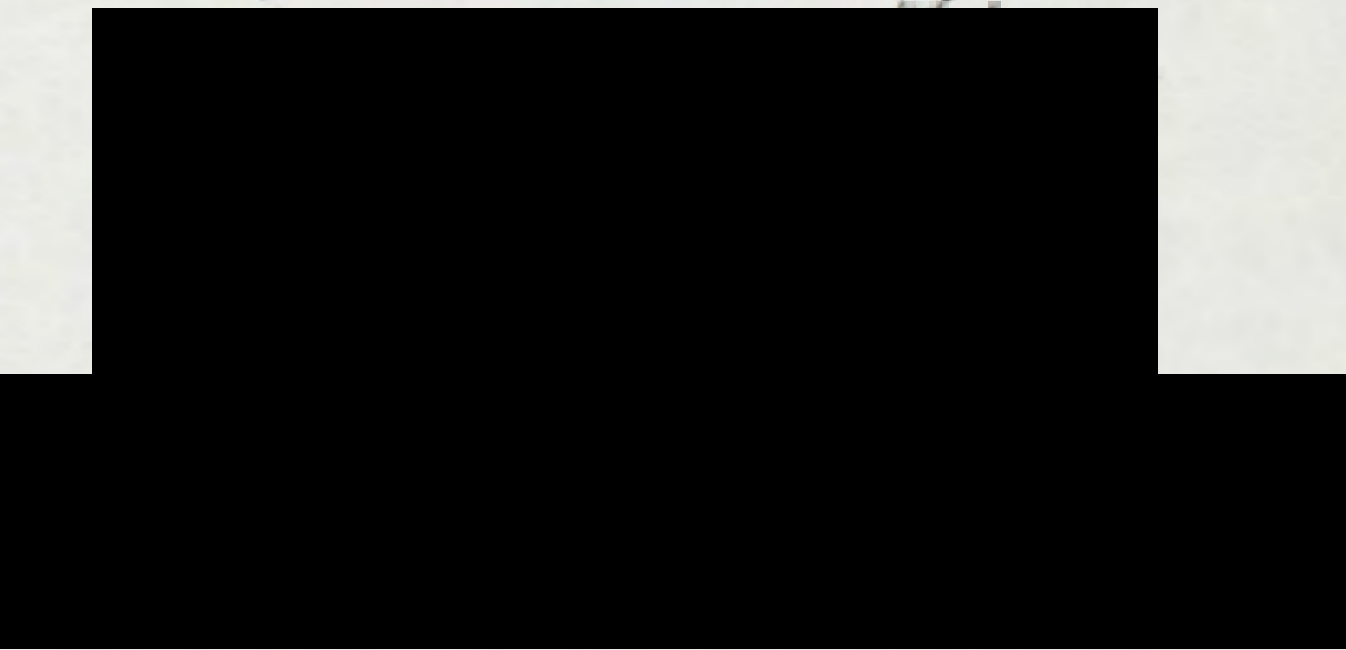


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A PERSONAL GLIMPSE FROM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

Ruth Nordlicht



I have just said farewell to friends whom I know I cannot write to because my letters will be intercepted, read, and not forwarded. I also, know that I can never call my friends because their phones have been disconnected. I worry for my twenty eight year old friend who suffers from allergies and cannot get antihistamines because medical assistance as well as medications are not available to him; I worry for an eighteen months old baby whom I met at The Black Sea, who was there because he has rickets and the Vitamin D from the sun could not be denied to him; I am concerned about a young lady who is a Theater Critic and has recently been fired- the sole supporter of her family; I am equally concerned about an elderly professor, head of his department who recently was fired in front of all of his students as he was about to give his lecture; I'm filled with apprehension about this article which may get those of whom I write into even more difficulty. I've just returned from The Soviet Union.

My story begins one week prior to participating in the First International School Psychology Colloquium which involved a visit to Leningrad, Moscow, Sochi, and Kiev. I was having lunch with some friends who had been to the Soviet Union last year. They asked me to look up acquaintances whom they had met. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet Russians in their own apartments and to determine whether much of what I

had read and heard about the plight of Soviet Jewry was true. The names given to me were not names of criminals; the people I was to visit had done nothing illegal. They were guilty of having applied for an exit visa- a permissible act in the Soviet Union. All had lost their jobs, were not permitted medical assistance, had their phones disconnected, could not send mail out of the country or receive mail without risking the chance of having it read by authorities and not reach its destination, could not use the public or University libraries. Some are separated from their families (mother, father, child, or spouse alone permitted to leave); some, like Alexander Feldman of Kiev, are in prison unable to walk because of broken bones; some like Semyon Gluzman, a noted Soviet Psychiatrist, are in a labor camp; some are in mental institutions as is Hillel Khaet of Tashkent.

Our plane (Airoflot) landed in Leningrad at 8:00 P.M. After going through Customs, we were immediately taken to the railroad station to board a midnight train- an eight hour ride to Moscow. Reason given: There was no hotel space available in Leningrad due to an International Botany Convention. The ride turned out to be most delightful. The trains neither jerked in movement nor "click-clacked" in sound. The rails were as the Russians called them "Velvet Rails".

We arrived in Moscow at 8:00 A.M., awakened by one of Tchaikovsky's symphonies which was piped into each railroad car-not bad; especially if you love Tchaikovsky.

After checking into The National Hotel, I began to phone Ivan (revealing his true name would probably do him much harm) every half hour from an on the street public phone, in order to avoid possible tracing. The phone rang but no one picked up the receiver. I retrieved my two kopeks and falsely assumed that no one was at home. I subsequently discovered that all disconnected phones react similarly. After three hours of no phone contact and much frustration I hopped in a cab and reached the street on which Illya, my second contact, lived. I did not permit my driver to know the building number, nor did I permit assistance from the many kind Russian citizens who offered; I did not know whom I could trust. A close friend had been interrogated here last year for three hours because he gave a Jewish star to someone. Before I left he said, "Be careful." I finally located Illya's house; now to find apartment # 43. Would you like to venture a guess as to which floor it is on- the fourth? the third? perhaps, the forty-third? Wrong on all three counts. Apt. 3 43 is on the fifth floor. With no one in front, back, or next to me; with semidarkness due to Russian energy conservation, with no sounds of children playing nor sounds of music emanating from

thick, locked door apartments, I finally reached apt. # 43, knocked and rang, knocked and rang the bell many times--no answer. I subsequently found out from Giorgi of Leningrad that they do not answer to every knock of the door nor to every ring of the bell. It could easily be uninvited guests. I should have, by some sign, identified myself. So, back to the hotel, feeling miserable, more phone calls to Ivan, no answers, feeling more miserable.

The next morning, I decided to throw caution to the winds and sent a telegram to Ivan from The National Hotel which is one block from the KGB building.

I have regards from U.S. Ruth Nordlicht. National Hotel. Room 221.

I knew that it would take several hours for the telegram to arrive and rather than waste any time, I decided to try and track down Fanni Tiemkin, the paternal grandmother of Marina Tiemkin. When Marina was fourteen years old, she and her father decided that they wanted to live in Israel. They applied for and were issued visas. When the time for departure approached, Marina was forcibly taken from her father and placed in an institution for girls. Her father, now, two years later, lives in Israel and begs the world for help. I have two daughters-one nineteen, one eleven. I decided to help. I noticed that on my detailed map of Moscow, Smolensky Bulvar was not too far so I attempted to reach my destination via public transportation. Know that unless you speak Russian

well, knowledge of "sposible bolshoi" (thank-you very much) is not enough to get you to your destination. I began walking on Gorky Street and stopped a young man, of nineteen or twenty years, for specific directions. He had never heard of Smolensky Bulvar, but since he spoke a little English and this would give him an opportunity to practice his English, he would be more than happy to help me. I was dubious. No, not dubious-paranoid. I said no, he insisted; I said no, he followed; I said no and two blocks later, he was still by my side. I decided to let him find out in which direction to proceed. He began to question pedestrians; no one knew. I suggested that he ask a policeman; he looked at me as if I were insane? Why? He didn't know what I was doing. Do you mean to say that even an innocent question of directions from a harmless citizen to an authority figure must be avoided? I suppose so. He then took me to a booth, one block further where for two kopeks one could procure specific directions (in Russian, of course) of how to reach any destination anywhere in Moscow.

We then proceeded to the Metro and engaged in an exchange of information:

- Is it true that almost everyone in America is either a crook, thief, or murderer?
- Is it true that it is very dangerous to walk on the streets of New York City?
- Is it true that Vietnamese women are being imported for prostitutes?
- Is it true that Blacks and women suffer so much in America?

Our discussion, which continued for another thirty minutes

standing in front of the Metro, only scratched the surface of each question, and yet I believe that we were engaged in true detente. In the Metro station, I obtained^d a ten minute detailed course on Metro map reading, exchange of money, obtaining of tickets, Metro machinery, and Metro stations. My new friend insisted on accompanying me; I persisted in a negative response. He finally asked why I feared him, why I didn't trust him. My reply was, "It isn't so much that I don't trust you; it's more that I fear FOR you." He no longer persisted, but left me with the words, "I don't know what it is that you are doing, but whatever it is please please- I can't impress upon you enough- please be careful. I took the Metro for one station, walked the area for an hour, asking directions several times, finally gave up, spent another half hour trying to hail a cab back to the hotel, walked into my hotel room, disgusted with myself, disgusted with my American friends who gave me the names and addresses, disgusted with Soviet Jewry when

the phone rang:

-Hello. This is Ivan. I received your cable.

-Thank God. I was beginning to think that you were a fictitious character from a James Bond novel.

We met two hours later in front of a store, I with an orange kerchief so that he could identify me, he with a much younger face than I had anticipated. His voice was soft; yet his verbiage revealed inner strength. His hands were not the hands of a worker; they were those of a scholar. He walked with an air of confidence; he was definately a leader. That evening, I joined Ivan and some of his friends for dinner.

I asked about Marina Tiemkin. Someone there, had seen her two weeks prior to my visit. Marina was with her classmates in Red Square on an obligatory excursion. The someone heard that Marina was still interested in joining her father; saw that the child was extremely anxious and tense; feared that a nervous breakdown was imminent. I asked about Semyon Gluzman, the psychiatrist and was told that his sentence was extended for two years. Later, in the States, I read a letter that he managed to send out.

"KGB Captain Utyr once said that I have one weak spot-- my parents. He is wrong. I have no weak spot. I cannot allow myself such a luxury. I have lost my right to emotion... Every day and every hour they are murdering me as a person and as a living creature. I am shorn bald and always hungry. I freeze on the cement floor of the punishment cell. The dog snarling at me on the other side of the fence is better fed than I. I am a slave... Any sadist has the power and the authority over me."

I asked about Hillel Khaet, the one whom the Soviets had described in their pedagogical literature as being a mathematical genius. His wife divorced him while he was institutionalized; he has no other relatives; mail from inmates is permitted to be sent to relatives. Since there are no relatives, there is no mail and therefore, no information.

While in Moscow, I met radio engineers, electronic engineers, theater critics, phycicists, and cyberneticists. Many were unemployed three to five years; some had been recently fired. They all wanted the same thing- the latest information in their

field so that when they enter the Western World, they will be eligible for employment in their profession. I met a physicist who wished he had a pocket calculator. Working with an abacus was a bit rough. I met a woman who wished she had anacins; she was prone to migraine headaches. I met an engineer who wished he had antihistamines; he was forever sneezing. I was not surprised to hear that he had allergies. There is a theory that some allergies are the result of tension, are a physical condition resulting from environmental conditions. Four years ago, Lev applied for a visa. He had graduated from one of the top Universities with many honors and had no difficulty finding work in technical radio engineering. Several days after his application for a visa was received, he was fired; his wife, also an engineer, was fired; his father (who had not applied for a visa) a full professor and head of his Department was also fired. Lev soon received notification that his request for a visa had been refused. He was now a "refusnik", someone who applies for a visa and is refused. He immediately went to the Ofir (Visa) office to try to determine the reason for the negative response and it was indicated to him that they could not let him leave because he knew too many secrets. He was never in the army, never traveled abroad, nor did he ever work in any department which involved classified information. He then requested to know what secrets in fact he knew. Their response to him was, "That too is a secret." From that day, he has been threatened with induction into the army. He

has pleaded with them saying, "I am here because of secrets. I do not want to enter the Army and learn more secrets." He has been arrested committing no crime, unless applying for a visa is to be considered a crime. The government has tried to place him in a mental institution. If one desires to leave, he is considered to be abnormal "neurotic." Socialized medicine allows every citizen the right to doctors and medications without cost, every citizen except Lev and those like him. The next morning, at breakfast, I announced to my forty-two colleagues that I had been to the park and the profusion of flowers was causing my allergies to act up. That same afternoon, I shook hands with the sneezer, and thus in a surreptitious manner was able to pass on to him a few vials of antihistamines--not "grass", not L.S.D., no anti government literature, no ammunition--just medication--the kind we get at the corner drugstore without a prescription. The stories in Leningrad and Kiev were the same; only the names and addresses were different.

After leaving the Soviet Union, I attended a psychology conference in Munich, Germany where I spoke at a workshop entitled "Human Right and The Dignity of Man". My talk revealed some of the above. The reactions were varied.

-I know of what you speak. I am from England and I am a Baptist. Our people also suffer for we can not even write the Word of God.

-I just came from East Germany. As bad as this lady says it is, it's worse.

-How dare you railroad a political issue into a professional meeting?

-These people knew what they would be getting into.

No one forced them to apply for a visa.

And then Ole from Denmark:

"If we as Psychologists do nothing to better the cause

of human rights wherever in the world they need bettering,

then we are nothing more than garbage collectors."

My personal glimpse behind the Iron Curtain resulted in favorable impressions of clean Soviet cities, of relatively little crime, of outstanding theater, danse, and opera performances, of a sincere desire for peace, for detente. Those favorable impressions, however, were coupled with the knowledge that those clean cities contain inhabitants who are prisoners in their own homes, prisoners who are not permitted the basic human right of choosing where they wish to live. The outstanding theater, danse, and opera involves artists who must think in accordance with government policy. As for the word Peace all nations use it; many are busy fighting and dying for it. If it is to be achieved, we must begin by respecting the rights of each individual, the right to live as one wishes, wherever one wishes.