
From ЛАФАЎЕТ to Kishinev

Getting to know the Soviets — not sightseeing — was the highlight of the Lafayette delegation's trip to the U.S.S.R.

Perhaps it's safe to say that few students at Lafayette have ever had a chance to discuss political issues with their counterparts in the Soviet Union. But for the 13 seniors who recently traveled to the University of Kishinev in the Soviet Republic of Moldavia, talking about world events was only one of the highlights of their two-week adventure.

The students, along with Associate Professor of Languages Rado Pribic and Assistant Professor of Government and Law Lisa Langenbach, visited the USSR through a first-year exchange program sponsored by the United States's Citizen Exchange Council and the Soviet Student Council, which matched six American and six Soviet colleges and universities for reciprocal visits. For Pribic, who has travelled to the Soviet Union on 13 different occasions, few of his prior trips have been as meaningful as this most recent one.

"When you visit the Soviet Union for two to four weeks, it's difficult to be in an intimate setting where you can get to know people," Pribic said. "But our students and the Kishinev students had the opportunity to meet each other on a personal basis, where they continue to write, look forward to seeing each other again, and remain friends. You always can do formal tours of factories and classes, but when you can go into a home and meet the grandmother and grandfather, that's the most meaningful part of the experience.

"It wasn't just an academic experience, it was student diplomacy in action. Churches, governments, peace groups are trying to do something, but the future leaders of both countries — they are right here."

Lafayette's contingent saw the usual "tourist" sights, such as St. Basil's Cathedral and Lenin's Tomb, but the group was treated to some specially planned activities as well.

The students danced at a disco and attended a concert by one of Moldavia's best-known rock bands, audited classes at the University and visited an English Language specialty school, met with Moldavian artists, and visited the theater. The Lafayette and Kishinev students and a number of students from other countries who are studying at the university talked about the treatment of foreign students by their host countries and institutions, and the United States's and Soviet Union's preoccupation with one another, among other topics.

Pribic said, "College officials want to continue the program and to invest certain financial resources in that direction. Of the schools involved, Lafayette really is at the cutting edge of the program."

On the following pages, six students share their memories, observations, and thoughts about the Soviet Union and its people.

—Mary Walter Gras



St. Basil's Cathedral was among the sights seen by 15 members of the Lafayette community who travelled to the Soviet Union through a first-ever group exchange program sponsored by the Citizen Exchange Council and the Soviet Student Council.

At the Memorial to the Defenders of Leningrad, the diary of a young Soviet girl, Tanya, lies protected in a glass case. To one side is a sample of the daily ration of sawdust-flecked bread the city's residents ate during parts of the 900-day siege known as World War II. The piece of bread is insubstantial. The Russian words on the pretty flowered paper are not: "My mother died. My father died. My brother died. I am the only one left."

This particular memory of our trip to the Soviet Union haunts me still. Not only those words of a child destined to die, but the power of war to affect the present and future of a nation. The Civil War, the last conflict contested on American soil, is remembered as though it occurred this century instead of 170 years ago. Imagine the effect World War II

"At this table I see no enemies. I see only friends here."

would have had on this country if it had happened here. Imagine that 70 percent of the buildings in your town were destroyed, as they were in Leningrad. Imagine that over just a short period of time only 40 years ago approximately 18 million Americans died, the sheer number of which touches every family in the country. A father, son, uncle, brother. An entire family in Leningrad.

To most Americans, World War II is a chapter in a history book or a vague memory. Our boys went "over there" to defend honorably the USA. The bleeding, bombing, and dying all happened "over there." Many Americans made great sacrifices in the war effort, but we were lucky enough not to live "over there."

To the Soviets, the repercussions of the Great Patriotic War continue sounding. Housing, while adequate and available for everyone (can we say the same?), is cramped by our standards. Many national monuments and shrines were destroyed;

those still standing require extensive restoration. And 18 million Soviets lie buried, an amount of human worth impossible to calculate. With what literature, music, or scientific discoveries would they, their children, or their grandchildren, have gifted humankind?

Every town we visited during our trip to the USSR included a memorial for the people who died there. Newlyweds and widows, the young

which the different peoples who now comprise the USSR suffered. The Soviet Union's strength as a nation results from a history that has been a test of its' peoples will to survive and their ability to pull their lives together after repelling an invasion. In the 40 years since their worst experience yet, they rebuilt buildings and lives while competing technologically with the United States. The Soviets have fortitude.



Rado Pribic

Jill Edwards '89 and Ina Semenchuk will be reunited when Kishinev's students visit Lafayette in April.

and the old come to remember. Adults show children the tiny pieces of bread, the seemingly endless lists of names. The message is clear: It cannot happen again.

I asked Inna, one of our Kishinev friends, what makes the Soviet people so strong. Without much thought she answered that they feel great unity, much like a family who has experienced a terrible tragedy. It was the answer I expected. She spoke not only of World War II, but of the many invasions through

The Soviets also have a healthy love of peace. Many expressed to us their desire to see the USA and USSR achieve a better relationship. Kishinev and Lafayette students signed a statement elaborating on this hope. We all realize that exchanges such as we experienced are an important step to fostering friendly Soviet-American relations.

Three Lafayette students and I were invited to dinner in the home of a Kishinev family. When we arrived, the family welcomed us into

its apartment and toasted us with Moldavian wine. We ate too much, laughed together, and shared songs. We talked of two nations with many differences and one common interest: peace. And the father toasted the table again saying, "At this table I see no enemies. I see only friends here."

The Soviets remember better than we the costs of war and the danger of enemies. Little girls come with their grandmothers to see Tanya's diary in the glass case in Leningrad. When they go home, they think of what it means to lose a family, to live alone in the hunger and cold as the Leningraders before them did. I was lucky enough to see Tanya's diary as well. It helped me develop a more realistic image of war and a stronger dislike of our competitive relationship with the Soviet Union. After two weeks of friendship in their country, I see no enemies. I see only friends "over there."

Jill Edwards '89 is a geology major from St. Thomas, Pennsylvania.

Most Americans would be stunned to learn how much of our culture is embedded into the Soviet Union. If you listen carefully you may hear American rock groups such as Pink Floyd, Rush, Michael Jackson, Billy Joel, INXS, REM, or even the Soviets' most popular American artist, Stevie Wonder. If you get bored you can go to a disco and dance the night away. If you are into celebrities, George Bush is one of the most-talked-about gentlemen around. If you look quickly you may get a glimpse of American product brands like Levi jeans or *G.Q.* magazine.

If you get thirsty in the Soviet Union you can always uncork a bottle of Pepsi Cola. If you are longing for the taste of a capitalist market, well then try Baskin Robbins 31 ice cream flavors in Moscow. (Also available: two American favorites—McDonald's and Pizza Hut!) If you haven't read any good books lately, review a Soviet citizen's top ten list.



Jill Edwards '89

The "G.U.M.", the Soviet Union's version of the mall.

Many American authors, such as Ernest Hemingway and Jack London, are respected and admired. And, if cinema brings excitement into your life, most Soviet citizens are familiar with the muscular, herculean actor Arnold Schwarzenegger. His movies, *The Terminator* and *Red Heat* are extremely popular.

"The Soviets know so much more about the US than average Americans know about the USSR."

How much do we as Americans actually know or care about the Soviet Union? Its culture, art, music, history, government? The irony, of course, is that the Soviet people know so much more about the lifestyles, government, and politics in the United States than the average American knows about similar com-

ponents of the Soviet Union.

While travelling to the Soviet Union with the Lafayette group, I was impressed with the Soviets' knowledge about the United States. They were so eager and enthusiastic to learn about our way of life. I was greatly humbled, like most of the others in our group, when we were asked, "Why wasn't the Russian language required in our schools?" or "Why weren't many Soviet authors read extensively?" Those and similar questions made me realize how uneducated and ethnocentric we are as a nation and society.

The trip to the Soviet Union was an eye-opener for us all. We never dreamed what an exciting and different world existed behind the Iron Curtain, and especially of a people so interested in our way of life. We learned so much, but most of all we learned that the Soviet citizens are ordinary people just like you and me.

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Most people are quite surprised when I tell them we attended the wedding reception of two Kishinev students during our trip to the USSR Here at Lafayette, and many other American colleges and universities, it is quite uncommon for undergraduate students to be married. However, in the Soviet Union, students frequently marry before they graduate. I met one 20-year-old female student who had been married for a year-and-a-half and had a one-month-old baby girl Another was 21, had been married for two-and-a-half years, and had a one-year-old son. Both had three more semesters to go at the University and intended on graduating. Although it is quite ordinary for Soviets to marry young, many students claim most people nowadays are waiting until they are between 23 and 25. However, of the group that will visit Lafayette and the United States in April, three are married. One is Angela, whom we helped celebrate.

The Kishinev students spent almost every free moment with us, and Angela was no exception. So on Thursday, when we discovered she was getting married on Saturday, we were shocked. We were even more stunned when she invited us to attend the reception. Saturday we were scheduled to travel to Terepolis, a city south of Kishinev, so it was impossible for us to witness the ceremony. (Since most Soviets do not practice a religion, in every city there is a Wedding Palace where the bride and groom say their vows. If they are "believers," a second ceremony is performed at a church.)

The reception started around 6:30 p.m. A Soviet student met us at the hotel, and we took a few taxis to the restaurant, which reminded me of a Knights of Columbus Hall. Because I've never attended a wedding reception, I—along with the rest of the group—was nervous because I didn't know what to expect. We were worried at first that we would "stick out." After all, none of us had packed our formal wear, and we were dressed in skirts and sweaters, or jackets and ties. However, so were most of the other guests. Rather



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After a day trip to the town of Terepolis, the 15 members of Lafayette's Soviet Union exchange delegation spent their evening among the invited guests at the wedding reception for Kishinev student Angela Glavan (who will visit Lafayette in April) and her husband. The newlyweds are pictured with their maid of honor and best man.

than bridesmaids and ushers, the bride and groom simply have one maid of honor and best man, each of whom wears a sash, not a fancy gown or tuxedo, to signify their role. Tradition dictates that these are the people who will guide the couple through their marriage.

Angela, as is our custom, wore a long, white gown, complete with lace and veil. She and her husband stood near the door and greeted the guests. Then we were given a glass of wine and drank a toast—according to tradition, in one gulp—to the couple. Each guest was given a white cloth flower to wear as a corsage or boutonniere. The guests formed two parallel rows and held flowers as the couple walked down through to the seats of honor at the front of the room.

After eating, we all held hands and danced in a circle while a few couples danced in the middle. While dancing with Kevin Marks, he and I decided to make a switch. He grabbed another student while I pulled the father of the groom in to dance with me. Since he didn't speak a word of English and my Russian is limited to about 12 words, we didn't have much of a conversation. But we whirled about the floor. After-

wards, he insisted upon having pictures taken with the wedding couple, family, and American guests, and he brought me over to meet his wife.

This wedding was a particularly interesting one because it was a "mixed" marriage. We tend to view mixed as interracial; however, in the Soviet Union, a mixed marriage occurs when the bride and groom are of different nationalities. Angela is Moldavian and her husband is Russian. Nationalistic feelings currently are a very important issue in the Soviet Union. Many republics, including Moldavia, are fighting for the right to have their national languages recognized. During our time in Kishinev, conversations were sometimes translated into three languages: Russian, English, and Moldavian.

Angela postponed her honeymoon so she could spend the remainder of our visit with us. As we were exchanging names and addresses on the last night, we asked Angela for hers. She complied with our wishes, but stated emphatically that she is keeping her maiden name.

Nancy Nickla '89 is an electrical engineering major from Smithtown, New York. She plans to pursue her M.B.A. after graduation.

Writing about our trip to the USSR is much like setting out to clean my room—an insurmountable task. Where does one begin? Words cannot adequately convey all that we saw and experienced. And they certainly cannot accurately describe the people we met.

Before beginning, I must acknowledge the very obvious language barrier, especially in Moscow and Leningrad. After all, my Russian consists of yes, no, please, thank you, Pepsi?, and the internationally understood shrug of the shoulders and helplessly confused look in the eyes. Therefore, my information comes solely from Kishinev, where most of our host students studied in the university's English department.

Widely known is the fact that the USSR is in a transitional stage termed *Perestroika*, or reconstruction, with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev leading the new school of thought: a more liberal societal atmosphere. People are, for the most part, free to worship and attend church (although being Communist still means being atheist). Signs of free enterprise are appearing here and there. Artists and craftspeople are allowed to exhibit and sell their works on the streets. And the Black Market traders are as active as ever (and, yes, it's still illegal as ever—my Soviet buddies were arrested before I could get the sweatshirt I wanted). The government has become much more tolerant of citizens' expressing opinions, even those in opposition. And there is opposition and resistance. This "old school of thought" was evident during a forum we attended at the university.

A very l-o-n-g lecture seemed twice as l-o-n-g since it had to be translated. Afterwards, the speaker—the very elderly head of the university's ecology department—asked for questions. That's when I cut down the center and went straight to the hoop, asking him about the effects of Chernobyl and his thoughts on nuclear power.

He talked briefly about the use of nuclear power in the Republic of Moldavia. As for the Chernobyl accident, he said there were "no tragic

cases," and Kishinev suffered no radiation damage. When asked for his opinion of nuclear power, he cited the use of pesticides as a more ominous threat, and then listed all the damage the USA has done with Agent Orange and the atomic bomb in Vietnam, Hiroshima, and Okinawa. He appeared more interested in defending his country's use of nuclear power than questioning it.

But, what about the younger generation and the new school of thought? Well, one evening we had dinner at various students' homes

ions? Igor's not in favor of nuclear power in the least. He believes it's much too dangerous, and hopes the USSR will concentrate more on developing a way to use more basic or natural energy sources.

I found it especially interesting to talk with Igor's brother, Oleg, who had completed his two years' military service the day prior to my meeting him. He'd been stationed not far from Afghanistan. Oleg said there's no way our countries can survive under such a threat of extinction, and that he and the other sol-



Jill Edwards '89

Soviet artists and vendors now are permitted to exhibit and sell their wares.

with their families. It was here that I was able to discuss, in some depth, the students' opinions on Chernobyl. Igor, the balding basketball player, was my main source of information.

According to him, *officially*, no harm came to the people of Kishinev due to the Chernobyl accident. *Personally*, he had difficulty believing that an accident of that magnitude could occur without any radiation reaching Kishinev—especially when Chernobyl is so nearby. Igor said the USSR has continued developing and building nuclear power plants since the accident. And from his understanding, "scientists" have been working on a safer design. His opin-

diers were strongly against any form of nuclear protection. They thought development of weapons must be abandoned, and that the USA and USSR should work together to develop a safer design for nuclear power plants—not work separately on weapons.

The Soviets do not want war. But, they are an insecure people, and understandably so in view of their struggles to preserve their culture, to defend their boundaries, and to ward off the many invasions of their country.

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So, how was it?
How was what?
The Soviet Union. What else?
Oh, oh, that! It was great. Yeah . . . and . . . well, the people were very receptive. They were really sincere and enthusiastic about meeting us. It seemed like everywhere we went, they had a small crowd greeting us, or were giving us something. I'd like to go back someday. By then maybe I'd be smart enough to learn some Russian.

You mean you don't know the language? You probably didn't have much to say.

Actually, one of the most interesting things I found out was that most Soviet children can speak English as early as fifth grade, and by age 12 they usually have the understanding of as many as three languages: Russian, their native language (in the case of the Kishinev students, Moldavian), and English. Some can speak French as well. I felt so stupid not keeping up on my basic Russian. I had tapes and everything. I at least could've gone there with a decent understanding besides *nyet* and *da*.

But, you said most of them knew English.

Yes, but that's not the point. One way people can come to understand each other is through the languages. This way, there'd not only be communication, but an understanding of why such a stand is being taken. Confucius could then be dealt with much more civilly.

Did you go to the McDonald's in Moscow?

You see enough of it at home. I must admit the we did stop at a Baskin Robbins.

In Moscow?

Yeah! It was a few blocks from the Red Square.

How did the 'ol Square look?

Well, here's a few pictures of it. That's St. Basil's Cathedral. There's the G.U.M.

What? You want some gum?

No. I said this place is called G.U.M. It's kind of the Soviet Union's answer to the mall.

Is there a Macy's inside?

No, just a lot of K-Mart shops. Anyway, this is Lenin's Tomb. Talk about experiences. They have

Lenin preserved in a glass box.

Come on! Really?

Lenin actually is sealed in this vacuum-like box in the middle of this small room. It was so strange. No one was allowed to talk, laugh, or even smile. You just walk up around and out the other door.

I was in awe, because for many atheistic Soviets, this is their icon, their god. Lenin, to them, was their liberator. And thousands of Soviets come to see him at every opportunity. It seemed like this was kind of a "Mecca" for them.

Who is this with the mask on?

Oh, that's a Soviet artist we met. He was great, a regular big kid. He did a lot of portraits of famous world figures in history, and he put on a few and pretended he was singing. His whole family makes a living in the art field. Here's his daughter-in-law. I got the opportunity to speak with her through one of my fellow traveler's translation of French. She also does portraits. Her paintings depicted people's changing moods, age, or the changing of the seasons. I loved talking to these artists. This was one of my most enjoyable parts of the trip. I didn't want to leave as soon as we did. The coolest part is that the government gives some artists these large buildings to set up their studios. Can you imagine? . . . the government gives them these large spaces!

Let me guess. You're an art major, right?

Does Pica sew? . . . Anyway, I also went to the Hermitage in Leningrad. This was kind of my Mecca. It's huge! Our guide said if one were to stand in front of each work of art for less than a minute or so, one would be there for 11 years. I stood in front of some Rembrandts, Caravaggio, Rubens, and DaVinci. Michelangelo, too.

The Sistine Chapel, right?

You didn't attend many of your Art History classes, did you? The Sistine Chapel is in Italy. What I saw was this sculpture piece called "The Crouching Man." It was unfinished and probably from this later period. The biggest thrill for me was to stand in front of Matisse, Picasso, and Kandinsky originals. To see the size, texture, and fine quality of some famous titles was an experience and a half. Oh, all right. Wake up. I won't talk artsy anymore. Any other questions? Answers? Recipes?

When are they coming to Lafayette — the Soviet students, that is?

In mid-April. And we have to make them feel at least as half as welcomed as we felt. They were really fantastic!

Clayton Evans '89 is a studio art major with a minor in education from Staten Island, New York.



Most Soviet students can speak English as early as in the fifth grade.

Bill Edwards '89

Change is a concept that many Americans take for granted, and one that continually takes place throughout an individual citizen's life. While in school, if you do not like the major you are pursuing, you can switch to another fairly easily. After school, if you wish to switch occupations, that option is available to you. New styles develop, new political and/or protest groups emerge, and society continually adapts to the times. The options that are so prevalent in our lives were not available to the Soviet people until only recently.

This visit to the Soviet Union was not my first. I traveled there in January 1988 with an interim session class. Since last January, there has been much published in American newspapers regarding the significant change taking place within the Soviet Union. It was a goal of mine to find out to what extent the Soviet society actually is changing, and how these supposed upheavals were affecting the Soviet citizens.

Our first stop in the Soviet Union was Moscow, where I noticed a major difference immediately. On my first trip, passing through customs was truly an adventure. Roughly four to five people in our group had their bags searched. This time, however, everyone made it through without having to open their bags. In fact, while we were waiting, I saw no one in the airport get checked.

Other changes were evident throughout the city. There were no large propaganda placards (Some I'd previously seen read "Glory to the Workers" and "Long Live the Revolution."). Limited free enterprise—people selling their artwork and other wares—was beginning to show its face on the streets of Moscow.

Another surprise was our visit to Lenin's Tomb. During my last visit, foreigners were not allowed to observe Lenin's body lying in state. The Soviets view this practice as a pilgrimage. Government officials did not believe foreigners could maintain the seriousness and respect that is demanded of the visitors. This time, however, foreigners were permitted to enter the tomb.



Jill Edwards '89

Emily Kissel '89 got a closeup of the Black Sea from Alexander Murzak.

What I believe is the major change that has taken place in the Soviet Union we encountered very strongly in our host city of Kishinev. In conversations we had with the students, they freely expressed their thoughts about the society, a concept that was practically unheard of a few years ago. Keep in mind that these students are members of the Komsomol, the youth Communist League. They are not people outside the political system. Apparently the party is allowing its members to probe into its own problems from within its own bureaucratic structure.

The change occurring in the Soviet Union was not the only change I noticed during our visit. I observed the attitudes and opinions of the students in our own group had changed. I believe, as a whole, we developed a better understanding of not only the Soviet society, but also of the Soviet people. Stereotypes were removed on both sides, and we were able to interact with the Soviet students as friends and not as rivals. We were able to develop our own opinions about the good and bad points of the Soviet society. Most of all, we got caught up in the Soviet people's excitement regarding their future. Most people support Mikhail Gorbachev with a guarded, yet growing opti-

mism. They back his plans for the opening of the society, but realize what a large job that is. One student from Leningrad, with whom I spoke last January, commented that the West views Gorbachev as a savior, as one who is extending far-reaching reforms for the Soviet society. However, besides the major change in the realm of the media, the student argues that the reforms, for the most part, are still on paper and not already taking place as the West thinks. The student supports Gorbachev in his efforts, but believes it will be five to seven years before any substantial reforms occur.

The Soviet citizens are aware of the major student and cultural exchanges with other nations and the joint ventures between Soviet and foreign firms. They see co-operatives in which they can share in the profits of a firm or business. They see new incentives for workers. They are involved in groups that seek to promote their national heritage. And, they realize all these factors promote promise and hope for them as a people and a nation. □

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