

The 2000 Russia Work Trip by Gary Drost

The idea of a 2000 Russia work trip really got started at Dwayne King's Kingdom Air Corps in Alaska the previous fall. During the summer of 1999 volunteers, including Marie and Art Andreasen started building Dwayne and Carolyn's home in Alaska. As winter approached more work still needed to be done. So Alison Huizinga, Neal Dodge, Doug Strobe and I flew to Alaska and tiled floors, set toilets and tubs, hung doors and kitchen cabinets and primed and painted the place. We naturally heard Dwayne's stories about Russia and church building projects that had been done or hopefully would be done in the near future.

On the morning of June 14, 2000 Art, Bob, Doug, Harrison, Lev, Ray Jones, Ray's son-in-law, Mary and I left South Apalachin for Russia. When we stepped into the Aeroflot Airlines airplane at JFK Airport, it seemed like we had already arrived in Russia. Most of the passengers were Russian, the flight crew was obviously all Russian, the primary language spoken was Russian and we soon found out that the food was Russian (smoked fish for an appetizer, and more fish for the main entre, very tasty).



We arrived at the main international airport in Moscow the following morning. It was a very confusing place as all the signage was only in Russian. We followed the herd and were eventually met by a Russian Baptist Union man who would be our shepherd around the city and to our hotel. Since we still had a six hour red eye flight to the city of Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, we stayed in Moscow a couple of days to get rid of some jet lag, and do some sightseeing. We toured Red Square and the Kremlin and did some window shopping. Of course everyone had to get a Matryoshka Doll to bring home. It turned out to be a very good thing that we scheduled the time in Moscow as two of our visas (written only in Russian) had problems that needed to be corrected before we could continue our journey.

Krasnoyarsk is a city of a million people, but not very modern. The airport baggage claim was outdoors, and the toilet house was a real shocker, especially to Mary. Inside, the only light was from the open doorway, and the "facilities" was a row of holes in the floor. Soon we were on our way to the town where we would be staying for the next two weeks. Divnogorsk is about an hour's drive from the airport and has about twenty thousand residents. Our first stop was the missionary's apartment. For those of us that can't sleep on

an airplane “red eye” flight, and now 12 time zones from Apalachin, we were dead tired. The missionary wife’s solution to jet lag was to keep everyone awake until normal bedtime, so she organized a hike for our team. Mary and I escaped, found a park bench and had a nice three hour siesta. We still slept like babies that night.

The town was a mixture of private homes and five (or so) story apartment buildings. The private homes were years beyond needing a fresh coat of paint. None had running water. The apartments were small but did have running water (cold only). Each apartment had an intruder proof steel entry door with a big heavy lock. The common hallways and stairs were very dimly lit and smelled of dirt and grime and cat urine.

Some of us (including Mary and myself) were fortunate enough to stay with church families. Very interesting. We stayed with Oleg and his wife and four daughters. Oleg was an AWANA missionary and the only one in the church that owned a car. The apartment was small, but adequate. There was almost no storage space, but they didn’t have much to store. We learned that the typical Russian has two sets of clothes, one good set and the other. At church or just on the street they are all dressed up, but as soon as they get home they change.

Soviet style apartments have a toilet room (approx. 3’ x 4’), and a separate “bath” room with a sink right next to the bath tub. A kitchen sink type faucet is mounted between the two and swings one way to fill the sink, and the other way for the tub.

The six in the Oleg family plus Mary and myself ate at the kitchen table, which by American standards would comfortably seat four. The coziness was kind of nice. Mary and I slept in the living room on chair beds. That’s right, living room chairs that opened up into single beds. Neat.

The next day was Sunday and we learned that the church was having three simultaneous services in three separate homes because they didn’t have space anywhere to meet all together. Pastor Pasha and Oleg had both been through Bible School in Krasnoyarsk, and did the preaching at two of the services, and John Wicker, the SEND International missionary preached at the third.

Most of the team was assigned to Oleg’s parent’s apartment for the service. There were no instruments to accompany our singing, and since Oleg only knew about ten words of English, he preached in Russian. The next day we started work. In addition to the nine of us were three men from Pennsylvania, and one from Alaska, all friends of Dwayne. The 30 foot by 75 foot masonry basement/foundation was nearly complete, but not like anything we had ever seen.

The basement walls were about 12 feet high and made of huge concrete blocks each weighing about 1,500 pounds and laid up dry (no mortar). Precast concrete beams spanned from side to side, and concrete planks (flooring) about 4 feet by 15 feet spanned the beams.



By the end of the first week, we had some sections of the first floor walls in place. Even though Sunday morning was very blustery with an occasional sprinkle, it was decided to have the church service all together in the new church. It was great; new church, all together in one service, guitar accompaniment to the singing and John, our missionary translating for us.



By the end of our second work week, all the walls were up and all the trusses were built and in place. The church people were amazed. The whole town was amazed. Under Communism people didn't consider working hard or efficiently. What amazed the people the most was that the South Apalachin team was made up of retirees which they referred to as "the grandfather" team. We didn't know it at the time, but we found out later that when we first arrived, our hosts were disappointed because they thought we were too old to do any meaningful work.

Within the next few months, the church was made weather tight, insulated, and the dry wall installed on the main floor. Within the next few years, the basement was finished along with everything else, including landscaping. It was nice to be part of this church building project. It was also nice to see a bit of Russia and to work with the "grandfather"

team from South Apalachin. It was really nice to see Jerry Mikalonis and the church bus when we got back to JFK.

A few years later I returned to help a nearby church summer camp. It was better than “really nice” to see the church that we helped build in the year 2000 thriving so well.

