will never let us know. Later, they buy us Russian craft gifts in return. Then we get around to the topic on everyone's mind. The family is convinced that the economic crises foreshadow a virulent antisemitism. The enemies of perestroika - hard-line party people who stand to lose their privileges, right wing religious fanatics, Russian chauvinists who see their chance to break away from the other, non-Russian Soviets - all blame it on Zionism. Zionism and Jews who are capitalists in disguise, who make all the money in the new open markets (so do the Russian, Georgians, Latvians, Armenians, but when was antisemitism ever logical?). The family all experienced antisemitism: remarks behind their backs, failure to get deserved promotions (even Iso now thinks he stopped at the rank of Major because he is Jewish). But this is a new thing. A rumor began in February that a pogrom was being planned for such-and-such a day. Ruth and family left their apartment and stayed with friends for several days.

Was it Pamyat, showing their muscle? Israeli agents trying to stampede Jews into emigrating? Rumors about rumors. The important thing is, it was believed even by Russian patriots, like Iso, who have no Zionist sympathies whatever. The family, for the first time, is even thinking about leaving. Where? When?

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Who? How? Ruth goes on pension in one year, she wishes to wait; once you apply, everything you own stays behind, you must pay a large bond, you are in limbo for at least a year. This sounds so painfully familiar.

Iso owns a car. He keeps the windshield wipers in the glove compartment when he's not driving (explanation one: they'd be stolen; explanation two: they last longer not exposed to the air, who knows when you can buy replacements). We drive back at night and stop at the flood-lit Red Square with the gorgeous onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral at the other end (Basil = Wassily = William), get our photo taken by an entrepreneur - he mails it to Ilyusha several weeks later; Ilyusha has spent a sizeable fraction of his daily wage for the photo and we Americans have a hard time honoring their hospitality and yet not allowing them to be profligate the way we know how to be; then again, our Russian family is astonished by the way we peel off rouble notes from our wads as if it were nothing, which it is - to us.

Ilyusha earns 170 roubles a month, raises come slowly. Ruth, as a translator of German technical documents into Russian, makes not much more. She pays 25 roubles a month for her apartment (remember our rent-controlled apartment of Riverside Drive at \$75 a month?), basic food is very cheap, medical costs are very low (of course, as the Talmud says, a doctor for nothing is good for nothing), even insurance is cheap. And extended families help out. In our capitalist society we print money, borrow, pledge property, pay a lot, get paid a lot, have so many more "needs," and don't help out our families as much. At the hotel, we host our family and feed five of us on caviar, borscht (with sour cream and spices), boiled fish and potatoes, cold white fish and horseradish, schnitzel and beef, vodka and coffee for 54 roubles; \$9 on the free exchange.

May 11

The way to prolong your life: go to a new country, each day seems like four. In the morning, Ruth and Ilyusha drive me around Moscow. Tedi and Elli have decided on an Intourist City Tour only to discover that it leaves not from the Kosmos, but from another Intourist hotel, the Nasional, and it will cost \$25 in roubles at the official rate (0.6 per dollar) which is one-tenth the tourist rate (6 per dollar) to take a taxi there, and they are not yet ready to tackle the amazing Metro, so they stay at the hotel. Ruth and Ilyusha have taken a vacation week off from work. We drive up to the Moscow Hills and the University where - in 1949 - to show the world that Russia was not destroyed - Stalin ordered built the equivalent of the Egyptian pyramids: a monstrous 29-story building, spired, symmetrically winged around the central tower, all in brick, heroic statues on the recessed levels. It looks empty, like a tomb. The view is perfect - Moscow at our feet, the ox-bow bend of the Moscow River, the Lenin sports complex before us, government buildings (spires, wings, statues, granite) scattered about the horizon, the Kremlin at a distance. A giant all-season outdoor pool holds thousands of swimmers; it was built in the 1930s when one of Moscow's most treasured cathedral was blown up to make way for a future unburdened by any memory of the pre-Bolshevik past. It turns out the past is always there, like dreams.

Arbat Street, the artist's colony since last century, still has Parisian-style four-story apartment buildings, painted in pastels. Now the street has been converted to a pedestrian mall and holds dozens of artists sketching passer-

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by, men selling maritschka nested dolls gorgeously painted in sensational colors; very expensive, some up to \$800 in hard currency (which, then, was illegal for a Russian to have, but obviously, a lot have). A political maritschka has a big Gorbachev nesting a Brezhnev nesting a Khrushchev nesting a Stalin nesting a teeny-weeny Lenin. \$400, comrade.

We then travelled one and a half hours to Hanya's house, outside Moscow precincts, a small apartment in a four-storey block built in 1945. then it was country, and we still could see a few traditional painted wood cottages on the road; remnants of private property - the family has one in the country, no heat or electricity, water from a well, which they love to camp out in. The little houses and roads make me think of Chagall. The town is called Molokcha and next to Hanya's building stands a 75-foot water tower that has never functioned from the day it was built. Local joke: Where is the best view in Molokcha? The water tower. But the water tower is ugly! That's right, but when you stand on top you don't see it.

Hanya's apartment is small, small kitchen, small bath, small bedroom, a living room and dining room together, a wall rug, no gewgaws, one or two family photos, a credenza is the meisterschtuck, a balcony looking out at trees and small garden plots where elderly people sit on benches. I could be content here.

Now I learn some new things about our family - in between the non-stop chess games (I can beat Ilyusha, Roma and I about tie, Tedi and Iso always win, somehow I don't remember those two playing each other - how cunning of them). The Hirschhorns from Podwolocisk were elegant, it shows in the names. Willi was Wilhelm, Tedi - of course, I knew this - is Theodore, Erna is Ernestina, Hanya is Johanna, and Lusia was Salome (the dancer, of course). And I am given a photo of our great-grandmother Sabina Hirschhorn, nee Bardach ("We hated her," is all Hanya can remember) - I promise to have this copied for you all; she looks formidable. More: Our grandmother's parents were named Salomon Leib and Sussel Migdan; grandmother, of course, was Leonora. In the Podwolocisk Memorial Book, recently published in Israel (I have a copy, courtesy Dov Breier who lives in Kfar Saba), Linda and I found the name Migdan among the perished.

All of our generation and our parents got out in time. Hanya had fallen in love with Jack, Ruth's father, a German Jew, an idealist, a communist, a journalist. I saw his picture at Hanya's (whose face changes even now when she sees it) - he is movie-director handsome, the European artist with a cigarette hanging from his full lips over the square jaw; piercing eyes wanting to know if there is any bullshit in you. They fled the Nazis and went to fight them in Russia; but in 1937 Stalin decided foreign communists, especially foreign Jewish communists were not to be allowed to live. I read some of Jack's poems - in German - written to Hanya; images of a man in a train seeing his reflection in the window and realizing how he could not see Hanya even as one man, much less two, but in fact would be reunited with her not as two persons, but as one in their love. The repeating cadences in German brought him back, for the moment. When Hanya met Roma, a military man, a Russian, her life was saved. The irony of it all is that Podwolocisk is now part of the Ukraine; her papers no longer list her as Polish, but "Ukrainian." Roma himself was in a gulag, from 1951-1954, the height of Stalin's antisemitic frenzy; he told a political joke, someone turned him in.

On Moscow television that night: boring live broadcast of the Russian Congress of Deputies in debate, live; US rock-and-roll and Muscovite heavy metallers; a documentary about privileged Russian youth who smoke, skip school, ride skate boards, "don't know much about history..."; a sports round-up; the Red Army chorus with film clips of Soviet soldiers at rest in the field in WWII. Roma wears his medals to show that Jews were good soldiers also, not just to jump the queue. Ruth, as a child, slept in the Metro stations during the air raids. At about the same time, I was sleeping in the London Underground.

May 12

We went to the Moscow Central Synagogue, for Shabbat (or, as Roma and everyone there says it, Shabbos). About 100 or so elderly men, a dozen women of different ages, a few young men, no children at all are there. During the recent High Holy Days, I am told, the streets outside are jammed with young Jews in kippes, dancing the hora, waving Israeli flags. This is different than before. Do Ilyusha and Sveeta go to Israel? But he's afraid of the army (in Russia he is exempt for some heart murmur). America? What will he do there, his education couldn't compete with American engineers. Would he leave his family behind? It all sounds so familiar.

The Torah is being read in six different corners, about a dozen men around each one, aliyahs at each one (I was honored, and stumbled through the brochas, it's been a while). The synagogue is decorated in a style that has a Russian Orthodox feel: blue painted cupola, green filigree vines and red medallions on the walls around the aron hakodesh. No one minds your having cash in the pocket and making donations; not even the Hassidic gentlemen. Roma sees me struggle with the brochas, and pulls me aside later to ask if I am circumsized. I think he meant it like in the old joke, am I still circumsized? Actually, I was Tevye, finally getting his seat by the Western Wall.

Outside, a schnorrer whispered urgently in my ear in broken English: this is a government synagogue! (The rabbis and officers are on salary from the State.) KGB! Watch out for the laser experiments! I need money! To eat! To go to America! Don't put money in the pushke! it's a government synagogue! It occurs to me that no one is paranoid who is truly being persecuted.

Private enterprise on the streets: tiny card tables set up in the Metro lobbies, on various squares, selling flowers, fresh raddishes or fresh tomatoes - never both - from garden plots. people are forever lining up or crowding around to see if it's worth lining up: a shipment of sardines, lottery tickets, cigarettes, fried pirugi, socks. Come to think of it, it looks like New York City.

We buy Bolshoi Ballet tickets for Swan Lake from a scalper doing good business right out in front. \$15 each. Roma is scandalized, we've bought one-rouble tickets. But to get one-rouble tickets, you line up for a couple of hours to get a number to allow you to line up another time to buy the tickets, if any are left. The scalpers have hired unemployed boys to line up. Ruth says, wistfully, "We never get any tickets." So Tedi, Ruth, Elli and I see Swan Lake - the seats were right up front, right on top, not bad if you crane your neck and body, and lean over - hold on, please! - it's a good thing the

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choreography is entirely symmetrical, you can imagine what the other half looks like. But the Bolshoi! Swan Lake! What a gorgeous theater, all golds and reds, the panorama of Lenin over the proscenium cannot erase the Czarist ghosts from the plush velvet. Ruth is still angry at the "Mafia," the people who find out how to milk the system, who are associated with the first stirrings of private enterprise (called, euphemistically, "cooperatives"). The joke is how the Communist Party members and the military have no problem getting what they want, and when; it is a reason they oppose perestroika.

Rationing is done by lottery - the right to buy something today - or by demography: today only Muscovites with three children or more can shop in the GUM, the giant department store near Red Square. I'm struck by how few children I do see on the street. There is a tax incentive to have the first child; family planning is permitted but contraceptives are just not available (and locally made condoms are the butt of some very crude, funny jokes). It tells me that no one has living space to have children; and no sex, with your parents in the same room behind a hung sheet; and abortions in case you do.

The most fun people have lately is reading newspapers. Revelations about the sordid past, lively debates about the future; a whole small press industry now puts out literary and political magazines and broadsheets. Ruth puns: "Ist jetzt mehr interessant zum lesen als zum leben."

Street scenes: Some old men with saxophones and a trumpet play classic Big Band jazz (A String of Pearl, Take the A Train); drivers obey traffic lights, but are quick off the mark - no forgiveness; a line one and a half blocks long waiting to eat a McDonald's hamburger; the Intourist kiosk for information is called MOSINFORM - Tedi dubs it MISINFORM. A new neon sign on top of a building advertises in English, "Enjoy Coca Cola, Coke." A Cyrillic reader would sound it out as "Cepiou sosa sola, sokee." Remember when cee cee cee pee turned out to be ess ess ess ar?

We went home by the Metro - no billboards, no litter (not much to throw away), young people give up their seats for elderly people (I accepted graciously), clear directions, clean white tiles. Ruth looks a bit tired. God bless her.

May 13

People have a way of subverting even the most oppressive regime. Take the soccer field next to the hotel, completely locked with its CCCP embossed iron gates and spiked metal fencing. Somehow, here and there, a fence stave is missing, a dirt foot-worn path leads from the gap, and there are people up on the pitch doing calisthenics, jogging, hanging out.

Or take the Exhibition of Economic Progress (VNDX in acronym) - a theme park pavillion covering over 100 acres, two miles long by half a mile wide. It is filled with white granite buildings built in pseudo-Greek revivalist style, housing exhibits on COAL, or ATOMIC POWER, or INDUSTRIAL CHEMISTRY, or SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE. From the moment one enters the marble arches under the giant statues of muscled tractor drivers and women with spanners, we know we are in authentic Soviet Union. But what do the Sunday strollers do there? They stroll and picnic. It's just a park, with flower beds, fountains, kiosks selling drinks, delicious Moscow icecream, or tee-shirts. No one even sees these giant buildings. If anyone is on the steps leading up to one, it is for

having a photo taken. I was reminded how Egyptian families sit on the pyramid stone blocks, or on statues of Isis and Ramses, picknicking; just not taking the surroundings, or themselves, too seriously.

Roma wants to take me in hand. Perhaps I would be his son in another lifetime; he is just the age my father would have been. He asks about my first marriage, my new life. He looks at me seriously and the says I should buy a small flat, lock it up, keep the key, use it in my old age. You can never tell, he says, when my wife might throw me out. Otherwise, I could always come and live with him. We finish the bottle of vodka at dinner and afterwards dance a nearly silent hava nagila in the Kosmos parking lot. I love this old man.

I have sponsored a family dinner, eight of us (me, Tedi, Elli, Ruth, Iso, Hanya, Roma, Ilyusha - poor Sveeta stays home with Anya, nothing like teen-age baby sitters here). Between us we consume five soups, three plates of salmon/whitefish/red and black caviar/three chicken cutlets/two chicken kiev/three plates of beef stew/vodka/Fanta/mineral water/coffee/tea - for 130 roubles including a generous tip, for me \$22; I feel like Tevye again, his dream come true at last.

But I ended up crying. We told the story again of how we learned Hanya was alive. And she learned we were alive. In 1956 - I remember the day the letter came from Israel, and how my Dad cried and laughed and danced in the kitchen. And now I learned how it happened. When Roma tore off his officer's epaulets and was sent, along with Hanya and six-year old Ruth to Alma Ata - he became a cobbler, Hanya a waitress. In Alma Ata was an organization of Jews looking for Jews, and a cousin named Max Fuchs found Hanya's patronymic name (there were five Migdan sisters who married Hirschhorn, Ebenstein, Weissman, Fuchs, one whose name Hanya and Tedi couldn't remember; Max was the only survivor in Poland - he had escaped to Russia and was a partisan). They corresponded from Moscow to Alma Ata, but then lost contact when the family returned to Moscow until - in a moment out of Zhivago - they saw each other across a railroad platform in Moscow for ten minutes only. Max was on his way home to Poland - ten minutes only, just enough to exchange addresses again. Hanya, under a cloud anyway because of Jack - foreign correspondence would have been dangerous, perhaps fatal - and with no way of knowing addresses of the Israeli sisters, or whether her brothers survived, just kept in touch with Max. Polish antisemitism forced him out of his job as an engineer and into a coal mine. Only in 1956, with the Gomulka thaw, did he get the chance to escape, to Israel. There he found the lists of survivors and searchers, and looked up all the Migden families; he find Erna's and Lusia's names and told them that Hanya was still alive. And I ended up crying, which was why I was dancing a hora in the Kosmos Hotel parking lot with an old man who could have been my father.

When Ruth grew up, in Molokcha, she never had a bed, just a fold-up cot in the central eating-living room. When she was 16, she got her own corner in the kitchen, separated by a divider curtain. When she had Ilyusha, there was no one to help care for him; Ruth had to lock him in his room when she went to work, put his food out for him kept warm by a newspaper covering; when they got a phone about 12 years ago, she called him hourly. Once he started a fire.

Ruth says she is not a Russian. She is Jewish. She is not a Zionist, she is

not religious - reads no Hebrew, doesn't go to synagogue; "Zhid" is what is written on her passport.

May 14

We visited the cooperative market; ah! all us American yuppies would think this so wonderful. Fresh produce, cheeses, honey on the comb, raw hanging garlic, fruits from all over the south, meats from just-killed pigs and sheep. All available for ten times the subsidized prices. The foreign community and rich Russians shop here. Ruth cannot afford to.

And the required visit to the Kremlin (skipping Lenin's tomb); grand of course, orderly, magnificent icons in the tiny Cathedral of the Assumption where Ivan the Terrible confessed and prayed.

Gorky Park, long tree-lined alleys, flower beds along the Moscow River, amusement rides, a few cafes (the short-order cook slings food indifferently and unhygienically; bread, cheese, kofta, hot sweet coffee ladled from a huge drum). Pretty as Gorky Park is, the effect is damaged by the incessant blare over giant loud speakers that reach every corner, under every tree. Propaganda? No, heavy-metal rock and roll. Maybe perestroika is not such a good idea. Can there be a social-democratic-welfare-entrepreneurial society that also values aesthetics? Finland? In one corner of Gorky Park is a pre-fab building with what would be antiques in America, a penny-arcade with mechanical games (the bear pops up, spins around, roars, the rifle fires bee-bees). Tedi says that Moscow's state of development and street entertainment reminds him most of Greece in the 1930s. Hanya says, "Man gewohnt sich," one gets used to things, especially compared to the war years and just after. What they worry about is not so much the failure of Socialism (although by many standards Russia made a brilliant recovery after a war that killed 27 million people), but that failed socialism is followed by fascism.

I said goodbye to Hanya, wondering when...if... She instructs me how I am to apply for a visit four months ahead of time and I can then be allowed to stay with Ruth.

May 15

Goodbye to Uncle Tedi and Aunt Elli. I got to know them and they got to know me as an adult; I found two sets of family on this trip.

Ruth and Iso take me to the top of the TV tower; it rains too much to get the best view. And then the Pushkin Art Museum with its two rooms of paintings I knew only from large coffee table books; by Cezanne, Monet, Matisse, Picasso, Gauguin, van Gogh, Renoir, others.

Everywhere I see icons of Lenin - on medals, on plaques, on billboards, on posters, photos on walls. But I also see that the dandelion is Moscow's unofficial spring flower - it flourishes yellow in every green patch, park or vacant lot, where ever the sun strikes. When the puff balls explode later on, it is summer snow, and the seedlings go where they wish, obeying only the wind.

Postscript

I wonder if all the cousins would be ready to join me and Uncle Tedi in establishing a trust fund for our Russian family. They will decide whether to leave, and when (I hope they do) and where they will try to go. We should be able to help them start their lives over if they do leave. Rather than do it in a hurry, in an emergency, I propose we donate a small amount of money each month into the trust fund. Who is ready to do this? And how much are you ready to give? Please answer just this question; we'll try work out the details as quickly as possible.

My address for the next two years is: c/o Ford Foundation
South East Asia Office
320 East 43rd Street
New York, New York 10017*

*For dear cousins who haven't heard from me in a long time, I'm moving to Indonesia with my wife Cynthia, beginning September 4.

With all my love, kisses and greetings,

Norbert