

WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE



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This fanzine is available for contributions, letters of comment, artwork, interesting clippings, uncancelled postage stamps, arranged trades, editorial whim, or A\$2 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). I prefer some sort of personal response.

The Rubbish Bin

This issue features my parent's report of their trip to the U.S.S.R. in October 1990, which I wanted to get into print before it becomes ancient history.

There's also some of Lyn McConchie's anecdotes of life in rural New Zealand, the usual excerpts from my diary, and a few book mini-reviews.

No letters this time – no space! Many people did write, and I thank you all.

I was amused at how many writers commiserated about my "problems" with the home renovations in terms that suggested they thought I was complaining about things that happened. Gosh, I thought I was telling amusing stories, not complaining. Very little has happened that was unexpected (even the fact that my planning sometimes lacks sufficient attention to details), and most of the time things have gone exceptionally well compared with my expectations. Renovating and remodelling houses is, for the moment anyway, my *hobby*. I enjoy it. Sometimes I don't enjoy the chaos, but most of the time the situation provides a convenient excuse for living in my natural state of mess! (*You* may think it's a weird hobby, but hey, how many people think your interest in *fandom* is a weird hobby?)

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Life, don't talk to me about life

Excerpts from Jean Weber's diary

Somehow the excerpts last time (back in November) failed to even mention the trip Eric and I took to Melbourne at Easter 1990, when Eric was Fan GoH at Danse Macabre.

The highlight of that trip for me was meeting Parris, who had accompanied Pro GoH George R. R. Martin to the con. I quickly discovered that Parris was a most interesting person to talk to, and that we had a lot of environmentalist, feminist, and other interests in common. But while I had "been there and done that", Parris had not only been there, but was *still* doing that. I could have talked with her for hours, but unfortunately other people made demands on her time as well.

After the con, Eric and I stopped to visit Lee Harding and his family in their abode at an old cheese factory (a museum) where Irene is manager. Lee was delightful as always, and deftly changed the subject when we demanded to know when we could read the sequel to *Waiting for the End of the World*. We listened instead to old Tom Lehrer records, and Lee seemed a trifle startled that Eric knew more about Tom Lehrer than I did. (Months later, we borrowed other Lehrer records from Jack Herman and taped them for Lee, who had bemoaned the difficulty of completing his set.)

New computing gear

I have been having fun doing page layouts with my desktop publishing program (Ventura Publisher), since I bought a 19-inch monitor at a sale just before Christmas. It's a Viking 1 monitor, built in 1988 and unsold until now. I got it at a warehouse clearance sale. It displays two almost-full-size A4 pages side-by-side, large enough to read the print and do useful work.

We'd gone to the sale for Eric to buy a Zenith MiniSport laptop computer. We'd been talking about getting a laptop for some time, but any machine with the features we wanted started at over \$2,500 and was more likely to cost over \$4,000. Then this MiniSport

showed up at \$850. It hasn't got everything we want, but it comes close.

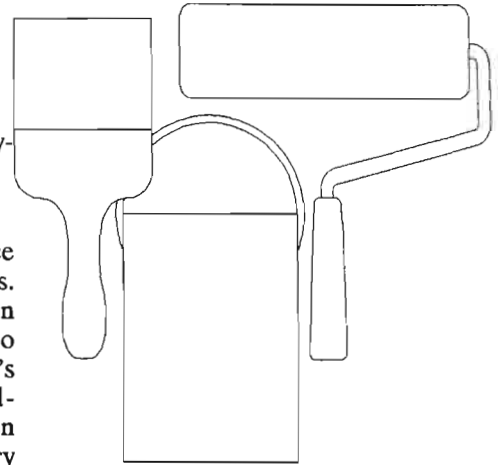
Christmas & New Year

Gordon Lingard stayed at my place for a week before and after Christmas. He helped me strip wallpaper. On Boxing Day (December 26) we went to Jack Herman and Cath McDonnell's annual Alcoholic-Beverage-and-Christmas-Cake Party. I had not been to one for at least 4 years, and was very pleasantly surprised to catch up with lots of people I never see these days, like Andrew Taubman, Gregor Whiley and Jon Noble, as well as many others whom I see a little more often.

Renovations

Just before Christmas a contractor replaced the decorative plaster ceilings in the hall and lounge of my house, so over Christmas I painted, stripped wallpaper, and painted some more. Decorative ceilings are not fun to paint, because you can't use a roller. Presumably it would be possible to use a paint sprayer, but I don't have one, so I used a brush. This does unpleasant things to one's shoulder muscles. The result is beautiful, however, so I guess it's worth it.

Early in the new year I received local government approval to build the extension to my house, and the work got under way. Officially I hold an owner-builder's license, but I had contracted with the architect who did the design to do the construction as well. It went quickly and was finished in early May. That is, the builders' part of the work was finished. That included demolishing an old brick garage, building a driveway up to the house, demolishing the old porch at the back of the house, building the new room, putting in some retaining walls, and paving the patio, driveway and a path along the side of the house. Now all I have to do is paint the interior, build some cupboards, install the kitchen cabinets and appliances, tile the floor... Also the landscaping, to reclaim the yard from the destruction left by the builders.



After the construction was done, I had new carpet laid in the living room and hall, and the place is now starting to look quite nice. Not to mention having a lot more space! The new room is on the north side of the house and has a lot of glass, so warms up quite nicely on a sunny winter's day.

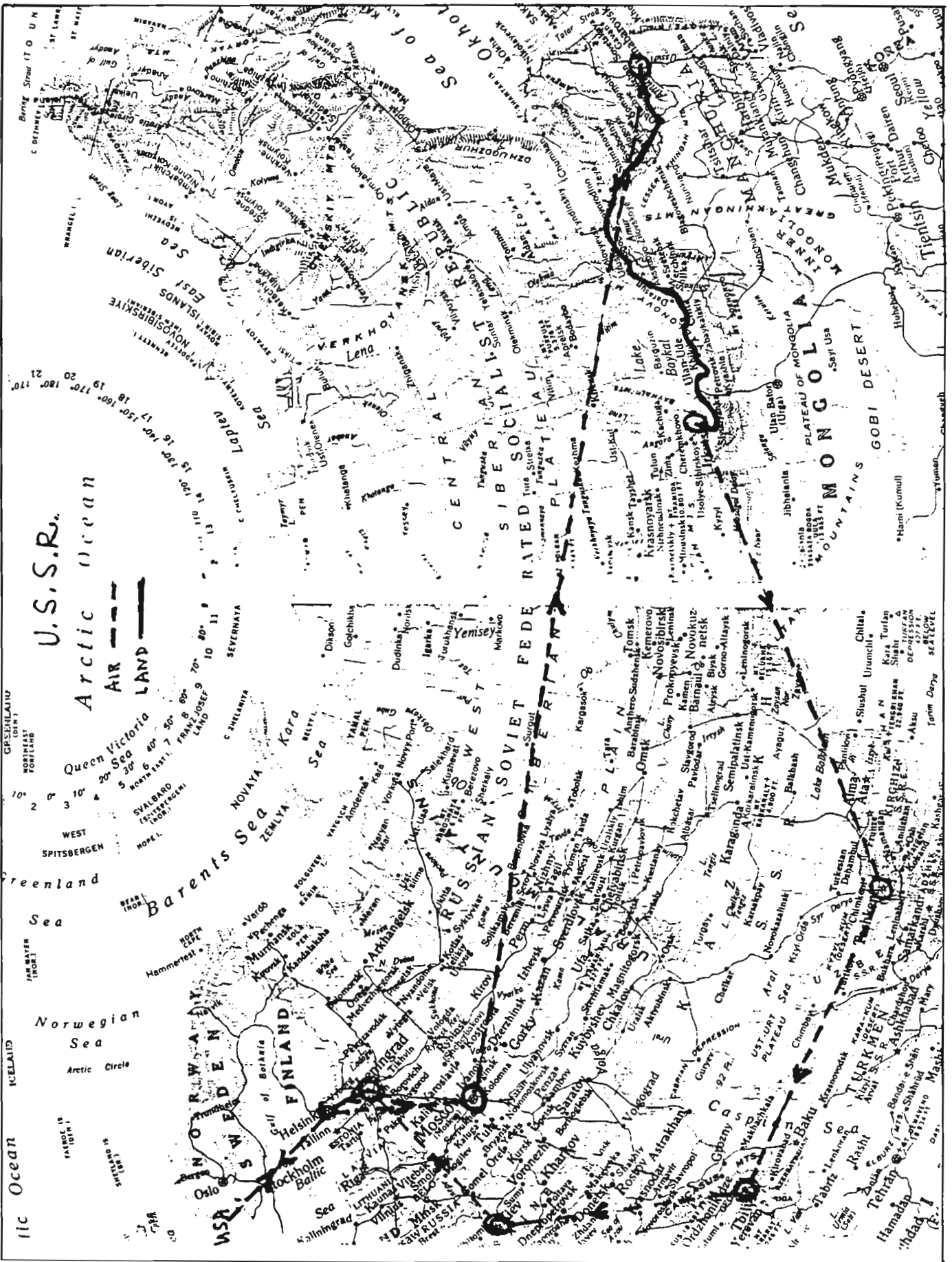
Trips not taken

I didn't go to Swancon in Perth in January, thus not seeing various friends and not meeting Barbara Hambly, one of my favourite writers. I decided I was too busy, and too broke. Eric did go, but then he gets paid when he's on vacation.

Escape from IBM?

I gave notice to quit at IBM when my contract expires in mid-June. My team leader, supervisor, manager, and various other people immediately started trying to convince me that I didn't want to go. "Tell us what you want, Jean, and we'll organise it," they said, adding "except for more money." Most gratifying. We are, as they say, negotiating.

To celebrate all these events, I decided to take another trip to North America. Then I got thinking about what fun it would be to cruise around Seattle and Vancouver with Lyn McConchie and Janice Murray, visiting all sorts of interesting people and places. Finally I realized that my mother's 70th birthday is coming up, and it would be really great to drop in on her around that time, and she and my father now live in Washington State.



Trip to the Soviet Union, October 1990

Milton and Carolyn Weber

We decided to take our second trip to the Soviet Union, again sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University Alumni Association, for three principal reasons:

1. This 3-week tour covered areas which we had not seen before – the Soviet Far East, Siberia, Soviet Central Asia, the Caucasus, Georgia, and the Ukraine, and included 3 days and 2 nights on the famous “Trans-Siberian Railroad”,
2. We would have an opportunity to observe what changes had taken place in the Soviet Union during the four years since our cruise down the Volga.
3. Dr. Douglas Murphy, Hopkins professor of cell biology, who speaks fluent Russian and has spent considerable time working in Russia with his counterparts, would again accompany us and give us the benefit of his observations and experiences. Also we had found on three previous trips with Hopkins alumni that, although our careers were varied, we had similar intellectual and cultural interests.

Preparations

We were cautioned before the trip that everyone must be in very good health, have no difficulty in walking considerable distances over rough terrain, climbing stairs, have no heart problems, no chronic intestinal or urinary tract problems, or requirement for special diet. Further, everyone should bring prescription antibiotics for the inevitable upper respiratory and intestinal tract infections we would experience. After considerable thought, we decided to take the trip.

Eight couples signed up, +, seven of them Hopkins alumni. Among us were three PhDs (including Doug Murphy), an MD (anesthetist) and his wife (an attorney), a Doctor of Public Health (naturalized Chinese from Taiwan), and two engineers. Milt was the only career military person. Two men and one woman were about our age; the rest were somewhat younger.

Our Tour Director was Perdita Welch – a tall, slender woman in her late

forties, and a human dynamo. For the past eighteen years she has conducted tours of Russia for nine months a year, from September through May, including every tour on the Trans-Siberian Railroad her agency offers in spring and fall. Though she doesn't speak Russian, she invariably gets her way with Intourist, the Soviet travel agency, and will accept as local guides only those who are most experienced and most fluent in English. She returned from her previous tour two days before leaving with us. The evening we got back to the States she continued on to her Washington office, and would depart two days later with her next group. Obviously she has too much energy to stay at home.

We met at JFK Airport, and took an overnight flight on Finnair to Helsinki. Perdita has obtained business class seats for most of us, and the extra space made the long flight quite comfortable. After a 4-1/2 hour layover, we boarded an Aeroflot jet for the 1-1/2 hour flight to Moscow. What a contrast!

Aeroflot

All flights within the Soviet Union, and most flights into and out of the country, are operated by Aeroflot, the Russian national airline, using Soviet-built planes. These vary in size from the equivalent of a DC8 to the seating capacity of a DC4. Seats are crowded together, and seat backs are of thin canvas or vinyl cloth; the knees of a tall person behind you gouge into your back. Carry-on luggage is stored under *your* seat, not the seat in front of you. The overhead racks are open, with solid or webbed bottoms, and only coats or similar soft items are supposed to be stored there, but the Soviets frequently put attache cases or other hard parcels in the racks. Flight attendants never demonstrated safety measures, checked seat belts or enforced any safety precautions. There was no evidence of emergency oxygen facilities. On one flight the dozen rows of seats in front of the door had to be filled before passengers were allowed to board the area aft of the door – so the plane wouldn't tip over on its tail!

Frequently the seat back would not stay upright. On one flight, every time Carolyn leaned back, her seat back rested in the lap of the person behind her – particularly disconcerting during takeoff. The Russians seldom fastened their seat belts for takeoff or landing. In some cases there were no seat belts at all, or one or both catches were missing, or the belt couldn't be adjusted. On one flight Doug simply knotted the two ends around his waist. On another, we held Carolyn upright during landing.

There were no amenities that we normally expect – no music that one can control individually, no call buttons for flight attendants, no way to easily adjust reading lights, no temperature controls. Carpets and seats were worn and dirty, and trash was strewn around the floor. The lavatories were like the majority of Soviet restrooms, filthy if functioning at all, and best avoided if possible. Whereas passengers are usually cautioned to avoid getting dehydrated during flights, we soon learned to go aboard as dehydrated as possible. Does anyone ever clean a plane between flights?

Planes were spotted on the tarmac. Usually everyone was stuffed into a bus – one bus per planeload, it seemed, regardless of the size of the plane – and driven out to the aircraft. Then began a pushing and shoving exercise at the bottom of the ladder – “be in excellent physical condition!” Tourist groups were assigned blocks of seats and were to be counted off like sheep and go aboard as a group – easier said than done! After all passengers were aboard and setaeed, and every seat was filled on each domestic flight, the cockpit crew filed aboard. In a few seconds the engines were started and we were underway. Who, we wondered, made any pre-flight checks?? But the engines worked, and takeoffs and landings were surprisingly smooth. We made seven flights on Aeroflot during this tour, and hope we'll not have to use that airline again.

At every airport, there were large numbers of passenger aircraft sitting around, some surrounded by weeds 2 or 3 feet high. Were they being can-

nibalized for parts? Or waiting to be junked? There is a rumor that the Soviet Union will soon give other airlines landing rights and permission to fly between cities within the country. With outside competition, how could Aeroflot survive?

Arrival in Moscow

At the Moscow airport we met Anatoli, the National Guide assigned by Intourist to accompany us throughout our trip until we left for home. Anatoli was a short, plump man in his late forties who obviously enjoyed the three full-course meals provided foreign tourists each day.

We knew from our previous trip that an Intourist guide can be a master at talking around and waffling an answer to a question he doesn't want to address directly. But Anatoli quickly warmed up to us and was surprisingly candid in discussing the current economic, political, and social situation. Our local guides were also quite frank and did not seem concerned that "big brother" might be eavesdropping. This was a noticeable change. Incidentally, the immigration and customs officials at the airport were pleasant, and not stern and grumpy as they had been in 1986, and it was much easier to accomplish these formalities.

Before leaving the airport we got an example of Perdita's clout. She had told us that in requesting hotel accommodations, she was most interested in location, and whenever possible would put us in a downtown hotel close to the points of interest. Upon landing, she learned that Intourist has assigned our group to the Cosmos Hotel, where we had stayed in 1986, and an hour's drive from the city center, instead of the Belgrade 1 Hotel, within a mile of the Kremlin. She had us wait in the bus while she made phone calls and hassled with the Intourist office. Half an hour later she returned and informed us she had won and we *would* stay at the Belgrade.

It was nearly 8 pm when we arrived at the hotel, and as soon as our luggage reached our rooms we departed in our rumpled travelling clothes for a welcoming cocktail party at the Intourist Hotel. Champagne and vodka flowed freely, as well as assorted soft drinks, and there was a wide variety of cold cuts, cheeses, sardines, caviar, salmon

and other seafood, and egg hors d'oeuvres. We returned to our hotel about 10 and fell into bed exhausted, having been up nearly 36 hours. However, the variety of food, plus champagne and vodka, gave both of us some indigestion, so we didn't sleep very well.

The next morning we settled into the meal schedule we would follow most days. Breakfast was at 9 am (in these northern latitudes, good daylight came about 8 in October). We would leave on our morning tour promptly at 10. Lunch was about 2 pm, usually at a restaurant near the location of our morning tour. Unless there was an evening theatre performance, dinner was at 8 pm (like most Europeans, the Soviets had their evening meal shortly before bedtime).

Food

Breakfast usually consisted of an appetizer: cheese, sliced cold meat or salami, light and dark bread and/or rolls, sometimes fruit juice of some sort (often hard to identify), at other times a glass of boiled milk, buttermilk or yogurt. We found that putting a lot of sugar in the buttermilk or yogurt made it palatable at breakfast; we weren't served milk at other meals. Next came either a variation of thin Cream of Wheat or Cream of Rice (served without milk) or eggs in the form of a thick custard or omelet, occasionally served "sunny side up", or something resembling cheesecake with raisins in it. Last came coffee or tea. Coffee was the thick Turkish type similar to espresso, with grounds in the bottom of the small cup, and served without milk or cream. Except for one or two die-hards we all soon chose tea, which was quite good. The waiters often seemed surprised, because coffee is a scarce and expensive delicacy in the Soviet Union.

Lunch, the main meal, also started with an appetizer: again cheese, cold meat, sometimes tinned sardines, light and dark bread, occasionally with butter. A salad, if served, would be mostly white and red cabbage, sometimes with red or green peppers or slices of cucumber, and a chunk of tomato. The next course was usually soup, frequently a form of borsht – white and/or red cabbage, sometimes beets and onions or other vegetables, a token bit of meat, sometimes thin noodles or rice, and some cheese or sour cream. The main

course was usually beef in some form, potatoes or rice, peas and carrots, and probably more cabbage. Dessert would be either ice cream, a tart, or cake, along with tea or coffee.

Dinner was quite similar to lunch, except the soup course was omitted. The food was usually quite well prepared, and we found no fault with it except the lack of variety. At times it became quite a game to guess what ingredients were in a particular unfamiliar dish.

On the table were usually several bottles of Russian soft drinks and mineral water (in some areas the water was not potable). Russian soft drinks were sickly-sweet (except for Pepsi-Cola and Fanta, produced locally on license from the U.S.), mineral water was high in salt and acted like a laxative, and the local beer was miserable. However, each evening we had a bottle of rather good Russian champagne for every 3 or 4 people, as well as a fair white wine. We soon became addicted to our "champagne tour".

Though food is rationed in many areas, we were provided more than we could eat. When asked what was done about our leftovers, Anatoli replied that nothing would go to waste. This may be one of the perks of the kitchen staff and waiters in Intourist hotels. But one wonders how the Soviet citizens feel about the foreign tourist who eats in luxury while they may or may not be able to purchase their meager rations of meat, bread, and dairy products.

Moscow

Before leaving home we had decided that, since we had already visited Moscow and Leningrad, in those cities we would only take those sightseeing tours that were new or different, and save our energy for areas unique to this trip. So we opted not to take the city tour or Metro tour that day, or have lunch with the group.

In late morning we walked down Arbat Street, a mile-long walking street between our hotel and the Kremlin where many artists, wood-carvers and artisans display their paintings, photographs, stuffed animals, and wood carvings – some good, some pretty bad. There we encountered something unheard of four years ago, and which we would encounter throughout our travels – money changers.

The Rouble

Recently Soviet citizens have been permitted to possess hard currency. The rouble has several values:

- a) At duty-free hard currency stores, the U.S. dollar is worth the official rate of exchange of .56 rouble (one rouble costs \$1.84).
- b) State bank branches in tourist hotels sell roubles to foreign tourists at 5.6 roubles to the dollar (one rouble is worth about 18 cents).
- c) On the street, black marketeers change money at the rate of between ten and twenty roubles to the dollar (one rouble = 5–10 cents).

This black market in hard currency is obviously condoned by the government – we saw money being changed in full view of the police. Soon some of our companions were busily engaged in money changing, so they could buy things cheaply.

But the question is: What can one buy with the cheap roubles except, in most cases, inferior quality goods? On the streets, we were constantly besieged by adults and youngsters wanting to sell or change money for: fur hats (which shed) as cheap as \$10; Russian “army”, “navy” or “marine” watches at about \$10 – imitations likely to stop running in a few weeks; trinkets of all sorts; caviar; postcards; wood dolls; etc. In one city we were told that since the schools operated on two shifts, one group of boys peddled their wares in the morning, while another group pestered the tourists in the afternoon.

There were shops of various kinds that sold for roubles, but sometimes they insisted on at least part payment in hard currency. Many places were not interested in roubles at all. The best selections of better quality goods were usually found in shops that demanded hard currency, though occasionally it was possible to discover a real “find” in a rouble shop. Many of our companions spent a *lot* of time searching for bargains.

Another question: Who is financing the peddlers and money changers? Certainly, many Russians recognize that the economy is falling apart and want to convert their roubles into hard currency at any price. Is a mafia-like organization behind it? We don't know. But one slick-looking young man who had been following our group for two

days and could, in an hour, provide just about any item one of our companions wanted, openly displayed a two-inch-thick handful of greenbacks he had obtained that morning from sales to tourists. Actual money (greenbacks, marks, or francs) is demanded; even at banks, travelers checks sell at a substantial discount – the opposite of the situation in other countries.

At the time we returned home, there was speculation in the European press that the rouble would soon have still another valuation for business transactions and investment – about two roubles to the U.S. dollar.

During our walk that morning it was also apparent that although some department stores and other shops had interesting window displays of clothing, appliances, etc., there might be little on the racks or shelves inside.

Moscow (continued)

The next morning we visited the Kremlin and the exhibits in the newly-reopened Armory. Here were displayed the crowns, robes, thrones, jewelry, crystal and porcelain, carriages and sleighs of the Russian rulers and nobility since medieval times, as well as Russian armor and early weapons – a fantastic display of great wealth.

We had a late lunch at the Hotel Rossia, just outside the Kremlin walls, and saw a sight unheard of in the U.S.S.R. a short while ago. In an open area between the hotel and the Kremlin, numerous tar-paper and packing boxshelters had been erected, and were occupied by middle-aged Russian families protesting lack of housing and other grievances. They had been there for several weeks; there were no sanitation facilities; and the protestations were obviously condoned by the authorities. The scene resembled the “tent cities” that keep popping up everywhere in our country, particularly near the White House or the Mall in Washington, D.C.

After lunch, we went to the Novo Divechy Convent, a fortress-like complex of buildings and chapels, where several czars had been crowned and where many had placed their unwanted former wives and mistresses. Peter the Great's troublesome sister, Sophia, lived there for most of her life. It is now a museum.

The following morning we visited the New Russian Art Gallery (New Tretyakov Gallery). Here were displayed hundreds of paintings, posters, sculptures, etc. done in the twenties and thirties. Many depicted Soviet social and political problems of that era, and until recently had never been shown to the public. Many of the non-political paintings, landscapes and portraits, were excellently done, as were many sculptures. Our guide Anatoli did an excellent job of explaining the meanings of the posters and paintings, and of describing the social and political environment of that period.

Another flight on Aeroflot

After an early dinner, we departed at 6 pm for the airport for our overnight flight to Khabarovsk, in the Soviet Far East. Our group had been assigned rows 15, 16, and 17 on the plane. When we got aboard – we were the last of our group to push our way through the mob – Russian men were occupying the remaining seats in our row and refused to budge. Anatoli told us to take seats 14D and E, in the second row behind the door; Doug was occupying 14C. As we anticipated, three Russians soon arrived, with tickets assigned them to those three seats.

Eventually the chief flight attendant, a sturdy Russian woman weighing all of 200 pounds and as belligerent as a drill sergeant, took charge, and demanded in Russian to see everyone's ticket. We had none. Since Russians will frequently try to get better seats, assuming that foreigners will not understand and will move, Perdita had told us never to move in a plane or theater unless she said so.

We yelled for Anatoli and Perdita. Anatoli made no response. After what seemed like ages, Perdita charged down the aisle with fire in her eyes, waving a handful of tickets in the stewardess's face, yelling back in English, telling us not to move, and telling Doug not to let on he understood or spoke Russian. Overwhelmed by this tall wildcat, the stewardess decided to back off and let the Americans alone. Now the question was: what to do with the Russians? Doug whispered to us to watch and wait; eventually there would be an accommodation.

As it turned out, there were three individual seats in the back of the plane. The couple we had displaced refused to

be separated; the other man had several large cloth-wrapped bundles and didn't want to drag them all the way to the rear. After extended emotional discussions, one person in the back agreed to move so the couple could have adjoining seats, and the man consented to go to the back, assisted by the stewardesses. No one ever questioned the men who had started the problem by taking our assigned seats. All this had delayed our departure more than half an hour. The problem settled, the cockpit crew came aboard, and we were airborne almost immediately.

The flight was 7-1/2 hours, plus a 7-hour time change. Aeroflot does not offer a meal unless the flight is over 3 hours. About midnight a "Chicken-Aeroflot" meal (Perdita claims the airline *always* serves chicken) was ready. The entrance door two rows in front of us had become part of the galley and Milt was interested in watching the food preparation through the partly-drawn curtain. Each tray of food was put together individually; utensils, roll, chicken, vegetables, etc. were placed one by one on the tray, and the stewardess then carried it over to the passenger. Serving the meal and picking up the trays took well over an hour. A snack was also scheduled before landing. In the interim, the flight attendants emptied the trays, washed them and the utensils, and then re-loaded them.

Before landing, the galley had to be disassembled so the outside door could be opened. What would happen in the event of an emergency landing? As far as we could determine, there is only one entrance/exit door on most Soviet planes.

Khabarovsk

We arrived in Khabarovsk shortly before noon, and after lunch toured the city of about half a million inhabitants. It was named after the Russian explorer who established a fort there in 1652, at the junction of the Amur and Ussiri rivers, and within view of China across the Amur. The modern city dates to the turn of the century, when it became an important junction on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. It is now the administrative and industrial center of the Soviet Far East, an area rich in forests, minerals, fish and fur-bearing animals. We visited an excellent small museum of natural history. The local people,

according to our guide, seek much greater independence from Moscow, 5000 miles to the West, and the opportunity to develop and exploit their resources and trade with Japan and Korea, only a few hundred miles away.

In the morning we visited an English-speaking school, where children 6 to 12 years of age presented a talent program, and later chatted with us. The older children were away at farms helping harvest the crops, which were said to be particularly plentiful this year.

After an early lunch we departed for the railroad station to board the daily train "Rossia 1" arriving from Vladivostok and heading west to Moscow. "Rossia 2" is the daily train heading east from Moscow to Vladivostok.

Trans-Siberian Railroad

"Rossia 1" consisted of 17 cars, including a restaurant car. Each sleeping car had 9 compartments situated across the car, with an aisle running along one side, plus a toilet/lavatory at each end, and a work/sleeping compartment for the conductors (porters) at one end. Each car had a samovar which provided boiling water for tea or drinking. Opening from the vestibule was a coal-fired heater to heat the car when necessary. The interior was of light brown formica and stainless steel, similar to the interior of our former boat, an Egg Harbor. Workmanship was excellent. The car was probably built in West Germany or Austria.

We had one of the two "luxury" cars on the train, with two couches (beds) per compartment. The other cars had four beds per compartment, two upper and two lower. Since there were 18 of us, we had the car to ourselves (Anatoli was in a different car).

The normal October temperature range in this part of the U.S.S.R. is a high of about 40°F and a low about 30°F. However, we were blessed with real Indian summer weather. Although there was frost on the fields in early morning, and some evidence of unmelted snow on northern slopes, by afternoon the temperature was in the upper fifties or sixties. Most windows were permanently sealed shut. However, we prevailed upon the conductors to open the 4 or 5 windows along the corridor which could be opened with a special socket wrench, and thus get a little fresh and cooler air into the car (there is no

air conditioning in this normally cold country).

Our "conductors" were Galena, a matronly middle-aged woman, and her husband George. They have been on the job for 18 years, and apparently have gained enough seniority to be in charge of this "luxury" car. They live aboard the car during the fourteen day round trip from Moscow to Vladivostok and return. They then have two weeks off while another couple make the round trip.

Galena obviously considers this *her* car. It was amazingly clean, a great contrast to the normal state of Russian sanitation. She was constantly cleaning the toilets, floor and brightwork. Toilet paper was always available (a rare experience). The samovar gleamed. There was a marked difference between her car and those we passed through on our way to the restaurant. Each time we left, she locked our compartment door and didn't open it until we had returned; she wasn't about to let anything be stolen while we were gone. On several occasions young Russian men, partly drunk, kept passing through or loitering in the car. She asserted her authority and got them out. One evening there was quite an altercation between her and an intruder; eventually she got him into the vestibule and locked the door until he decided to give up and leave.

We had read that the roadbed was very smooth, but the area we travelled through was quite rough, possibly because the roadbed is laid on permafrost. Also there is a great amount of traffic – said to average about one train every couple of minutes 24 hours a day. In addition, the Soviets prefabricate the rails and ties into section about 60 feet long, and both rails join at the same place. This tends to accentuate any irregularities at junction points. Our compartment was at one end directly over the axles, so both vertical and horizontal movement was felt. Most of the line was electrified.

Water on the train was not potable. We had several options: (a) put boiling water from the samovar into the heavy plastic cups we brought with us, and let it cool; (b) drink bottled Russian soft drinks; (c) drink bottled mineral water; (d) put a water purification tablet in a quart flask (being the only military-oriented people in the group, we were

the only ones who brought along such tablets and used this option from time to time). George and/or Galena provided hot tea morning and evening.

The railroad operates on Moscow time, regardless of the local time, and the schedule posted in each car is in Moscow time. Our 56-hour trip covered 2,070 miles and three time zones (5 to 7 hours ahead of Moscow time). We were encouraged to get off and exercise our leg muscles at stops longer than five minutes. To reduce our confusion as to time, Milt converted the Cyrillic letters of the principal cities along the way to Roman letters, and computed the local times for arrival and departure. Fortunately, the dining car served meals at local time. We had all our meals there, and they were surprisingly good.

At mealtimes, a waiter working out of the dining car pushed through the train a two-wheeled cart loaded with covered metal bowls resembling army mess kits. From the number of bowls on the cart, many passengers must have obtained their meals this way. Apparently some brought aboard their own food, and at longer station stops kiosks and vendors along the station platforms were well patronized.

In the past, photography at railroad stations, marshalling yards, bridges, and any other location of possible military interest was prohibited. These restrictions have been removed. In fact, we were permitted to take photos everywhere except inside some museums and churches, and even there sometimes only flash photography was prohibited. Occasionally one had to pay a fee to bring in a camera.

Actually, taking pictures from the moving train could be quite frustrating. Not only did one have to shoot between the concrete poles of the electrified railway and power lines, but it seemed that every time we were about to enter an interesting village the scene was blocked by a siding full of freight cars, or by the sudden appearance of a passing freight train.

Soon after leaving Khabarovsk and the broad valley of the Amur River, the landscape became very dreary and brown, and remained so for the first day and a half – mushy land above the permafrost, some grass, stunted birches, and tamarack (deciduous conifers). Villages were far apart and small, as

were the houses. The one-lane dirt roads between villages were deeply rutted and filled with puddles. Occasionally a motorcycle with sidecar, or a small truck, would splash through.

Much of the time the railroad followed a river valley, crossing the river frequently. At each significant bridge crossing there was a sentry box and a uniformed guard. Since there are several hundred bridges along this part of our route, and since manning one guard post full time requires five persons, this operation must require thousands of personnel. Probably the Soviets feel that the proximity of the border with China, in some places only 30 to 40 miles away and long a subject of friction, justifies such protection.

The middle of the second day we made a 12 minute stop at Amazar. Since the car windows are always dirty, Perdita had brought along detergent and a long-handled brush and squeegee. She hopped off with her pail and brush, and as fast as possible cleaned and dried the dozen windows on the platform side of the coach, while Galena polished the car insignia. The sight of this American woman in shorts and blouse vigorously cleaning the car windows drew a crowd of amused and interested Russian males. One remark was interpreted as: "I'd sure like to have *her* as conductress on my car!" At the next long stop, about two hours later, she cleaned the windows on the other side. This did make quite an improvement, both for looking out and for taking photographs.

There does not seem to be a definite line of demarcation between the Soviet Far East and Siberia. Probably the names are more descriptive than specific – like our terms Midwest, Rocky Mountains, and West Coast. But by the time we reached Amazar, and entered a new time zone, it was generally agreed we were in Siberia.

By the following morning we had reached the Buryat Autonomous Republic, and the land had become more populated. Instead of only wood and coal production, we saw many more factories and larger towns. It was still pleasantly warm. In mid-morning, we got off at Petrovsk (12 minute stop) to see monuments to the Decembrists, who had been exiled in this area in the 1820s and 1830s. They were senior officers of the Russian army (mostly

members of families of Polish nobility) and other idealists who had been seized while staging a coup against the Czar in December 1825, and sentenced to hard labor and exile in Siberia for the rest of their lives. Before taking the trip, we had read a fascinating book about these men and the brave wives who had followed them 3500 miles into the Siberian wilderness.

At noon (we had again entered another time zone) the train made another long stop at Ulan Ude, and we got off for a group picture. Ulan Ude, a city of 300,000, is an important industrial center and rail and highway connection to Ulan Bator in Mongolia. The main roads were now paved and there was considerable truck and car traffic. Most of the houses we could see from the train had fenced in yards, in which were chickens, pigs, even cows, and a small garden plot. Many of them had greenhouses, which would indicate that even in Siberia tomatoes and leafy vegetables are appreciated.

At this and other cities we were impressed by the large quantities of old railroad cars, locomotives, motor vehicles, and other objects left to rust near the tracks – many thousands of tons of metal which could be salvaged as scrap.

After following the southern edge of Lake Baikal for four hours, we arrived at Irkutsk, where we disembarked and were taken to the Intourist Hotel.

Irkutsk

Irkutsk, a city of 600,000 established as a frontier post in the mid-1600s, has become a major educational, administrative, industrial, and transportation center. The urban population is mostly Russian; in the surrounding rural areas, the Buryat-Mongol people engage in fishing, cattle breeding, and fur trading.

Our two days in Irkutsk included a visit to several old Russian Orthodox churches and a bus trip to Lake Baikal. Boat excursions on the lake had ended for the year, so we spent a couple of hours walking through the lakeside village of Listvyanka, built by early inhabitants, and visiting a museum displaying the geology, geography, animals and fish of the area. One afternoon we strolled along the riverside park in Irkutsk and photographed the many fine old wooden homes, now being res-

tored and preserved as historical monuments.

Tashkent

Keeping up the rapid pace, we departed at midnight for a flight to Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan, arriving there about 6 am, after a 2-hour time change. After a short rest and lunch, we visited the folk art museum of Uzbekistan and attended a program of local folk songs and dances.

A cold front had come through, and instead of the warm days of Siberia we were treated to an evening of hail and snowshowers. Whereas our hotel room in Irkutsk had been stifling hot (heat turned on for winter), in the normally mild climate of Tashkent, ten degrees latitude farther south, the room hovered between 56°F and a maximum of 60°F.

Tashkent, the largest city of Central Asia with a population of 2 million, is situated near China, Afghanistan and Iran. For centuries it has been a crossroads between the Far East, Middle East and western Russia. It has a large Moslem population. The city was demolished in 1966 by a four-month-long series of earthquakes and tremors which had their epicenter directly under the city. An interesting monument depicts the citizens who refused to leave their beloved land, and stayed throughout the trauma of never-ending earth movements.

We visited the restored new city and toured the old Moslem area and its mosques, as well as the large city market where enterprising local people offered for sale many varieties of fruit, vegetables, meat and flowers.

Another interesting monument is dedicated to local families who during World War II had received and adopted thousands of children orphaned during the German invasion of western Russia. After half a century these orphans are parents and grandparents, consider Uzbekistan their home, and have no desire to return to the place of their birth. There is also an elaborate monument to Women.

According to our guide, Uzbekistan is composed of nearly a hundred ethnic groups speaking nearly as many languages. They are historically, economically, and racially oriented toward Central Asia, and not to Russia. They desire much more autonomy.

Here and in other cities we learned that church attendance is now officially permitted, if not encouraged. Numerous Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and Mosques are now being converted from museums back to "working" churches if the people desire. The stipulation: a church used as a museum is restored and maintained by the State at government expense; a "working" church must be restored and maintained by the congregation. We were surprised at the number of people of all ages attending services. Religious marriages are accepted by the State, as well as civil marriages.

Tbilisi

Again we had a short night – we were up about 2 am, and arrived in Tbilisi about 7 am (after a 3-hour time change).

Tbilisi is situated at the base of the Causasian Mountains and is the capital of the Georgian Republic, which borders on Turkey, Armenia and Afghanistan. Fifteen major nationalities are represented.

From ancient times this small country has been sought as a prize by Turkish and other middle eastern rulers. About 200 years ago the king of Georgia made a treaty with the Russians for protection from nations to the south; during the next half century the various principalities were gradually annexed by Russia. After the revolution it became one of the Republics of the U.S.S.R. Today the Georgians still desire to maintain their various ethnic cultures and languages, and obtain a greater degree of independence.

The Georgians want autonomy even more than the other Republics we had visited. Last summer the huge statue to Lenin in the main city square had been torn down and replaced with a grassy area, and the square renamed Freedom Square. Many streets have also been renamed, to honor the people *Georgians* consider heroes, not those the Communists favor. The Georgians refused to participate in the traditional November military parade and festivities marking the Revolution. They were about to vote on separation from the Soviet Union – later we learned that they had so voted.

We asked Anatoli whether the military could or might prevent

Republics like Georgia or the Ukraine from seceding from the Soviet Union. He replied that in his opinion this might have been possible three months earlier (June or July), but not now. The spirit of independence had gained too much momentum throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, thick haze prevented us from getting a good overall view of the city from Mount Mtatsminda, reached by funicular. But the city tour revealed a very interesting combination of old and modern residential and business districts.

At dinnertime (it was Saturday) there was a large Indian wedding party at one end of the dining room. Soon many of the young Indian males, apparently quite drunk, provided their own floor show by forming as couples and engaging in provocative and lewd dances. During his year in India Milt had never seen Indians acting so uninhibitedly. In contrast, at the other end of the large room there was a smaller, very sedate Syrian wedding party.

Next morning we went to Mtskheta, former capital of Georgia, situated about 15 miles outside of Tbilisi. Of principal interest was the centuries-old Cathedral of the Twelve Apostles, surrounded by a large open area and fortress-like walls. At one time the townspeople and their livestock moved inside the walls for protection against attack. It was Sunday and the "working" cathedral was filled with worshippers attending services. Several young men carried or dragged lambs or sheep into the compound to be blessed before slaughter. After lunch we went to the Outdoor Ethnological Museum, where were displayed numerous 18th and 19th century peasant houses, which had been moved intact from Western and Eastern Georgia. Western homes were built of wood, well above the ground. Eastern Georgia homes were of earth and masonry, built halfway underground into a hillside, with a central opening servicing as a source of light and a fireplace chimney. All were more spacious than we had expected.

In late afternoon we watched a number of Georgian folk dances presented by a group of Young Communist League (COMSOMOL) members aged about 20 at their Youth Center. Then we went on to a dinner with a Georgian extended family at the apartment of a woman doctor (urologist),

her sister and brother, probably all in their sixties. Soon we were joined by some of the dancers and a small combo playing native instruments.

The small apartment was crowded with Victorian-type furniture, bric-a-brac, paintings and family photos, and wood models of buildings resembling doll houses. Our group was seated at a long table covered with dozens of ethnic dishes, and bottles of champagne, white and red wine, regular and lemon vodka, mineral water and soft drinks. As we sampled some of the appetizers, more dishes of meat and chicken appeared. Eventually these were replaced with cakes and pastries. Unfortunately, we weren't able to learn the names or ingredients of many of the dishes.

As the meal progressed, the toasts began, led by the doctor's vivacious brother acting as host, and responded to by several members of our group. Toasts covered everything from peace, friendship, good health, and happiness to women, mothers, men, love, eating and drinking. By the end of the evening there must have been two dozen toasts. Several of the Georgians sang songs which were obviously of great significance to them. Soon the combo started playing Russian folk dances, and some of the young dancers enticed some of our group to dance with them in the cramped space in the hall and between the dining table and tables holding bric-a-brac.

Later we asked Perdita how the family had managed to provide such a lavish feast. She told us her travel agency had given the money for the Russians to buy the ingredients which they prepared as ethnic dishes. Since there was much more food than we could eat that night, they would enjoy the leftovers as their compensation for having us as guests in a Georgian home.

We found Georgia and Tbilisi very interesting, and wish we could have spent more time there. But the next morning we were on the road again.

Kiev

Our original schedule called for us to have an all-day drive over the mountains to Erevan in the Republic of Armenia. But unrest and disturbances in Armenia had closed the area to tourists, and we were diverted to Kiev, in the Ukraine, where we arrived by air in the

early afternoon.

Kiev is a city of two million, one of the most important industrial and cultural centers in the Soviet Union, and the third most frequently visited by foreign tourists. Situated close to Eastern Europe, it has the flavor of a European city. During our whirlwind day-and-a-quarter visit, we saw several famous churches, monasteries, and monuments.

In each Soviet city we visited there were more privately owned motor vehicles than we had expected. Although gasoline was apparently not rationed, gas stations were few and far between, and usually at unexpected out-of-the-way locations. When we passed a gas station, even late at night, the line of cars was several blocks long. How many hours, and how many liters of fuel, does the driver waste waiting in line?

In Kiev and other cities, the longest lines we saw were at tobacco stores – sometimes a block or so long. We had been advised to bring with us a carton or so of cigarettes (Marlboros and Winstons are the Soviets' favorite brands). A pack was very gratefully received by a worker, tour bus driver, or taxi driver as a gratuity for special services.

Leningrad

On our late-evening flight to Leningrad – our last on Aeroflot, thank goodness – we noted an interesting situation. We were in the second row behind the door; the first row was occupied by three men whose legs were directly under the door, which curved around the body of the plane. Once we reached cruising altitude, well above the clouds, every time the plane banked to the right a trickle of water pour from the exposed door handles and both exposed hinges into the laps of the men underneath. We speculated on the reason for this phenomenon.

Having been to Leningrad before, we took in only those tours which were new to us. The first afternoon we went to the Russian Art Museum. It contained excellent exhibits of works by Russian painters and sculptors, and we would have liked to spend more time there. The following day we toured Catherine Palace in Pushkin, which was built by Empress Elizabeth and named after her mother Catherine I, and Pav-

lovsk Palace, given by Catherine the Great to her son Paul. Whereas in July Leningrad had been green and sunny, in late October it was gray and gloomy.

The highlight of our visit to Leningrad was our attendance at the ballet "Swan Lake" at the famous Kirov Theater. We had excellent seats in the third tier of boxes.

We learned that the people of Leningrad want to change the city's name back to Petersburg (Petrograd). They say Peter the Great built the city out of marshes and island; Lenin only fostered a revolution here.

Our Gala Farewell Dinner the following evening was held at the "German House" across town from our hotel, where we had a German type meal with spicy sausage as the entree. Perdita explained that even the In-tourist hotels in Leningrad could not obtain appropriate food for a first-class dinner, but "German House" was a German-Russian consortium with access to imported German food. But more important than the food was the evidence of friendliness which had been fostered by and survived three weeks of "total togetherness".

Helsinki and Home

The next afternoon we said "Good-bye" to Anatoli and boarded a Finnair flight to Helsinki, while he headed back to Moscow to pick up a new group of tourists. We luxuriated in the comfortable, clean Finnair plane (what a change from Aeroflot!) and the luxury-class Ramada Presidentti Hotel.

After an elaborate Scandinavian breakfast buffet the following morning, we had a tour of the interesting city and its suburbs before boarding our Finnair flight back to the U.S. We decided we would like to return to Helsinki and Finland someday.

In Conclusion

The changes which have occurred in the Soviet Union during the past four years have been almost unbelievable. The following opinions are based on our own observations, conversations with our guides and others, and reliable reports.

Economy. The economy is falling apart. For seventy years, three or more generations of workers have been guaranteed a job regardless of their productivity, and assured at least a min-

imum of housing, food, clothing, education, medical care and retirement benefits. Measures to convert to a market economy and introduce competition have raised the specter of massive unemployment, soaring prices, and closing or conversion of industrial facilities.

Anticipation of price increases and shortages started scare buying and hoarding some months ago, particularly in the larger metropolitan areas. As might be expected this exacerbated the problem. Greater personal freedom and less government supervision, coupled with lack of desire or motivation to work, resulted in reduced farm and factory output. Although some areas had bumper crops this year, much food rotted in the fields, and reports indicate the perennial problem of national food shortages is increasing. In areas where surplus agricultural or factory products exist, the transportation system seems unable to move them to places of need, and people may not be interested in buying the manufactured goods available.

Now that Soviet citizens can legally possess foreign currency, individuals and organizations having contacts with foreign visitors have devised many ways to obtain hard currency through barter or trade. Some entrepreneurs appear to be doing very well. However, the flight from the rouble may well necessitate a drastic devaluation or currency reform which would make an individual's earnings or accumulated funds worthless.

The salary of a teacher, doctor, scientist, or other professional person has been far below that of a farm or factory worker – thus eliminating any monetary incentive to learn or practice a profession. Few engineers are being graduated, because a bulldozer operator earns several times as much as professional engineer. One wonders if business management is even taught in college, and if so, by whom?

It is evident that the people desire to turn away from communism as an economic system and a way of life, but are reluctant to face up to the great changes in lifestyle necessary to convert to a competitive market economy. Having had no experience with such a system, or opportunity to observe or study it, no one seems to know how to proceed or has confidence that it will

work in this country. Some feel the government is moving too rapidly; others, too slowly.

Nationalism. The success of the Eastern European countries in breaking away from the Soviet bloc and installing more democratic regimes has helped generate among the non-Russian ethnic groups a surging desire for greater autonomy or complete secession from the U.S.S.R. The Ukrainian and Georgian Republics are demanding complete independence. At this time the many ethnic groups in other areas we visited seem only to want more control over their internal and external affairs.

A complication not yet addressed by the nationalities demanding independence or more self-government is that over the past century large numbers of ethnic Russians have migrated or been moved into these regions. By now they have become a substantial proportion of the population or even outnumber the original inhabitants. How would they react to being governed by a non-Russian regime?

If one or more of the Republics succeed in gaining independence without serious armed conflict with the national government, would they be likely to become viable nations? The Ukraine, because of its agricultural and industrial resources and its location close to Eastern Europe, probably would. The Georgians might. But it is questionable whether the heterogeneous peoples of the Republics and regions of Central Asia and Eastern Asia bordering on China and Mongolia would.

Religion. Despite three or more generations of being raised and educated in an atheist society, Soviet people of all age groups are returning in large numbers to their traditional religious beliefs and places of worship. One might assume that this will eventually have an impact on local and State political and social policies.

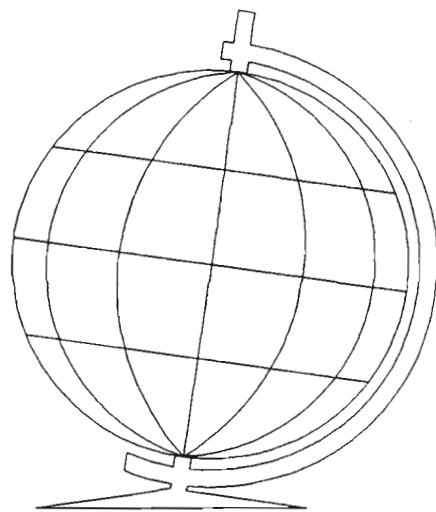
Gorbachev. In our opinion, Gorbachev has done a masterful job of broken-field running in: (a) eliminating the power of the "Old Guard" communists; (b) introducing a measure of competition and a trend toward a market economy, which most citizens seem to accept in spite of their uncertainties; (c) permitting citizens to voice their opinions without fear of retaliation; (d) permitting national groups to demon-

strate their aspirations for greater autonomy while so far averting the breakup of the Soviet Union; (e) restraining the military; and (f) making Soviet international as well as domestic policies more acceptable to this country and the democracies of Europe.

He has, however, opened a Pandora's box which includes: a good likelihood of economic chaos; ever-increasing demands by nationalist movements for secession from the Soviet Union; and continuing challenges by aspiring leaders, particularly Yeltsin, whose Russian Republic covers over half the territory and half the population of the entire country.

As of November 1990, we feel the odds are that in the not far distant future the Soviet Union will disintegrate into several separate countries. The largest and dominant nation would be a new Russian Republic, occupying generally the same areas and ethnic Russian population as today. It might include the numerous ethnic groups living along the border areas between the Russian Republic and the China-Mongolia border.

Historically the breakup of a great empire has been accompanied or followed by a period of internal turmoil, and sometimes bloodshed, while the new nations sort out their policies and new leaders emerge. Some bordering nations have sought revenge for past grievances. Is such instability likely to occur in the northern half of the Asian continent by the turn of the century?



Notes from rural New Zealand

Lyn McConchie

This is the winter of our muscontent

It usually happens about this time of the year. The weather turns wet and/or cold and in come the refugees. However, it isn't usually this bad! This year because of the wet weather the clan mus have arrived earlier and in greater numbers.

I don't normally worry about the occasional mouse. Rasti is here and the odd mouse snack suits both Sir and I. (Er – he eats them and I approve that he does, that is.)

Mice as mice don't worry me. The small grey form scurrying across the sheds, passing me in the cow bails – to these I have no strong objection. I am even prepared to tolerate one here and there in Winter inside, so long as s/he doesn't make her/himself too obvious and upset visitors.

But nocturnal orgies that wake me up after a long day are *just too much!* I decided that there were entirely too many the other night when a particularly nymphomaniacal one held a tournament of her lovers followed by an orgy, all of which took place at 2 am under my bed.

Rasti was no help either. I pushed him off the bed, pointing out that he was a cat – go get 'em, fella! Thirty seconds later he climbed back to glare indignantly. He might be a cat (his look said), but what made me think he liked waking up in the middle of the night any more than I did? Anyhow, he had no intention of pursuing mice at 2 am – that was made *very* clear.

The mice intend to emulate Abu Ben Adam, that is also clear. So, reluctantly, they are in deep shit trouble.

I rose early and repaired to the local shop. There I acquired several traps. These were all set by 11 am today. The day's bag so far, as at 11 pm, is four. Two caught by the traps, one by Sir, and one by me (a small stupid one who climbed into the hen's bag of feed and then wasn't big enough to leap that high out again).



Last year when this occurred, I killed 17 in one week with two traps before the others got the message and moved out. This year it may be more. I have twice the trap numbers, and the mice are earlier and more prolific. I just wish that, like St Francis, I could reprove them and have them leave peaceably. . . .

Lions and geese

Life in this neck of the woods gets downright odd sometimes. This evening I heard the geese making a heck of a noise about 6:30. I stuck my head out of the door to check, as this usually means I have visitors.

I did! I had a middleaged male running about the lawn crouched over. My eyebrows rose! He then pounced triumphantly on something and straightened with a beam of pleasure. I peered closer and discovered that he was now holding a very fine feather from Ghandi my gander.

Noticing at that point that he was observed, he pattered up to me and informed me thus, "I'm on a wild goose chase. I hope you don't mind but I've borrowed a feather from your geese."

There isn't much one can say to information like that. So I didn't say it. I was strongly tempted to ask firstly if his keepers knew he was loose, and secondly how – if he had only borrowed the feather – he was going to return it, to the goose or me?

I had barely returned to my book when the geese went off like alarm clocks for the second time. I had another visitor. This one was at least respectably at the door rather than about the lawn.

It turned out to be the Census Enumerator (our 5-yearly census is in progress). She commented on the

goose alarm and said how very handy they must be. I in turn told her about the last visitor.

"Oh, he must have been a lion. That's the sort of thing they do."

I kept a bland face and agreed, shutting the door carefully before locking it. The Lions are (or should that be 'is') an organisation devoted to good works and charity. Why they should appear on my front lawn pinching my goose feathers, and in what conceivable way that could benefit charity or classify as good works, baffles the hell out of me. It also baffles me that she should immediately jump to that conclusion. Is this something they do often? If so, *why* for Ghod's sake?

(Nor, I might add in passing, some six weeks later, have I found out any more except that it *does* appear to have been a lion. They had some kind of con here then and odd goings-on are apparently the thing.)

Cop shop 1

It can't be a lot of fun being a policeman at times. Being out here in the wilds of Southern Hawkes Bay it can sometimes be quite hysterical. We spent the last week farewelling a cop from Dannevirke. The paper had a very nice article, the WDFW gave him flowers, and the CWI sent something for his wife to farewell her kindly. What no one was tactfully mentioning is his first day on the job when he arrived a year ago.

He was sent down to the saleyards on a Thursday (sale day) to speak to someone about something or other. The chap to be talked to was there and it was urgent enough that the Office didn't want to wait half a day until he arrived back. The cop found his

speakee and was deep in discussion when a certain amount of noise arose. It was just before midday and the cattle which are in the sale at noon were being unloaded. A stout 'n sturdy female bovine decided that it was hot, she was tired, the noise was insufferable and so was the idea of being in the sale.

She therefore – in the best 'Colditz' style – made a break for it. Straight down the alley between pens, hang a right towards the unloading race, and (thank all the Ghods of Cattle) someone had left the gate open at the end. Of course it was obstructed by a couple of chatting humans but with her speed up – half a ton of beef at speed is not easily halted or deflected.

The farmer simply stepped to one side, understanding the problem. The cop (poor man), who had never been faced with this one in the city from which he had been transferred, didn't. For a couple of seconds he dithered! Realising that to be run down and trampled flat by a cow would be detrimental to both health and dignity, he fled. Overcome with hysteria, the cow followed. It was at a very brisk pace indeed that they travelled up the road, the cop slightly in the lead.

Luckily for him the cow was fat and tired easily, while he was lean and in good condition. She fell behind and he was able to dodge behind a fence. She gallumphed on to be turned by a passing motorist who shoo'd her back to the saleyards again. (Where she sold for a good price.) However, half of the town has a mental picture of that unfortunately cop sprinting for his life in front of a young cow who would have leapt away from him in terror had he only stopped.

It put the lid on the anecdote when the small son (about ten) of the chap who halted her, was the one to drive her back to the yards. No – no one said anything as we farewelled him. But by gum, I could tell from the occasional expression when he wasn't looking, what a lot of us were remembering as if it was only yesterday.

Cop shop 2

Last year a lot of Kiwis stayed up to watch the Clive James farewell to the year programme (89/90). We thought it was funny as hell, most of us giggling

merrily over 'our' segment. 'Our' segment? Well, it was like this.

Like the U.K., New Zealand has a Crimewatch programme. This details crimes that have been committed and asks viewers to ring in with ideas, or information, or possibly the names of the perpetrators. They do too! About 30% of the crimes featured are solved through information or fresh ideas produced by the ring-in viewers. Any wanted person whose name appears on the screen together with a clear picture, may as well walk into the nearest Police Station and surrender that moment. If he doesn't, 49 calls will be received telling the cops where to look anyhow. At least if he turns himself in, he gets credit and his lawyer can make a lot out of a voluntary surrender.

I should add that after this dawned on the criminal fraternity, a lot of them did just this. Picture appears. Friend rings to say, "You've just had your photo on Crimewatch."

"Was it recognisable?"

"Why the 'eck do you think I'm ringing, you prat!"

The next thing, the chap is with his lawyer in town at the Police Station.

"My client is unbearably distressed by hearing that he is wanted, so he has

asked me to come with him when he surrenders."

Yerse . . . well!

Clive James however took all the mildest, most amusing bits and made it appear that all we ever have to worry about is the odd missing car, boat, or please ring in if this is your camera that we developed this film from ... We'd love to return it to you. In all fairness, I should say that there *are* bits like these on our Crimewatch. It was just that James made it seem as if it *all* was!

And in case you're wondering what the 'eck all this has to do with anything, I had a sparrowhawk after my chicks the other day. They are strongly protected birds, so I rang the local cop shop to ask about getting nasty over my chicks. What happened if I did and the sparrowhawk died of it?

He didn't know. But he did find time to tell me *his* current troubles. Three steers running loose in Cemetery road, a missing dog, and two neighbours feuding over whose cat this one is that's been eating in both homes. *And* some no good has nicked a pet sheep from the showgrounds where it was tethered to eat down a bit of the nice grass. *Clive, where are you?*



Books

Michael Flynn, *In the Country of the Blind, Baen, 1990.*

A most impressive story, parts of which appeared in *Analog* magazine. The Babbage Society aren't the Illuminati, but they are a secret society attempting to run things behind the scenes, using scientific principles and mathematics. As this story unfolds, though, we discover that there are several similar groups, and the plot almost degenerates into farce... just as life almost degenerates into farce at times. Most enjoyable, and thought-provoking.

Robert Anton Wilson, *The Earth Will Shake, Bluejay, 1982.*

Volume 1 of *The Historical Illuminatus Chronicles*. This is the sort of book that almost sends me to the 'official' history books to check how much is fact. I assume most of the gory details about the Inquisition are firmly based on fact. I got a real chill when I read about 'toleration' being heresy, as it reminded me of the sorts of cultural conditioning that stand so much in the way of peace in the world. (The cynical view of the collapse of dictatorship in Eastern Europe was that it frees the people to go back to good old religious intolerance again, and the continuing events in the Middle East don't exactly inspire one about the better side of human behaviour, either.)

James Gleick, *Chaos, Cardinal, 1987.*

A most impressive book, very readable. By talking about the main people who've contributed to chaos theory, and about their work, Gleick makes a complex subject understandable. The thing that stood out most in this book was the one part that came closest to touching my life, as a graduate student in botany in the late '60s. I could not accept my professors' easy dismissal of scatter in my research data, thinking that it had to mean

something other than 'experimental error', and this eventually contributed to my dropping out of research and turning to writing up the research that other people did. Reading this book, I realised that had I known about some of this work (a bit of which was going on at that time, but wasn't widely known), I might have been intrigued enough to stay in research and study these things myself. In retrospect, I wonder how much of my 'experimental error' did have meaning? I will never know.

Rosemary Kirstein, *The Steerswoman, Pan, 1989.*

An enjoyable story of a quest, set in a society where 'magic' is really just technology beyond the understanding of ordinary people. The characterisation is well done, and the ethical problems nicely handled. This book deserves more attention than it has received.

Pat Murphy, *Points of Departure, Bantam Spectra, 1990.*

The first collection of short stories by this excellent author (who wrote *The City, Not Long After*, and *The Falling Woman*, both of which impressed me greatly).

Jane Yolen, *White Jenna, Tor, 1989.*

Sequel to *Sister Light, Sister Dark*. I enjoyed these books not just for the story told in them, but for the delightful interleaving of fictional 'scholarly' works that pointed out how pompous some academics can sound, and how wrong they can be, when denouncing researchers whose findings go against accepted 'knowledge'.

Joan Slonczewski, *The Wall Around Eden, Avon, 1989.*

Set on Earth, twenty years after a major global catastrophe. Small enclaves of humans have survived nuclear winter by being imprisoned

behind airwalls erected by aliens. The book's focus is on a small group, mainly Quakers, in one such enclave.

One young woman is determined to escape the enclave, or at least to find out the truth about the aliens. Some of the other people agree with her urge to learn more, and to make decisions for themselves; others are afraid of the consequences if the aliens decide to punish them. How the group works out its differences is one major theme; how the individuals make their decisions, and what they learn, is another.

Carles de Lint, *Moonheart, Pan, 1990.*

A strange, thoughtful fantasy set in Canada. Sara Kendall lives in a marvelous house in Ottawa, in a full city block square, with a park in the middle, and is a haven for a small collection of social misfits. An acquaintance of Sara's has been dabbling in witchcraft, and gets involved with an ancient sorcerer. When the evil from the other dimension comes after the sorcerer, the house turns out to have rather unusual properties. I found the book utterly delightful.

Terry Dowling, *Rynosseros, Aphelion, 1990.*

Cover art by Nick Stathopoulos. A collection of strange stories about a strange land, in a future/alternative Australia where, as the cover says, 'terraforming, genetic engineering and formidable mental sciences are commonplace'. I enjoyed these stories, even if I'm not entirely sure I understood them. Terry has a *weird* mind (that's a compliment).

Richard Grant, *Views from the Oldest House, Bantam Spectra, 1989.*

More weird, brilliant, delightful fantasy. This takes place sometime in the future, during the collapse of society. Turner Ashenden is failing as a student in a college he despises. All

around him are misfits, inept terrorists, and would-be philosophers. His only friend is a lunatic medical student, who spends his days seducing young women and ranting about Turner's heroic destiny. Turner discovers a secluded mansion in the mountains nearby, inhabited by a bizarre assortment of people with access to a strange computer-like machine. He ends up the leader of a revolution, as he comes to terms with himself. Superb.

Mary Gentle, *Scholars and Soldiers, Orbit, 1989.*

Short stories by the author of *Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light*. Includes two novellas set in the same universe as her new novel, *Rats and Gargoyles*. I loved this collection.

Kate Wilhelm, *Children of the Wind, St. Martin's, 1989.*

Five excellent, hair-raising novellas by a superb writer. Includes the Nebula award-winning 'The girl who fell into the sky'.

S.P. Somtow, *Moon Dance, Tor, 1898.*

I don't usually read werewolf stories, but this one sounded interesting and was written by an author whose works I often enjoy. A band of European werewolves migrates to the Dakota Territories in North America in the 1880s, seeking wide open spaces and new prey. Unfortunately, a band of native american werewolves already lives there. The contrast between the two groups, in their approach to prey and to life in general, is quite different. I found the story quite fascinating, but loaded with entirely too much sex 'n' violence for my taste.

Vonda McIntyre, *Transition, Bantam Spectra, 1990, sequel to Starfarers.*

I thoroughly enjoyed both these books. I liked the notion of a group of researchers refusing to give in to the military, and instead hijacking their spacecraft to go off on its research mission. In this book, the group dis-

cover that the aliens they'd hoped to meet refuse to meet them because they (the aliens) have decided that humans are entirely too dangerous and uncivilised. Come back in 500 years and try again! The characterisation in this book is excellent.

Steven K. Roberts, *Computing Across America, Learned Information Inc., 1988.*

Very readable account of the first trip by a 'high-tech nomad', peddling around the USA on a recumbant bicycle loaded with such gadgetry as solar panels and a laptop computer. Roberts found a way to combine travel with earning a living (he's a journalist and technical writer, keeping in touch with his office and filing his stories by modem). He is now on the third version of his 'Winnebiko' and publishes a magazine called *Nomadness*. Very inspiring!

Juanita Coulson, *Star Sister, Del Rey, 1990.*

Readers of this fanzine probably realise by now that I definitely enjoy a good feminist romp, and the occasional tale that features the women in charge and the men subservient. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, I get quite grumpy when such a story keeps telling me what's going on, and pointing out the similarities and differences between the situation in the story and the situation in 'real life'. This story, which could have been quite enjoyable, was ruined for me because the author kept telling me, rather than showing me, this stuff. I kept reminding myself that probably a lot of the audience does need to be told, because they'd never notice on their own, but that didn't help my own enjoyment. Pity, because there were some good bits and amusing asides, that got lost in the lecture.

Other books read

- Isaac Asimov, *Azazel*, Doubleday, 1988.
- Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Heirs of Hammerfell*, Daw, 1989.
- Marion Zimmer Bradley (ed), *Renunciates of Darkover*, Daw, 1991.

- C.J. Cherryh (editor), *Flood Tide*, volume 6 of *Merovingen Nights*, Daw, 1990.
- Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee, *Cradle*, Gollancz, 1988
- Gordon Dickson, *The Chantry Guild*, Ace, 1988
- Ursula K. LeGuin, *Tehanu, The Last Book of Earthsea*, Bantam Spectra, 1990.
- Anne McCaffrey, *The Renegades of Pern*, Del Rey, 1989.
- Anne McCaffrey, *The Rowan*, Bantam, 1990.
- Rebecca Ore, *Human to Human*, Tor, 1990. Conclusion to *Becoming Alien* and *Being Alien*.
- Kim Stanley Robinson, *Escape from Kathmandu*, Tor, 1989.
- Dan Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion*, Bantam Spectra, 1990.
- Bruce Sterling, *Crystal Express*, Ace, 1990. Short stories.
- James Tiptree, Jr., *Crown of Stars*, Sphere, 1988. Short stories.

Review books, not read

Melanie Rawn, *Sunrunner's Fire*, Book 3 in the *Dragon Prince* series, Pan, 1990.

David Eddings, *Sorceress of Darshiva*, Book 4 of *The Malloreon*, Bantam, 1990.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman, *Dragon Wing and Elven Star*, Volumes 1 and 2 of *The Death Gate Cycle*, Bantam Spectra, 1990.

Margaret Weis, *King's Test*, Volume 2 of the *Star of the Guardians*, Bantam Spectra, 1991.

Sean Costello, *The Cartoonist*, Pan, 1990; horror.

Steven Brust, *Taltos the Assassin*, Pan, 1987; omnibus volume combining *Jherog*, *Yendi*, *Teckla*.

Larry Niven and Steven Barnes, *The Barsoom Project*, Pan, 1989.