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Dick,

Russia in Private arrived a few weeks ago. I opened it and finished it in two sittings. Your writing is terrific. What an arc of time and experiences. From Khruschev to Yeltsin. Soviet dogma back to imperial rule scented with Orthodoxy. Your explorations of the underlying assumptions of the Russian mind are challenging. Good to reflect on one's own assumptions that flow from being an American. Not sure what to make of your thoughts on the role of women. They resonant positively, but I lack a solid base to go further.

Though I am not much for nostalgia (not for nothing was I referred to as "the bureaucrat" by some of my compatriots in student politics. Walter Drymalski once crushed me with his claim that I probably acted like a banker when I was fourteen), I was immediately caught up in waves of memories and impressions of memories while reading your book. At 65 I now think memories are mostly just smoky glimpses of what might have been or I wish them to have been. So having them come in waves is upsetting, stimulating…..

Here are some reactions and other.

I absolutely loved seeing George on the back cover. That face all lit up, the hands clasped in front with the omnipresent cigarette smoking away. His enthusiasms were boundless and frequently quite strange. George once plunked down a pile of LPs, operas of Glinka, Mussorgsky, Borodin,Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov (not sure what he thought of Prokofiev or Shostakovich?), in front of us during a class. He announced that we could not be considered educated until we had listened to all of them. I knew we were in the presence of a passion that required attention.

When I first came to Lawrence I thought that I would fulfill my language requirement in Greek. I had studied Greek for four years in prep school and won all of the classics prizes (this is not to suggest that I was much of a student in the all A mold. I was, and am, too centered on

what I find interesting to work at the received curriculum with much diligence). I looked over the course offerings and found one on the plays of Aeschylus. I went to see some professor in the classics department. He said that I would have to take a qualifier exam. That didn't appeal to me, but, perhaps more important at that moment, he was a terribly stiff guy with not a wisp of humor. So I marched out of his office and close at hand was a door that said Russian (maybe Slavic Studies?). More about why this attracted me will become obvious later. In I went and there was George. I can't recall anything of our conversation. All I remember was his eyes, passion, and enthusiasms. Thus began my career in Russian language and literature.

You might have begun your first trip to Russia "to find a life, if not socialist, at least not aspiring to middle class." I came to Russia with a different set of preconceptions. As a prep school student I had taken a course on Russian history taught by a very dynamic teacher. When I became a senior I managed, with his support, to wangle my way in to an independent studies program that allowed me to define a topic of interest and work on it for a semester. In that case I proposed to write a paper comparing the rise to power of Stalin and Khrushchev. This resulted in my reading innumerable books and journal articles and writing a 70 page paper. Along the way I came to have some understanding of how the Soviet system worked and little things like the purges and what I later learned to be the Gulag. During my Lawrence years and for the two years before I went on the 1971 trip I also got embroiled in various radical political groups that lead to more study of Marxism and the unfortunate follow on isms. One book that came out in 1968, **The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties** by Robert Conquest, did much to make more concrete the actual operations of Stalinism. So, by the time we came to the border crossing near Vyborg in June 1971, I was looking through very different glasses.

That border crossing was a bit terrifying. And, for me, who by this point had spent 6 years trying to learn to speak a bit of Russian, this was my first interaction with a real Russian, even if a young guy with a Kalashnikov in hand. I don't remember what I said but he said nothing back. So I tried again and finally he said something completely unintelligible. My god had I been duped into thinking I knew anything of Russian! Then he spoke further and I realized that he was speaking Russian but with an accent and grammar that completely baffled me. I

noticed finally that his facial features seemed kind of Asiatic. Light bulb goes on. This guy is not a native speaker. He's probably from Uzbekistan! As you noted, as one got away from the heart of the Russian empire, you got a chance to speak Russian with others for whom the language was a bit mystifying too.

Your comments about the public versus private throughout reminded me that I assumed that almost any interaction in public with a Russian was likely to be with an employee of the state or reported to the state[1].

I had two real opportunities for some private conversation.

In Leningrad I met a young guy named Ilya Levin, a student of English at the university. I cannot remember exactly how we met but we made a deal to split our time between English and Russian. We met twice for several hours each in parks. Trade-offs. I missed ever going into Hermitage because of this. We talked about literature, politics, and his family. He asked about some authors in English who he said were popular in the Soviet Union. I confessed that I had not heard of them and confessed that my education in English and American literature was not more than superficial. On the second occasion he told me that he came from a Jewish family and that this was the source of serious constraints on his parents and his future. As a secular Jew he did not have any idea about the content of this Jewishness. His parents had long ago become secular and had not passed along any of the traditions. Nevertheless he was officially a Jew.[2] Though I was aware of the dangers for him, I asked him where he lived and he told me. I memorized the address and wrote it down when I returned to the US. In 2006, through business

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[1] I found **The Whisperers** (Figes, Orlando. The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia. First ed. Picador, 2008.) to be astonishing. The comprehensive policies of the Soviet state to change the structure and role of the family and interpersonal relations in general was very surprising to me.

[2] While I was teaching Russian at Newton South HS (Newton, MA) 1969-1971, I experienced an illustration of this anti-Semitic labelling. I found a student, Peter Rolicky, thrust into my class part way through the year. He was a recent arrival from Poland. He was a very angry 15 yr old. After a couple of weeks I finally got him to talk about why he was here in the US. He said that six months earlier his family had been identified as Jewish by the state. Turned out that his great grandmother was Jewish on her mohter's side. Thus, three generations later Peter found himself to be a Jew. His family decided that it was time to leave Poland and found their way to the US. His mother was a doctor and father an engineer. Cruelly, Peter was tortured by his own anti-Semitic attitudes that flowed from his typcial Polish background.

connections in St. Petersburg, I attempted to find him. No luck. Perhaps he is living the good life in Tel Aviv or Brighton Beach?

My second private conversation took place near Krasnodar. We had set up camp and there were some Russians nearby picnicking. Conversation ensued and this guy, who identified himself as a hydrological engineer, invited me over to his dacha. It turned out there were three couples staying there. We went in. The men sat in the main room and the women disappeared to the kitchen. His wife reappeared with zakuski and glasses. The women did not reappear except to replenish the food.

One of the guys produced a bottle and filled up the glasses. I had looked at the bottle and quickly took it to be vodka. Down the hatch. I only got a part of the tumbler down my throat before I felt this intense wave of heat. I unceremoniously spit up most of it to gales of laughter from the men. Pepper vodka. That was my introduction to this new world of flavors. I recall the word nastojka as covering vodkas that berries, fruits, and peppers had been left to infuse with their essences. But my dictionary says that nastojka means brandy. What is the word for these vodkas?

We spent most of the evening talking about their work on dams, mostly on rivers I had never heard of in Siberia, and music. Although this was before my formal engineering days, I have always had real interest in everything mechanical and electrical, so hydroelectric power stations suited me just fine. But better was our talk of music. The three Bs, Tchaikovsky of course, Glinka, and Shostakovich. One of them had heard some of S's string quartets. All of this was great.

These guys had a passion about music best summed up for me a decade or more later in Harvard Sq. One evening I wandered down to the square, probably on the way to a watering hole, and found a string quartet playing an adaptation of Bach's Contrapunctus in the entrance to the Coop. I paused and listened for a while. Bach is always the best and these students were darn good. After a bit I turned away and went down the street towards the bar when I heard the very same music coming out of another doorway. But this was a completely different Bach, one

full of passionate yearning where the former was all precision. They played the pathos of Bach while the American students played the form. I listened until they finished and then immediately heard the musicians speaking Russian. I asked who they were to discover that they were part of the Soviet Jewish immigrants recently arriving here. By the way, I like both the form and the passion of Bach. The pinnacle of Western music.

I must admit that the seemingly inescapable visits to the monuments to the Great Fatherland War in every city did engender in me a lifelong suspicion of Germans and Germany and changed my views on the role of the US in WWII generally. With our physical isolation from the war and relatively light casualties, the glorification of the war here continues to grate on me. We don't need to go in for any recitation of the grim numbers here. Americans simply have no appreciation for where the real pit of that war was.

Since I have traveled a bit, your musings on why we travel were of interest. I particularly liked the quote from Camus. I feel anxiety at the very thought of travel. I don't want the discomfort of strange places, funny looking people speaking in tongues. I am almost always ready to abandon the project on any excuse. Fortunately for me, my wife Karen is indefatigable and drags me out the door. Once underway I become energized, observant, questioning, ready for the adventure. Thus Camus's "feverish and pervious" (what a great word this "pervious" - I had not gotten beyond its negative until now). Though I have always sought some connection to the locals when traveling, it strikes me that perhaps more valuable is the opportunity to step outside of your day-to-day life and culture and look back at it with some distance.

In recent years the global expansion of the tourism industry makes finding anything genuine, leaving aside the speciousness of this notion, very difficult. For the last four years we have travelled to Hong Kong for three weeks in December to visit my son, Jonathan, his wife, Nan, and their two children. Since they are academics, this is one of their vacation times. With two little kids in tow we always take a side trip. Last year we went to Bali. Even in remote places there tourism industry is hard to escape.

In 2009 we travelled with them to Vietnam. Jonathan has over a decade of work in Vietnam under his belt and speaks Vietnamese with such ease and fluency that we regularly saw people gasp when he spoke to them. He had spent enough time there to have some real friends. We spent many evenings drinking beer or tea with street vendors he had known for many years. They invited us into their apartments, really just one room with cooking, washing, and other basics done in the alley. Though we could not speak directly we got to observe daily life quite closely.

One phenomenon has stuck with me. Everyone wanted to hold the baby, Jesse(9 months at that point) and then run off to find neighbors to show off Jonathan's baby. When this first happened on a street in Hanoi I was horrified. Suddenly, Jesse was sailing off down the street in the hands of an old granny tea seller who wanted to show him to someone else. I waved to Jonathan and Nan pointing to Jesse disappearing in the crowds. They were not concerned. Then, on repetition I realized that the Vietnamese have a different relationship to children. When we went to a restaurant waiters and waitresses who might not be busy immediately picked up Jesse and kept him entertained while we ate. Jesse never expressed any agitation at all these strangers. Everyone seemed to know exactly how to hold him and do all of the right things to keep him happy. Babies seem to be communal responsibility there. In the US, and probably many other places, parents would never allow a waiter in a restaurant, or anywhere else for that matter, to pick up their baby and march off to take care of them. Quite amazing still in my memory.

Travel occasionally also becomes transforming. Certainly my Russia trip fits that category for me. During the '80s, my wife and I travelled repeatedly to the America Southwest, especially the four corners area to visit Anasazi and other Indian ruins. This period of exploration for us culminated in a camping trip in Mexico mostly in the Yucatan. These experiences revealed for me the utter failure of my education to provide an understanding of even a bit about what happened in our own hemisphere. Here were civilizations that were as large, urban and sophisticated as their contemporaries in our much more familiar Eurocentric history.

Here there is a little connection back to Russia.

Though it was widely known that there was extensive inscriptions on the Mayan and Aztec ruins, very little progress was made in deciphering the language until Yuri Knozorov published a book on the topic in the early '50s. According to lore, Knozorov recovered a single volume from a burning library in Berlin when the Soviets overran the city in 1945. Knozorov carried it back to Moscow where he was a professor of ethnology at MGU. The book turned out to be a reproduction of the three Mayan codices. With no knowledge of work done earlier, he applied his obviously very keen linguist's tools to deciphering the text. His book was a revelation. With Knozorov's work in hand much progress has been made and almost all of the Mayan story incised on their monumental buildings have been decoded. Now we have a fairly detailed political and military history of this civilization. (more on this in Jonathan Coe's **Breaking the Maya Code** 1992).

While we are pausing on the topic of our camping trip in Mexico I want to recall some of my camping in Russia. We had fairly dry weather though I do recall arriving at some campground in a driving rainstorm that fairly filled the tents with water even before we got the soggy sleeping bags arrayed. But, being a lifelong camper these discomforts have not stood long in my memory. I do remember waking up one rainy night to hear some sort of rumpus going on in another tent. The sounds grew louder and more frantic. Then someone figured out that the sound was George, increasingly enraged, trying to a light a Belomorkanal with Soviet matches in the rain. By the time we found a light, George had knocked his tent down and was standing with a poncho draped over him glowering and cursing about the damn Soviet matches.

As you recounted, getting gas was always a troubling venture, first the finding then the buying. I recall that sometime after Moscow we realized that we really did not need to buy the coupons if we were bold enough just to shove some rubles through the hole in the glass. But, at some stop I went through the ritual you described so well. But shoving rubles through the slot instead of the coupons was only greeted with a grunted nyet from the other side. I tried again and she simply replied talony? Well, I didn't have any and so I decided that we had a stand off going. I bent down fully and placed my forearms on the sill of the glass completely blocking the aperture. I began to hear the truckers in line behind me getting annoyed. Someone tapped me on

my back asking what was going on. Without moving I shouted toward the back of the line that she wouldn't sell me any gas. More grumbling behind me. Then one of the truckers started pounding on the glass shouting at the attendant to sell me gas. I knew he was saying that, but it was surrounded by a whole bunch of other words which I had to assume were curses George never introduced. Finally the attendant relented and I got my gas.

Cursing in a language not your own seems to be very treacherous territory. While I was at Cornell (1971-1973 before I discovered that I was not cut out for the academic world) I acquired a mimeographed dictionary of slang, mostly slang gathered from the literature ofthe Gulag. This introduced me to a basic handful of curses. We had an old White Russian emigre in the department who passed as our native speaker in residence at Cornell. Old Boris would never tell any of us any curses because proper, educated people never used them.

Only in 2005 did I get my real introduction to cursing in Russian. Through my management consulting I came to work with a couple of Russian emigres from St. Petersburg who needed help with a business strategy for a start up Internet security firm they wanted to start in Russia from a base in Boston. These guys were nuclear physicists and information science guys, but what a profane bunch. They were amused by my very halting Russian but disturbed that I could not follow their cursing and colloquialisms. So they undertook to educate me. I learned a whole lot more curses but I never felt comfortable using any of the words even with them privately. I realized that cursing requires a very deep knowledge of the social circumstances where they are appropriate and effective. Properly used curses are wonderful. Improperly or appropriately used they can be a complete show stopper. Then there are the environments in which cursing is completely reflexive, every third or fourth word is a curse. I worked as a machinist for a number of years after I quit graduate school. One machine shop in South Boston stands out in my memory for its inmates' mind numbing relentless profanity.

This mention of the Russian emigres reminds me of corruption as a theme in Soviet life and now intensified exponentially, it seems, in present day Russia.

As part of my work with my emigre entrepreneurs I helped them develop a budget. On my first pass down the columns of figures I noticed that an item called "other" amounted to more than 25% of the total expenses. "What's up with this "other" item?" I asked. "Mark, you can be so naive. That is for bribes." I was astonished and said, "Really, 25% of the budget is bribes?" They then went on to describe how greasing palms was required for virtually every transaction and that you could be assured that every sales person was not only paying bribes to get customers but also stealing from their employers at the same time. And the same thing was happening in the other side of the business with vendors from whom you were purchasing goods and services.

I asked whether the corruption was getting worse. They said that it was becoming normalized. Normalized?

They then told me how business was changing at the border. When they started out two years earlier trans-shipping used computers from the US via Finland into St. Petersburg they could never tell how much money the Kalashnikov toting border guards would extract for each shipping container. Now things had gotten better because the Putin government had stepped in and the bribes had been standardized. They just built the bribes into their costs, paid them in advance to the guards, and voila no delays or stolen goods. That was things getting better through normalization.

As my work with them continued, they gained confidence in my experience and skills (they had learned of my small but successful software company that I had sold two years earlier) and asked me to join their venture. I researched the situation a bit further. I discovered that not only is the criminal justice system in Russia corrupt. Law covering contracts is shabbily put together and very pervious (good to use a new word right away) to money and influence. So I asked my would-be business partners how, if a Russian could not enforce contracts, would I, an American, fare in this regard. They said that they were honorable and I could trust them. I resisted the urge to quote President Reagan.

On further digging around I noticed that the board of directors of every Internet company in Russia had an FSB guy obviously and publicly listed. What's with this? Oh, in order to do anything on the Internet involving encryption you have to get a license from the government, thus the FSB. I then participated in a teleconference with some potential investors in Moscow. Though I struggled throughout with the blizzard of new business and Internet words (can't blame my earlier training at Lawrence or Cornell for this. Most of these words simply did not exist until the 90s) I figured out that these guys were setting up my friends for some theft of intellectual property. I asked them how they would deal with this. Oh, that's where the FSB guy comes in. There must be some honor amongst them!

With all of this going on I backed away from this deal and stopped working with them. There is a business maxim that instructs to control the controllables and forget about the rest. This was a situation where I could see too few controllables and an overhanging tsunami of uncontrollables.

To return for a moment to George, as we were getting ready to leave Kharkov, George came up to me and told me to follow him closely down the road for a while until we came to a Y in the road. We were supposed to go left, but he told me that I should follow him to the right. OK.

So 30 minutes or so later I saw the Y intersection and noticed a bunch of police cars, policemen leaning casually on their cars smoking and chatting. When we got up to the intersection George's bus lurched forwarded accelerating through the intersection to the right just as he had indicated. I stomped on the gas to keep up. As we went by the police jumped up waving their arms, racing to get in their cars. After a couple of Ks they stopped us. They jumped out of their cars with guns in their hands. These guys were clearly not your ordinary traffic cops. George got out of his bus waving back to me for me to stay in the bus. I didn't. When I got up to the very angry police who had surrounded George I heard him speaking very slowly in some sort of imitation of broken Russian about being so sorry.... We must have gotten lost... and so on. He must have been convincing in his act. They examined our passports and saw that we were Americans. They ordered us to turn around and escorted us back to the Y and then several

Ks down the correct road. After they disappeared George pulled over. We all got out to find out what this meant. George had a big smile on his face. He explained that from his military intelligence days he knew that there was a big MIG factory down that road and he just wanted to see how close we could get. Not very, apparently. George's little adventure for the day.

Now that I have paused on George, your mention of the Prague school reminds me that once I got started with the first Russian classes I was completely captured by this analytical approach. It very much appealed to that part of me that lead me to engineering after I quit graduate school. Here was structure and order amidst the apparent chaos of language. Having already studied French, Latin, and Greek in the traditional approach, this was completely enthralling. I later discovered the obvious limitation of this as a pedagogical device[3]. Not everyone finds it so obvious or easy to extend the abstractions and simplifications of the Prague school as applied to learning an actual language. But that aside, for me it very much appealed to my brain's pattern recognition systems.

I was pretty good at this. At some point senior year George had me constructing phonemic inventories of Latvian, Lithuanian, Rumanian, Turkish, Hungarian, and a couple others. This must have been part of some grand scheme he had in mind to map out all of the languages that one might bump into on a grand Slavic tour.

A correction: the Tractor theater, aka Gorky Theater, is in Rostov on the Don not Kharkov. (http://tourism.rostov-gorod.ru/attractions/detail.php?SECTION=15395&ID=108676).

My main memory of this building, besides the fact that the building really did look so obviously like a tractor, was going to some opera there. My attitude towards opera being more akin to Natasha in War and Peace than George's delight, my memory is much sharper about the fact that there were two, two, working escalators that carried the entire audience upstairs to a huge ballroom where we stuffed ourselves with champagne and ice cream between the acts. It

[3] During my brief tenure at Newtown South HS I used George's approach to teaching Russian. It was an early discovery for me that people are different. Some students took like ducks to the approach, others, not stupid or lazy, found the abstractions difficult to master. People's brains really do work differently. This insight, what a comment that this might be an insight for me, came to be very useful during my much longer career as a manager.

struck me as completely incongruous that a society that had almost no modern highways could move a whole audience up and down just to have champagne and ice cream. Maybe these are better priorities? This also illustrated that all semblance of civil order almost collapsed in the stampede up the escalators. The pushing and shoving was as bad as anything I had experienced at hockey games at the Garden in Boston.

In retrospect I can now see traces of why I left academic life in what I actually spent time looking at in Russia. In Moscow I spent most of a day watching the construction of a building somewhere down Nevsky Prospekt. I remember watching one site for several hours. They were laying up concrete block walls. Since I had spent some time as a teenager working construction, I had found myself indentured to a mason for several weeks. It felt like I was indentured because he worked at a ferocious pace and my days were mostly punctuated with continuous calls for "more block" and "more mortar", usually followed by epithets about how slow I was. At any rate, though I had at that point never held a trowel or buttered a block, I knew what good work looked like. These Russian masons laid block up in a haphazard fashion with not a lot of consistency about the thickness of the mortar bed. When they struck the the joints the followed with a burlap bag to clean off excess mortar. This then smeared a film of mortar over the surface of the blocks that would later show up as an efflorescent staining.

At this same site I watched a truck pull up with a load of blocks. I didn't see any machinery around for getting the blocks off the truck. Before I could even think of how many people it would take to unload a truck of blocks by hand, the driver simply tipped the back of the truck up and all of the blocks slid off dropping several feet to the ground in a jumble. Many were broken or seriously chipped. I asked the driver if this was the way he always delivered blocks. "Oh yah, I just get them to the site."

There was the marvel of Soviet trucks. The first time I saw a tractor trailer truck going down the road with the trailer following along about 10 to 15 degrees off center I was amazed. Why hadn’t the driver stopped before he left the yard to get the rear axel aligned? Then there was the sight of a pillar of black smoke just to the side of a highway that as you came close revealed a truck tire abandoned on the side of the road and set afire. No recapping of tires? Or,

the sight of a Moskvich stopped with its hood up and the driver with a set of tools working to get it moving again. Here is where your typical Soviet driver was superior to US. One had to be a competent mechanic to drive.

Your steam bath story is great and to think that you did that with the great Walter Drymalski, aka The Polak. I don't recall the name of my bath house, but your description fits the one I went to. Definitely pre-revolution in origin. Unlike you, I entered to steam room and immediately sat at the lowest level I could find. The heat had a kind of pressure to it that instantaneously ended any adventurism on my part. I remember looking up through the mists to see large hulks glowing up at the top. The only other memory is of the offer for a massage or rub down. I looked over and saw this guy who made me look small picking up this human form and flipping it over the way you might a piece of meat that needed a good wacking with a meat tenderizer. I passed.

Walter was one of my real friends at Lawrence. We really struck it off in large part because we both had great interests in things mechanical and we liked cigars, brandy and all things boozy. Our different religious backgrounds added frequent spice to conversation. Being a recent convert to the atheist tradition from WASPy New England Protestantism I found Walter's Catholicism a challenge, especially the guilt that seems to flow broadly there. Walter owned a Ford Model A that he brought to Appleton senior year. We had great fun keeping it running. It always caused a stir when we drove the the supermarket. (We had so tortured Dean Vanderbush that he allowed a few of us to take off-campus apartments senior year. He was doubtless glad to be rid of us from his dorm system.) Walter and I also smoked a lot of Ben Franklins washed down with Grain Belt beer.

After graduation I kept track of Walter for a while. He spent a year working on some Federal program, maybe it was called Vista, that took him to Lewiston, Maine. My mother's family came from Maine so I know a bit about this place that is best described as the Mississippi of New England. Poverty with lobsters. People speaking an English that can be almost incomprehensible. Not sure exactly what Walter did in Lewston, excepting perhaps that it was not Danang. Next thing I knew Walter had wangled his way into medical school. Years

later we had dinners together several times in Cambridge when he found a medical conference that required his attendance. By this time whatever youthful bond we had was gone. Can't complain when one doesn't keep touch with more frequency. Then a few years later a note from Terry that Walter had cancer and died. Perhaps you know more of his life?

My visit to Peredelkino had a slightly different twist. When we arrived, we asked an old man, who I took to be a caretaker, where we could find Pasternak's grave. He scowled a bit a pointed to a large conifer and said, "Over there". We picked our way through the graves and stood reverently for a moment. As we gathered ourselves to leave the old man reappeared and asked whether we would like to see the grave of a truly great writer. Of course. He lead us over to another part of the graveyard and pointed down, Kornei Chukovsky. "There is the grave of a great writer who wrote for really important people, children." He then reeled of a list of Russian authors who had written for children, most not exclusively for children, but many well known. Not including Pasternak.

Well I had better stop here…… thanks again for writing such a wonderful book.

Regards,

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