

Moscow/ Leningrad and Ukraine. May 1990

See Map on last page

This was a sort of thank you visit for me with Sasha Netrosov and Pat Goodwin with Yuri Tsyganov. Yuri was quieter than Sasha, very intelligent and with a nice sense of humour. Pat had been my first research student (then Pat Dunstan). Sasha had visited our lab for about 6 months. Yuri and Pat were research collaborators.



Yuri, Me, Pat and Sasha

15th May. In Leningrad. Dear Libby,, back here again after quarter century (1966). I am writing this overlooking the river Neva under a damp grey sky to the sound of strams of lorries. We are waiting for Sasha and Yuri to do the usual prolonged sorting out of hotel rooms. Pat is also writing her diary. I wonder if she will confess to sharing a sleeper on the train with me last night.

I had a had a beautiful drive through an misty English morning to Heathrwo. It was the drivers first day at work. He had the wrong address for me and the wrong day for an old lady in Romsey. I had a 3 hour journey to Moscow with a gang of 40 US compter experts; good company. I was at the front of the passport queue and the 40 min wait for luggage. Pat had arrived independently just 10 min before. Wonderful feeling of relaxed arrival to be met by Sasha and Yuri. We drove right actoss crowded Moscow to Sasha's flat where we unloaded present and drank a bottle of champagne. Then went to dinner with excellent caviar and more champagne in a Lithuanian restaurant called Vilnius. As Lithuania had recently (in March this year) the restaurant is now listed as foreiign. It was then a beautiful clear night as we left in our sleeper train to Leningrad at 11.30. We were in the 1st Class sleeper section; Pat and I had one compartment and sash and Yuri the adjacent one. Five minutes after starting we had another bottle of champagne. We got to sleep at 12.30 after a noisy chat. Pat was slightly self conscious in white silk dressing gown. It was a slow rattling journey rather like sleeping in a moving campervan. I suppose I slept.

We arrived a 8 am in a grey murky Leningrad. 300 people were waiting for a taxi so we went by trolley bus to our hotel which was a 10 year old hotel built for th e olympics near the Neva monastery. We had to wait an hour while Sasha sorted out our rooms; the manager wanted western currency but yuri was refusing. We were given an official typed itinerary. Minsk was crossed off as there were no hotels availableso we go back to Moscow to travel from there to

"Lvov in Ukraine. The itinerary had me down to give one lecture but Pat had none! The whole trip is really just an exchange for our past help and for a chance for S and Y to travel.

Sasha then explained that he is 14th on the university list for a new car and they have just been allocated a lot. Rather a strange situation because of the huge demand for cars: Sasha will sell his old Lada for 2x the cost of a new one (unavailable to most people). So he will get a new car plus cash. A typical Sasha deal.

Yuri has just brought in another bottle of champagne 19.45) which we declined. Had a civilised late breakfast of scrambled eggs and sausage meat, declining the cabbage and sour cream.

Last night on the station platform I saw 2 Jewish looking men arguing fiercely, each eating and conducting with an ice cream in each hand. As is obvious I have little to report. I have just been

given 150 roubles for expenses (about £120). This led to a big debate. The University (Moscow)

paid for everything except food and S and Y insist on paying for that. There is nothing in the

shops to buy so Pat may not get her fur hat.

Moskva Hotel. Wed. 16th May 9.0pm

Writing 2 day's worth while S and Y hunt for a restaurant.

Tuesday morning walked down Nevsky prospekt in light rain to the Winter Palace Square and St Isaac's cathedral where I climbed up to the dome for a view of wet Leningrad. Pat looked like a drowned mouse but insisted that she lied being wet. I was wet but cold in my plastic mac. At 2.00 (no lunch) we went to the famous Hermitage museum. A friend of Y had arranged for the top guide (who guides visiting presidents etc) so we had on arrival we walked for 10 min to Yuri's brother's a very informative but exhausting 2 hour tour. Oddly he ignored completely their famous French Impressionist masterpieces. Yuri's friend then drove us back to the hotel in pouring rain. After tea in the foyer I went to our room for a very hot very brownwater bath then slept for couple of hours. We had dinner in a restaurant on Nevsky Prospekt with a floor show of overamplified singers and dancers. We were told how Yuri had managed to get rooms in the hotel with a complicated personal deal with the manager. Yuri now has a letter giving him the way of getting rooms in future anywhere in Leningrad. In exchange he has offered cancer drugs (Interferon etc) from his research institute in case they are ever needed. We had dinner of cold meats and salad followed by huge steak with vodka and pepsi, followed by a dry but freezing walking around local squares.

Wed. I had a very long sleep then up for breakfast of sausage eggs etc. Yuri's friend Y turned up with his car to take us on trip of more Leningrad squares, starting with a visit to the battleship Aurora. It had been anchored on the Neva at the start of the 1917 revolution. It joined the Bolsheviks and fired one (blank) shot which caused all resistance against them in the Winter Palace Square to stop. It is now a museum. Sasha somehow got the captain (a retired Admiral) to join us. He made a speech to Pat and I welcoming us in the cause of peace between all nations. He hoped that all warships would become museums like this one. He then kissed Pat's hand and posed for a photo with us. Sasha bought us a ship's bell.

We spent one cramped hour driving to various palaces and the same luck as yesterday. In the afternoon we drove out to Peter's Summer Palace where we went in 1966. The many fountains were turned off the statues were in storage but still had a nice wall in the fountain gardens.

We returned to the hotel for dinner but found all the restaurants were fully booked except for the foreign currency one. Yuri arranged that we could go there but pay in roubles because we are a "very high level scientific delegation". Sasha made a similar arrangement for visiting museums palaces etc. These can only be visited as part of a group. Sasha created a group with him

labelled as the official leader so now niet problema. Dinner was chicken Kiev plus cognac and champagne. Yuri made us stand for toast 'Hussar' style. I wasn't allowed champagne until I had drunk my quota of cognac. We then panicked and rushed off to get our 11.30 train back to Moscow making it with 10 min to spare.

More cognac and vodka on the train which were essential for the political debates. I slept well but woke with a queasy stomach (S and Y were worse). We walked 10 min to Yuri's brother's house. He looked like Yossarian in Catch 22. He introduced himself as a psychiatrist. He said to Pat "I can diagnose a character within 30 seconds ; please undress and use my home. The found her coat politely removed and hugh up. (Written in train to Ukraine).

We had breakfast of caviar, sardines and salami. Then given instructions to shower. The water was on a common system with other flats which is except when one has a problem. Sasha had no hot water for 3 weeks. His flat is in the same block on Kutusovsky Prospect that Andropov and Brezhnev (previous presidents) had lived in. Last week, following a general political condemnation of Brezhnev's corrupt years his name plaque was removed in the middle of the night.

At 11.45 Sasha arrived with his car to take us to get the 12.45 train to Lvov (in Ukraine). We got stuck in a traffic jam. The previous day I saw a tragic result of Russian driving when a little boy was knocked off his bike and killed. I woke in the middle of the night seeing his face. Roads often have 6 lanes in one direction with only worn markings, vicious tramlines and gigantic potholes to direct the flow. We arrived at the train at 12.20 and were left on our own. Great shock. We were told our train is number 33. We had our own luggage plus Sasha's big bag and rucksack full of bottles of vodka. I had to mine and Pat's huge case and bottles while I hunted for the train. My bit of Russian helped me work out the number platform but we couldn't find it. We eventually managed with 5 minutes to spare. With 2 minutes to spare Sasha arrived, having parked his car and run 1 and a half miles then a minute late Yuri strolled up. We found our adjacent first class compartments for the 24 trip to Lvov in West Ukraine near the Polish, Hungarian and Czech border. I don't think I could have caught the train if I had not previously regularly used my bits of gym equipment (weights etc). Sasha did his usual tricks to book a lunch table for his important scientific delegates. We slept most of the afternoon while hurtling through miles of birch forests. We woke for an excellent dinner including a huge tumbler of sour cream mixed with the sap of birch trees – very refreshing. Now for the card game called FOOL. It was very complicated and I never really learned the rules. This was accompanied by slightly sweet red Georgian wine (Stalin's favourite), We have a very friendly car attendant lady who brings us milkless tea at regular intervals. I just drank a pin of kefir (dilute yoghurt). I had a disturbed night woken by terrifying crashes as we changed engines at some point. Had the usual breakfast of eggs and sausages with cucumber and sour cream. The sunny morning has now changed to the more usual gray. We are due into Lvov in one hour. So a very relaxed journey after our frantic start.

Saturday night 19th May. Writing this in bed with the sound of wild Ukrainian singing diners. We were met in Lvov by Andrei the head of the Biochemistry Institute. He took us to the hotel Dneiper at noon. It is new and next to a park. Nice simple room. Had shower then lunch. We were then rushed to the institute for my lecture. This was in the famous Mirror room. There were about 20 in the audience. I gave my usual 'historical' PQQ lecture with much omitted as Sasha had to translate. I was very pleased as there were about 30 minutes of questions at the

end. After hotel and wash out to Andrei and Natasha's home. This is a 4 room flat which is large; it has room especially for their piano playing daughter age 12). Dinner was cold meats, fish, caviar, salad borsch (beetroot soup, stuffed cabbage and meat stew. Chocolate cake. The only problem was drink. Yuri announced that he is Tomadar – the MC whose job is to organise drinks and toasts. It was champagne for ladies and cognac and vodka for men. The small glasses had to be emptied after each toast. These are very serious but unselfconscious declarations of admiration, gratitude, love and all the other emotions you might expect a Russian to have towards me(?!). Earlier in the day I had received 10 minutes of this stuff when being introduced before my lecture.

The toasts are good as they permit reserved Englishmen to say thank you properly. This all went on for about 3 hours with lots of political chat as well. They are scared that Ukraine will soon try to declare independence and that this might lead to civil war.

We paused at 10.30 to have a short piano recital by the daughter – slightly heavy handed Bach and Handel. We disintegrated at about eleven; Pat and Andrei discussing a joint research paper, Yuri and Sasha discussing politics and me and Natasha sleeping (me with my arm around the neck of their poodle).

Saturday. Woke feeling a bit delicate but had to get up to go on a trip to the Carpathian mountains in a minibus with S, Y, P, A, and N; the driver was called Ivan Ivanovich. We stopped half way in a small town because it had good bookshop – small but better than Moscow. Sasha did his usual clever job of finding a loo – the Councillor's private loo in the local Parliament building. He also bought some maps. The Parliament was in session – broadcast over external loudspeakers. The hall had a Ukrainian flag flying – only recently permitted. Then into the beautiful wooded mountains covered in a mixture of pine and deciduous trees. In the foothills were many small wooden houses surrounded by apple trees in blossom, and horse-drawn ploughing.

Then the Horror. Andrei's friend was the 'Sheriff' of that area and he had kindly (!!!) arranged for the winter skiing chairlift to be opened specially for us to go 1500' up to the 3500' summit. It is normally closed in summer. The chair was an actual small chair with a single thin bar across the front. I felt I was falling out all the time. Except for that it was glorious, moving only about 50' up over woods, orchards and meadows in glorious sunshine. This was broken by occasional alarming ravines. I held onto the flimsy bar rigid with nerves while Pat in front of me was turning round laughing and waving, completely relaxed. Twenty minutes later at the top the weather changed to freezing with wind and flurries of snow. We sheltered in a ski hut. Luckily I had a thermal vest, two sweaters and a plastic mac. Then out came the welcome cognac and sandwiches. When the snow stopped we set off down the mountain, accompanied by wild loud crazy Russian yelling and singing. As my hands refused to let go of the iron bar they were frozen by the time we reached the bottom. Off to the Ski Hotel for an enormous lunch. Same as usual with many toasts in English,, Russian and Ukrainian -translated by Yuri who had been brought up in Lvov. For my main toast I explained how Clive had prayed that God would look after me; so looking at all the wonderful friends around the table "I have clearly proved the existence of a caring God".

Incidentally we stopped at a beautiful little Greek Orthodox church. They were having communion and Sasha, innocently, went up to the altar and returned amazed that the priest was drinking wine. A little old lady came up and aggressively demanded if I was there to seek

God or only to stare? Yuri said both because it is such a beautiful church. On the way back we saw Fieldfares, Golden Orioles and Storks. I had a very interesting drive but Sasha said it was boring so we had a mixture of Ukrainian folk songs and politics all the way. We were let off inner and drinks so Pat and I could go for a stroll in the beautiful town which was like a lot of small corners of Prague and full of people. In one square there seemed to be a Greek Orthodox gospel meeting with a big banner with bible texts and about twenty 30-70-year olds singing with high wailing peasant women and glorious growling basses.

So diary now up to date. Thinking of you all at eight o'clock on a Saturday night and wishing I was sharing this with you. We are due to go to the ballet tomorrow tickets being obtained by usual route of Andrei having friends – in this case a singer in the opera. With love and goodnight.

Sunday and Monday 20th/ 21st.

Woke to a sunny cool Sunday morning. Our main plan to visit the ballet but starting with a stroll around town calling into a few churches all packed, standing room only and flowing out onto the pavements singing what sounded like Ukrainian Tessa music. Had wonderful coffee and cakes in a little café in a small open air artists market. We then met Igor the singer (baritone) who had got us our tickets for what would be a folk Ukrainian ballet. Pat then wanted a toilet. Ok Sasha said but we had to stand in the sun while Igor explained the plot to us (Sasha translating). Time got near to the start with audience rushing up to the door and crushing through. Still no loo. At last we got into the modern 'Baroque style' theatre. Still no loo. Igor disappeared but returned with a lady with a key. WHERE'S the loo? We could hear the orchestra tuning up. All became clear when we were ushered into a private, velvet-lined dining room that led into the Czar's private box. It had its own loo hidden behind velvet covered doors that looked like part of the wall. Typically the flush on the Czar's private loo did not work but a big ugly bucket of water was available.

The ballet had the usual sort of boy/girl/hero/villain/prince/gypsy story. I recognised many of the folk song because Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky had used them. In the interval we had more chocolates and champagne. Igor was very pleased to have a nice chat with a man who sings in the opera (Figaro this season). More toasts: "a privilege to entertain such an eminent scientist in the Czar's private suite". As I remember the real eminent scientist Bob Genniss saying in a posh hotel in Malmo "I could get used to this lifestyle". I pointed out that operatic music achieved the impossibility of turning personal and national tragedies into beauty. Igor wiped away tear and poured me more vodka. In the square afterwards I was photographed with Lenin's statue – a historic moment as they thought it would soon be removed. There were big crowds listening to speeches about the hoped for separation of Ukraine from the USSR. Sasha went round singing the previously forbidden Slava Ukraine (Glory to the Ukraine) with Pat chirpily replying with Glory to the Heroes). At 4.30 we went for lunch/dinner until 7.0 in a very special restaurant. I have learned to stick with vodka rather than alternating with champagne. There was a huge party next to us which led to the traditional wild peasant wailing folk songs. Then our usual toasts. It is so good to have Pat here as she is good at saying the obvious gushy things appreciated by the wives and hosts. We finished the day with a bit more strolling and packing before going to the station in Andrei's brother's car. Pat went off to photograph the engine for her husband George. When she returned she said she was not sure it was the engine so set off toward the other end to find it. Sasha had to run after her to tell her board as we were due to leave. She had walked for 5 minutes but not reached the end of the train which had more than

40 coaches. We soon started playing FOOL whose impossible rules I failed to grasp. I told this showed I have an intellect equal to a 4 year old Russian boy. Pat is trying to write the rules for export to UK. It is 8.0 and we are entering the outskirts of Kiev.

21st evening. SPORT HOTEL

We were met at the station by Malashenko who took us to the hotel. He had great difficulty in finding a hotel but eventually used his previous reputation as a sportsman to get us into this special hotel which is next door to the ammin stadium. We arrived at 9.30 but didn't get our rooms till 12.30. We found a cafeteria where it had to be explained that we were the British FOOL team to gain entrance. After a good breakfast we waited and waited. Three of Malashenko's staff joined us. Two of them went off and spent 5 hours getting tomorrow's train tickets. Next we went by Metro on a restaurant hunt. The one we found was very good but half outdoors and so too cold. It was on a hill amongst woodland. Very good lunch with usual vodka and champagne lasting from 2- 5 O'Clock. Yuri and Sasha kept us entertained by inventing complicated Russian conventions mixed up with funny stories of how they apply. I proposed a toast to the health of Libby, George and my two wonderful sons. I was then told the toast was invalid unless I drank the whole glass of vodka in one go. So I had to repeat and do this. Survived.

We next went to the square outside the Ukrainian Parliament. The crowds were there because the separation of Ukraine from the USSR was being debated. I was bought a flag and badge and taught to shout the right words. Most of our vodka discussions were on politics with Sasha and Yuri discussing when to leave the communist party (tear up their cards) and follow Gorbachev. Then down to the Dneiper river for a 2 hour boat ride in the golden evening. Next up to the oldest church in Russia (11th century). We were refused admittance with a lot of shouting between Sasha and an armed guard. A second senior guide came up and satisfied himself that we were English apologising and letting us in. We failed to find the Gate of Kiev described in Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. I later found that it was never actually built. In bed by 10,0pm.

24th/25th Moscow Written before my last lecture on Nitrogenase.

Kiev. Had a sunny morning out to an open air museum of old style Ukrainian houses swarming with new style Soviet children. We went in two taxis. We did it in 30 minutes. I would have preferred longer. Back to a monastery set in cliffs and down creepy caves by candlelight to see loads of mummies (not many monks are ever daddies). Next for coffee and cakes in a cafe in an old weapons store full of 2nd World War guns and tanks and planes. Then to lunch/dinner with Gregory's parents – Jewish but loads of pork on the table. The usual 3 hours of vodka etc and very good food including cabbage burgers. Mr Pinchuk is brother of a famous sculptor who made the famous Kremlin statue of Lenin. We were given photos of it. Pat admired a lovely laqueur box and was promptly given it to her huge embarrassment. (New less valuable ones cost at least £40). Back to the Sport Hotel where I had a special walk by myself around the stadium area.

At last down to the station to be met by Malashenko. A few years before at a meeting in Göttingen he gave a dreadful lecture in which for no reason he included a picture of a submarine. So he was met at the station by unkind Russians all singing the Beatles song 'We all live in a yellow submarine'. So into the Kiev/Moskva Express. Very nice cabin with water bottles and biscuits provided. We played our last game of FOOL Biochemists versus geneticists. They won. I really enjoyed these train journeys.

Must be off to my lecture. A sudden wonderfull thought just washed over me - Home tomorrow.

245h/25th. Written on plane in airport.

Sasha drove me to Moscow State University around the parts I remembered from the 1966 Symposium. My lecture was in a small hall so the 50 people packed it nicely. People from the Biochemistry Institute came and were the only ones to ask sensible questions. The subject was Andy Smith's work on nitrogenase. Went well. Now taking off so bumpy through low cloud. After the lecture we had tea with staff and the very eminent prof Kondratieva. Her father was a famous economist who was killed by Stalin. She is quite a royalist. I later learned that she was friendly with Prince Philip, serving on Olympic committees with him. (horse jumping). A huge pile of cream cakes were offered but, dutifully, I was the only person who took one. But I was the main person (as their lecturing guest) who had to talk most – through a mush of cream. Earlier Kondratieva had asked my opinion of a paper by her colleague. It was bad but on an important subject. For convenience I wrote a page of notes on it for Kondratieva. She then introduced me to the writer of the paper who I saw had my notes which were rather blunt but not quite rude. To embarrass me further she asked me to autograph these notes.

Next was a present hunt. I had just been paid £50 for my lecture so I had £200 to spend (in roubles). Nothing in shops. We went to pick up Misha (Sasha's son). We drove hopelessly around for 2 hours and went to some shops together. He is same as when we first met but still shy but works at chatting.

No more pages!! I think is is the time I eventually found a music shop so bough about 18 kg of Shostakovich scores and Beethoven quartets.

