

TRIP TO THE U.S.S.R. BY DICK AND LIZ ASKEY, SEPTEMBER 1987

*a travel diary written by Liz Askey,
edited by Tom Koornwinder¹, 15 June 2022,
thanks also to Howard Cohl for careful reading.*

Schedule

September 1-2: Moscow (stay in Hotel Akademicheskaya², visit to Israel Gelfand³)
September 3-9: Leningrad (stay in Hotel Moskva⁴, mathematical host: Sergei Krushev⁵,
Steklov Institute⁶)
September 10-21: Moscow (stay in Hotel Akademicheskaya, mathematical hosts:
Israel Gelfand, Andrei Zelevinsky⁷ and Boris Levitan⁸,
all at Moscow State University)

Thursday, September 3, 1987

The Hotel Moskva – a classy hotel by Russian standards and definitely a step above the Academy Hotel in Moscow – is our base for a week's stay in Leningrad⁹. We arrived at the Moscow airport on September 1, after the standard three hours of sleep on the plane, and inched our way through customs. The man ahead of us, who was evidently visiting Russian relatives and who spoke Russian himself, seemed to have brought in (as Dick phrased it) the contents of a K-Mart store¹⁰. The customs man removed a tall pile of items including videotapes and a boom box and the visitor tried his best to argue him out of all those questionable items. Finally the discussion, the man, and the stack of “contraband” were taken to some quieter corner. We saw the man rejoin his family later but we never did find out whether he argued Russian customs out of anything.

Having whetted his appetite on the man ahead of us, the customs official was ready for us; he went through everything with the proverbial “fine toothed comb”. He wondered about the hearing aid which Dick had brought for Gelfand, but the sticky point proved to be the anthology of twentieth century Russian literature – specifically a story by Nabokov¹¹. A supervisor stood reading for some time before letting us take the book into the country.

We were met by an interpreter hired by the (Soviet) Academy of Sciences who shepherded us and our luggage out to a taxi. His first question on the ride into Moscow was about the AIDS problem in the United States. Guess what's covered by the local media. He took us to the Academy Hotel on Leninskiy Prospekt and made arrangements to pick us up

1. thkmath@xs4all.nl

2. [Gostinitsa Akademicheskaya, Ulitsa Donskaya, 1](#) (on Google Maps). This is near Leninskiy Prospekt, but possibly newer than the hotel building in which they stayed then. Leninskiy Prospekt is a major avenue running south-west from the Lenin Monument at the Garden Ring to the (outer) Ring Road.

3. <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/search/author.html?mrauthid=189130>, also [on Wikipedia](#)

4. [Hotel Moskva, Ploshchad' Aleksandra Nevskogo, 2](#) (on Google Maps)

5. <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/MRAuthorID/198407>

6. [Leningrad Department of Steklov Institute of Mathematics of the USSR Academy of Sciences](#) (on Wikipedia)

7. <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/search/author.html?mrauthid=191850>, also [on Wikipedia](#)

8. <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/search/author.html?mrauthid=198925>, also [on Wikipedia](#)

9. since 1991 called again St. Petersburg

10. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kmart>

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Nabokov

the next morning to take us to the Academy. We unpacked and settled into our room – quite modest but adequate accommodations – and with only one resident cockroach who didn't try to crowd us out of our piece of his turf.

My first impression of Moscow is of broad avenues without a great deal of vehicular traffic and mile after mile of tall apartment buildings. More impressions, which came later, included poor upkeep and maintenance of those buildings, a much bigger proportion of men in military uniform than I'm used to seeing, queues, and drab buildings in tan, brown and gray.

On Wednesday the second we went to the Academy; Dick got his 20 rubles per day (which totaled 420 rubles to last us the whole three weeks); we had it confirmed that our stay was indeed three, not four, weeks – and we were told that we were leaving that night on the overnight train to Leningrad for Dick's visit at the Steklov Institute. There went all that effort we'd put into unpacking the night before! So now that we knew what our program was to be, the first thing on Dick's agenda was to meet initially with Academician Gelfand and arrange to give a talk in Gelfand's seminar after our return from Leningrad. Our guide from the night before (he'd introduced himself as "Paul") found us a taxi and took us to the apartment building in which Gelfand and his family lived. We were only going to stay fifteen minutes since Gelfand's wife was ill. He was delighted to see Dick and the conversation went on much longer than 15 minutes. He was interrupted constantly to answer the telephone and we eventually learned that it was his 74th birthday. At one point he brought his daughter in to introduce us to her. She's a beautiful child of six. Finally, after apologizing because he couldn't join us, Gelfand made arrangements for a younger colleague to take us to a dining room which was reserved for the use of Academicians and their guests. Rank has its privileges and the meal showed it. It was excellent and generous and included a kind of fish which is caught in the Volga River and is increasingly hard to find. Our guide Paul, who stayed with us through lunch, commented that for contrast we should eat at a cantina where common people eat.

Paul had another job related commitment and we went back to the hotel, took a badly needed nap, re-packed so we could take half of our luggage to Leningrad and took a walk in October Square. There is a massive sculpture there (all the public sculpture we saw in Moscow seemed to be massive, heavy and unemotional pieces with little "punch") of Lenin elevated above a crowd of people including a mother with a child on her shoulder, a worker, a soldier, etc. We walked on past a church which seemed to be well maintained. We couldn't find any sign to identify it but Dick's conjecture was that it was probably a museum of atheism! Maybe we'll find out when we get back to Moscow.

Our train left at 11:10 p.m. and Paul got us there in plenty of time. When we got to our compartment we learned that our tickets had been written for berth numbers that didn't exist in that car. However guests of the Soviet Academy of Sciences have rank and non-existent berths 19 and 20 were exchanged, for berths 17 and 18 which did exist and the fellow who was there went elsewhere. It made me uncomfortable but Paul just said "Never mind." (Some revenge was taken however. When Dick undressed this evening his arms and back were generously sprinkled with bug bites.) Not knowing about the bug bites which tomorrow would reveal, we settled down and enjoyed the glass of tea which the conductor brought to each of us in the car. After she took away the empty glasses in their metal bases with handles, we settled down to get as much sleep as was left to us last night.

We were met at 7:40 this morning by Sergei Kruschev. He had an institute car and driver, so it looks like the hospitality we received in Moscow will continue in Leningrad. This is very useful, since we can barely transliterate the signs; understanding is beyond us.

Leningrad is a lovely city established initially in 1703 by Peter the Great as the capital of the Russian empire. It's a city of nearly 5 million on the Gulf of Finland. Many of its buildings date to the 1700s and 1800s, are no more than five or six stories tall along the Nevsky Prospekt¹² and come in an assortment of colors and classical styles.

We were taken to the Steklov Institute which is located in a mansion once occupied by a foreign minister in the time of the tsars. We ate at a neighboring building in a dining room tucked away in the basement. Again we ate very well. The privileges available to the privileged in this classless society can be considerable. We got lost returning through the upper reaches of this building and found ourselves in several restored rooms with parquet floors, magnificent chandeliers, friezes, columns and carvings covered with gilt paint. It was a magnificent and impressive site and we learned that Leningrad has received UNESCO money for restoration purposes. It's been used to good effect if this is an example. We'll be seeing more of what this St. Petersburg area has to offer architecturally.

In the evening, after looking at the public library building (second largest in the U.S.S.R. with 20 million items) and walking back to our hotel we ate in the hotel restaurant (that's PECTOPAH in Russian), where the Academy of Sciences sponsorship listed on our visas seemed to "grease the skids" and watched the floor show, Russian style. The music seemed to be a mix of popular, folk style songs, and jazz (sounded like Duke Ellington and Tommy Dorsey). Tomorrow the Hermitage¹³ and then Dick will go back to talk math at the Steklov. In addition to Dick there are three other foreign visitors there now – two women from Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and someone from the DDR (East Germany).

Monday, September 7

It's three in the afternoon and this was supposed to be the day when I wrote postcards, read, and jotted down impressions. Instead I've just returned from wandering around the grounds and cemeteries of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery¹⁴. Most of my time there I spent wandering around the Tikhvin Cemetery keeping company with the spirits of Dostoyevsky, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glinka, Mussorgsky and Borodin – among the many eminent people buried there. The sculpture on many of the tombs was first rate work – well worth the visit even if one weren't communing with the spirits of the great. But now I'm back and I'll write for a while before going for my restorative cup of tea.

Tea! It's excellent here – a pleasure for tea drinkers like us. Hotel passes. I didn't show mine when I came back. It's a great way to keep the natives separate from the foreigners. I don't like it. Lines. There are queues everywhere. Sometimes you can see the ice cream stand at the head of the line. Sometimes it's impossible to see what the attraction is that holds people patiently in line. Sometimes, from what I read before we came, people have no idea what they're standing in line for. They just hope that by the time they reach the head of the line it will be worth the wait. The subway. Marble tiles, sculptures, fancy light fixtures, scrupulously clean – kept that way by women wielding brooms, even when crowds of people are swirling past them from one train to another. People have their places here. When Dick went to the desk in the hotel to get our return train tickets the woman told him it was too soon – they weren't ready. Then he showed her his visa saying he was a guest of the Academy of Sciences. She produced the tickets on the spot – no further waiting. Pity the poor tourist. I

12. [Nevsky Prospekt](#) is the main street of that city. From their hotel at the far end of that street it is a one-hour walk to the other end near the Hermitage Museum.

13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermitage_Museum

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nevsky_Lavra

wonder if part of the reason they do that is that people are so weighed down by the bureaucracy and its irrational actions that they feel the need to "get their own back" whenever they can. There is a bottle opener attached to our hotel key. Maybe that accomodates people like the Finns who, according to our guide yesterday, come to Leningrad on "Vodka tours".

Saturday we had the services of a van, a driver and an English speaking guide for the entire day for our exclusive use – provided for us by the Steklov Institute. We went to Pavlovsk¹⁵, a palace built by Catherine the Great for her son Paul. It has been beautifully restored – and a great deal of restoration was necessary. Each room holds a photograph of the condition in which the Germans left it during the period in which Leningrad was under siege during World War II – 900 days of blockade. Much of the damage was intentionally inflicted in an attempt to kill people's spirits. It didn't work.

We drove from there to Pushkin¹⁶ where we walked on the grounds of the Catherine Palace, which was built for the wife of Peter the Great. We had lunch in Pushkin at a rather bleak cafe. The food was quite adequate. The toilets weren't. It's times like this when one's glad to have some squares of toilet paper in one's pocket along with one of those paper towelettes for cleaning one's hands. There were no internationally recognizable symbols on the doors, so I came back to ask the guide which letter meant "women". That was the point at which we discovered that Dick had used the wrong one. Lucky someone of the female persuasion didn't want to use it while he was there. I don't think there were locks on the doors.

On the way into town we stopped briefly at the monument built in memory of the 900 days' siege of Leningrad. This city certainly remembers World War II – and has reason to remember it.

We ended our tour at the Russian Museum¹⁷ which has Russian works of art ranging from icons painted by the great icon painter Andrei Rublev to Socialist Realism. There were some very good things by artists with whom we were totally unacquainted, as well as "lesser" works.

On Sunday we guided our own tour – by subway back to the Hermitage, where we especially enjoyed the rooms full of Dutch and Flemish paintings. There were many Rembrandts, as well as genre, landscape and portrait painters whose work we had come to enjoy greatly during the year we lived in the Netherlands¹⁸. Food for the soul. After leaving we strolled down the banks of the Neva, looking at the people, the river, the 18th century buildings on the other side, and the hydrofoil bringing groups of tourists in to dock in front of the Winter Palace/Hermitage. Many buildings here were palaces or churches before the Revolution and are now put to very different uses, like the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan¹⁹, which is now used as a Museum of Religion and Atheism. We probably aren't going to visit that one.

In the evening we had dinner with someone from the Steklov, his family, a colleague and two visiting women mathematicians from Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Before dinner a vast plate of fruit was served and dinner itself consisted of various appetizers and salads, a zucchini and meat dish and for dessert we had pastries made with bilberries²⁰ (That's what the

15. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavlovsk_Palace

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsarskoye_Selo

17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Museum

18. during 1969-1970

19. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazan_Cathedral,_Saint_Petersburg

20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilberry>

dictionary called them). We finished with tea – delicious tea – sips of which were alternated with spoons of wild strawberry jam – a Russian custom, we were told, and a very tasty one. We saw part of a newscast in Russian. Its American coverage featured a demonstration, the visit of a former American astronaut and a picture of Reagan flashed across the screen as well. The people there thought better of Reagan than we did. Dick thought it's because they feel that if Russian leaders perceive a strong leadership in the U.S. there is a better chance of changes and improvements in the U.S.S.R. In the general discussion it became plain that they really didn't expect any real political changes in the U.S.S.R., whatever the public stance may be. One comment to me was that the judicial system and laws would need to change for there to be any real difference in Soviet life. I was told that Tsar Alexander (I don't know which one) in the last century had started to reform the judicial system. When I asked if that hadn't been changed after the Bolshevik Revolution I was told that it had not. It really sounds like the Soviets have done a much more efficient job of applying repressive political measures than was the case in Tsarist times. Democratic government and individual freedom weren't what that revolution was all about.

Friday – to back up yet again – we entertained ourselves. We walked and walked up and down the Nevsky Prospekt and into all sorts of places – the Hermitage, where we saw their French Impressionist paintings; into a department store, which looked more like a bazaar with each department in its own niche off a long corridor (the building was built as a series of small shops over 200 years ago and the adaptation to modern usage is intriguing to see); into Dom Knigi²¹ (House of Books), which is the largest bookstore in Leningrad (it has a large globe on top which is the trademark of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, the former occupant of this building, which was built in 1902-04); a Beriozka shop²²; an ice cream stand; and in and out of more than one eating establishment looking for a place to eat. We finally ended up at the Yevropeyskaya, a pre-revolutionary hotel which seems to have a long line of tour buses in front whenever we pass. We enjoyed an overly late lunch in the company of several American women who were just wrapping up their tour of the U.S.S.R. A wearing day, with its proof that just because you've come to an eating place doesn't mean you'll be able to eat there. Speaking of eating, the buffet is now open which it wasn't when I got to Rublev the icon painter three or four pages ago. To eat and then to the postcards!

The cheese, bread, sausage, buns, etc., at the buffets in this hotel are good, but I can imagine the time when the fact that the menu is exactly the same every day would get to me – along with those little squares of paper napkin that are 3 inches by 3 inches or smaller – rarely any larger. And then there are the women who sit at desks near the elevators on each floor and who take your room key when you leave the floor and return it when you come back. It's an excellent method for keeping track of your movements. Somehow I doubt that Big Brother will be any better off with the knowledge of this tourist's movements – or most of the other tourists' comings and goings either. Now what DOES merit a sharper watch is the movements of those biting insects that found us either on the train from Moscow or here at the hotel. Neither Dick nor I think we acquired any new bites last night, but right this minute the old bites on my elbow are driving me (if you'll pardon the expression) buggy.

Friday, September 11

We've been back in Moscow for one and one half days, but a few wrap-up comments about Leningrad . . .

21. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singer_House

22. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beryozka_\(Russian_retail_store\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beryozka_(Russian_retail_store))

The abacus – the "adding machine" used by many shops to tote up your bill. People seem to use it efficiently – and it's certainly quieter than a cash register.

There's an arcade along Nevsky Prospekt that's always crowded with people – artists and student artists drawing portraits of willing passers-by. It's fascinating to watch. Some of the characterizations seem to have real life in them.

On Tuesday we went to the Fortress of Peter and Paul²³ in the rain. Into the life of every tourist a little – or a lot – of rain must fall. With that thought in mind we raised an umbrella and off we went. The cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, which is on the grounds of the fortress, is very attractive with its gilt carvings and white tombs. On our way back to the metro station we stopped to snap pictures of some modest public sculptures of a mother and child, a girl, and a man and a woman. Their most noteworthy characteristic is that they weren't statues of Lenin, who is by far and away the most common subject of public sculpture here.

From there we went to the Steklov Institute where Dick talked mathematics for a couple of hours. I read for a while in the Twentieth Century Russian Reader which we brought along, and then talked with one of the Russian mathematicians and his wife. He was leaving the next day for Paris to accept a mathematical prize which he has been awarded. We did a bit of souvenir shopping on the way back to the hotel and then had dinner in the hotel restaurant again – complete with floor show again. The show differed from the one we'd seen earlier, in part because a member of the audience got on stage and waltzed around in time to the song being sung. The singer didn't miss a note, even when the man tried to get her to dance with him, so we applauded especially hard at the end of her number.

On our last day in Leningrad – Wednesday – we returned to the section of the Russian Museum with displays on the ethnic groups of the Soviet Union. The folk art displayed was quite impressive and the room holding examples of contemporary folk art had many pieces of exquisite quality, whether in weaving, embroidery, ceramics or whatever the form. I hope we can find a book on Russian folk art before we leave. That's a memento I'd like to take back home.

After lunch at one of the hotel buffets we waited for our host of the evening, walked across the street with him so that I could take a picture of him and Dick standing by Euler's tomb, and then took the metro to the room he rents from his sister and which he uses as a study. The apartment in which he and his family live is some distance away. He did a good job of preparing a meal for us (with his sister's help, I suspect) and we chatted until it was time to return to the hotel for our suitcases and go to the train station. He gave us an added little wrinkle on this business of being approached for illegal currency exchange. (Dick had told him about being approached four times in less than two hours the previous evening by men who wanted to exchange dollars for rubles at a 1-3 ratio. Dick thought the spate of attempts came because he was wearing both a tan trench coat and a pair of Levis. He hasn't worn the trench coat since!) Our host said that when the offer is for some ridiculously high ratio like 1-10 the buyer often finds himself the purchaser of a bundle of blank paper. Interesting little sidelight. It's a good thing we have no interest in dealings like that, which are illegal here and can get you into big trouble.

Back in Moscow on Thursday we checked into the Academy Hotel again and Dick called the U.S. Embassy to make an appointment to see someone in the Science and Technology section and to give them our address and telephone number. Two large Russian security guards ask for your passport before you're permitted into the building and once there a Marine guard checks your passport again and gives you an identification label to wear while

23. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_and_Paul_Fortress

you're in the building. We had an informative talk – in both directions evidently – with a woman named Paula Boyd.

Originally we intended to go back to the hotel to get some rest, but when we found out how close to the Embassy the Kalinin Prospekt²⁴ was, we set off walking down it to see where number 14 was. That was the address to which I was delivering several letters from Ginny Moore Kruse²⁵ to people whom she had met during her trip here in May. We found the building and I left the letters, but not the children's books and tape cassettes which I had left at the hotel. I have the telephone number of Ginny's contact and if I don't actually meet her I will at least stop by later with the books and tapes. Having walked that far down Kalinin Prospekt, and being within easy walking distance of the Kremlin, we kept going instead of having the wit to return to the hotel and get that rest. We walked – past the Lenin Library, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, around the corner into Red Square, past Lenin's mausoleum and St. Basil's Church (a truly magnificent and striking structure) and through the 19th century building that once housed hundreds of small shops and is now GUM department store²⁶. That's a lot of walking, but despite that we thought we'd try to walk back to the hotel. On around the Kremlin walls we continued until the rain that had been falling intermittently decided to get more serious. We took refuge under a tree and watched the traffic splash through the puddles in the broad street that edged the river bank. It was pleasant standing under the tree, relatively dry under its branches with a wet circle forming just beyond their protection. That simple pleasure didn't last however. As the rain fell harder and harder we thought of the umbrellas, rain ponchos, boots and rubbers – all back in our hotel room doing us no good whatever. Finally we ran for cover under a nearby bridge over the river. When the rain finally eased off we squished our way to a metro station close by, having given up all those foolish notions of walking back to the hotel.

At least we are getting well acquainted with the Moscow subway system and not just as an alternative to a long, wet walk to our hotel. Each metro stop is not only kept meticulously clean, as in Leningrad, but each stop has a different decor – tile, marble columns, attractive lamps between the escalators, wall friezes, chandeliers, even a stained glass window at one metro entryway that looked like a war scene of an attack against civilians. An architectural tour of metro stations would actually have some appeal here in Moscow.

A soggy end to our first day back in Moscow was followed by a new day – and eleven new insect bites for Dick. We had hoped that the first few days in Leningrad had seen the end of that. There was nothing to be done about the bites, once they were there, so we took the metro to the Ostankino Palace²⁷ (or, in any case, as close as the metro could take us). The palace and its contents were built by serf labor, starting with the design of the building by a serf-architect. The lovely parquet floor was also done by serfs. According to one of our guide books 210,000 serfs were connected with the Ostankino estate. The palace had a theater built – like everything else – by serfs and with a troupe of 200 serf-actors. Some of the 18th century stage machinery designed by serfs is still there. The theater can be converted into a ballroom by the addition of a floor which raises the floor level by one and one half meters, and which was in place when we went through.

24. presently called [New Arbat Avenue](#)

25. <https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/contributor/ginny-moore-kruse>

26. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GUM_\(department_store\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GUM_(department_store)), the situation with many different shops inside was restored after the Soviet time.

27. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostankino_Palace

Back to the hotel, by way of an ice cream stand, for Dick to go off for a few hours of mathematics and for me to take a nap. The cold I picked up in Leningrad is finally telling me to slow down. When Dick came back his bites looked much worse. Zelevinsky was with him and there was much talk with a woman from the hotel staff, at the end of which our sheets were changed in an attempt to eliminate that possible source of refuge for those biting insects. Tomorrow may be spent with Dick nursing his bug bites and me nursing my cold. The rest of Moscow will be out cleaning parks and all sorts of other areas, according to Zelevinsky. Much preferable to nursing bug bites.

Saturday, September 12

I forgot to mention that our host the last night in Leningrad keeps a pet toad in his room. He said that the cockroaches had disappeared since he got the toad. The building is a hundred years or more old so many of the cockroaches come with the turf. This building is nowhere close to that age and it could profitably employ a toad in every room. Something else this city could use is good service in its restaurants— and adequate food to serve those who want, or need, to eat in them, if that's a part of the problem. In the past twenty-four hours we've been turned away at the restaurants in both of the Academy Hotels, which are located next door to each other. At one they were waiting for a tour group and we have no idea why the doorman wasn't letting people in at the other one. For lunch today we were finally admitted to one of them but only after the maitre asked if we could speak Russian. Then we were placed at a table with four other people and service was slow. We'd read before we came about this sort of service in Russian restaurants. Oh, woe! It's true. It makes eating in them less than a pleasure. We do better at the buffets located on a couple of different floors in the hotel. The food is not inspired but it's quick and they don't try to tell you you can't eat there. As a matter of fact some of the "locals" seem to do their shopping there. The first day we were here there were several women lined up, after we'd gone through the line, buying hot dogs and sausages. One woman left with a large plastic bag full of hot dogs – shopping, perhaps, for her friends and relations as well as herself.

Today we stayed in our hotel room most of the day sleeping, working and reading. My cold feels much better for the sleep and Dick woke with "only" three new bug bites instead of thirteen – yesterday's count. Cold compresses and Histacalma lotion help some, but those are nasty, painful bites. We hope that tomorrow's count of new bites will be zero. They add a certain something to our stay in the U.S.S.R. that we would be happy to do without!!

Monday, September 14

A rainy day today. One should always have a backup plan in case it's too wet for comfortable sight-seeing. So while Dick kept his appointment with a trio of physicists and a translator I arranged to move into a different room in this hotel and then spent several hours examining every square inch of clothing we brought with us to be sure we didn't move any bed bugs along with all our possessions. And bed bugs it is! Dick got confirmation on that from Schmid, the biologist from Minnesota whom we met at the "briefing" session at the Academy of Science in Washington, D.C. But we knew we had a problem. Dick was up at 2:30 a.m. with six new bites and he wasn't about to crawl back in there with the beasties who were making a meal out of him. Can't blame him. However he just left to give his presentation at the Gelfand seminar and that's a strenuous evening ahead for him with only

three hours of sleep last night. Since talking mathematics is what he's here for, that may be enough to keep him going.

It's a good thing that yesterday was such a marvelous contrast with today. Zelevinsky and his wife, son (13) and daughter (9) came to get us for a trip to the Kolomenskoye Museum-Reserve²⁸. It's a former estate of the tsars located in the southern part of the city on a high bank of the Moskva River, with a marvelous view of the city stretching out across the river. Just inside the gates is a working church and some kind of service was going on when we went in – something involving the blessing of children. Most of the participants seemed to be elderly women, but that wasn't the only segment of the population there. I would have liked to stay for a while, but it was crowded, hot and there was more to see. In addition to several more churches there were several wooden buildings brought to the grounds from elsewhere in Russia, including a log house which had been built for Peter the Great in 1702 on an island in the mouth of the Northern Dvina River. The tsar lived in the house while supervising the construction of the Russian fleet at the Arkhangelsk shipyard. A marker on one wall of the house showed a physical reason why Peter could be called "the Great"; he stood about 6'7" tall.

Exhibits in the museum included Russian woodworking, metal work, architectural ceramics (including some tiles that reminded us of some we had seen in Delft 18 years ago), clock mechanisms, as well as keys, locks and lanterns, tempera painting and mica windows. That's a "short and sweet" type of listing for what was an impressive and beautiful display.

On our way out we wandered through an old oak grove containing 600 to 800 year old trees. The Zelevinskys invited us back to their apartment for a meal, which was the culinary high point of our stay in Russia. It was so good that I feel it's safe to say that, even with a week to go before we leave. We had borsht, a mushroom and onion pie (which was my favorite, I had seconds and would have had more of it if I hadn't known there was more coming), a cheese pie, a potato and meat dish which reminded me somewhat of scalloped potatoes, a vegetable "sauce" which included eggplant and tomatoes and was eaten on a slice of bread, fresh sweet watermelon, and, for dessert, three kinds of cakes – two made with red currants and one with strawberries – and tea. It was absolutely delicious and we enjoyed every bite. That's a very pleasant memory to wrap up an agonizing day of looking for bed bugs. If Dick is bitten again I won't know whether to swear or cry – or both.

One of the physicists who came by this morning brought me a bouquet of flowers from his garden. I think I'll crawl into bed with a novel and smell the flowers. That, too, is preferable to looking for bed bugs – unless they come looking for me.

Thursday, September 17

Four days and four nights until we leave for the U.S. There's been much that was good about our stay here, but the hands down winner for the bad part has been the bugs. Last night they found me again after my 10 day or so "vacation" from their attentions. The bite on my left arm is a red spot with a blister in the middle of it; the back of my right hand is half covered with a large, red inflamed sore spot. When the clinic staff at the Embassy is back from its lunch break, I'll see if I can get an appointment. One thing we need to do is to wash or dry clean every piece of clothing we have, but at this point that isn't really feasible. We learned this morning that there are laundry facilities in the new embassy but getting there would take time we don't have any more. Dick is booked up to see people tomorrow and on one of the weekend days. But the minute we get to a hotel in Washington, D.C., we're

28. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolomenskoye>

unpacking our suitcases into a washing machine full of soap and hot water. Now we just have to last until then. Dick is concerned about what will happen if I were to get thirteen bites, as he did one night, since my reaction to the bites is worse than his is.

Ah, well – back to the good parts. On Tuesday I went over to the Central Children's Library which we had learned on Sunday was all of a four or five minute walk from our hotel. I asked someone if she spoke English. She didn't, but before I knew it someone who did was found, along with someone who was in charge of the international section of the library. I was given a tour of the whole building right then and there. Not only did they have a room in which Young Marxist clubs were organized and met, they had rooms with pianos where children could take sheet music they had checked out and practice playing it, another room with a piano in which children could meet with composers, reading rooms for all age groups, a craft room for the children, a room with pedagogical materials for librarians (a group of librarians was taking a class break before returning to the class room while we were there), and a three story atrium with a bust of Pushkin and a beautiful contemporary chandelier as its central features. I was told it looks quite spectacular when the lights in it are changed from white to colored ones. I had told my hostesses that I had a gift for them so I came back later in the afternoon with a Dr. Seuss book and cassette tape which Ginny Kruse had sent to be given to that library. The director came back just before I left and after a few minutes conversation she gave me two little dove of peace pins which she said children here particularly like. A very pleasant experience!

On Wednesday Dick was free and we went to the Embassy to mail a box of mathematics books back home. I contributed two books we had finished reading to the library the Embassy staff uses for its own light reading and the woman with whom we were dealing appreciated the contribution. She recommended a book called *Small World* by David Hodges as a highly entertaining satire about life at academic conferences – guaranteed belly laughs she assured us. (This telephone system is certainly erratic. Sometimes you get no dial tone; sometimes the static is impenetrable; sometimes only one of the two parties can hear the other. I may be some while in reaching the Embassy clinic.)

We left the Embassy for an afternoon of sightseeing. We had hoped to go to the Kremlin but something official was going on there and we ended up detouring through the GUM department store instead of Red Square, which was blocked off. We toured St. Basil's Cathedral at the other end of Red Square. The building, built between 1555 and 1560, is a jumble of color – onion domes painted in a variety of colors and patterns; vines and flowers painted on the brickwork, both inside and out; walls of beautifully painted icons.

From there we went to the Rossiya Hotel, where the restaurant was set up for tour groups and we couldn't get any service. A snack bar outside the hotel provided lunch along with later stops at ice cream stands. The Church of St. George was across a narrow street from the hotel. There were religious paintings on its ceilings, but the church is now used for display space. A show of "primitive" or "naïf" style wood carvings by half a dozen people was on display – three versions of Adam and Eve and the serpent (one with a snake's head, one with a man's head and one with a woman's head), St. George and the dragon, whirligigs, bird houses in the shape of short, squat men with open mouths which served as the entrances to the houses, and female figures. It was a delight to look at.

We went on through an assortment of side streets (actually we were trying to track the ice cream bars we saw in people's hands back to the ice cream stands where they had bought them) back to Kalinin Prospekt, where we left the other book and cassette Ginny had sent

with me at the Association of Literature and Art for Children and Youth for its executive director.

Then we wandered down Arbat Street, a walking street, lined with shops, which encouraged strolling – very relaxing after the busy streets we had just left. We found a store that sold tea, chocolate and cookies and decided that all of that looked good. Getting the chocolate and the tea was no problem but this was the point at which we found that things aren't sold here by the pound or the package. We were now the proud possessors of a kilo bag full of cookies – 2.2 pounds. We shared them with Bill and Nancy Schmid (the people from Minneapolis. They are on the same floor of this hotel until tomorrow when they leave for Tashkent²⁹. We've had a couple of very interesting chats with them this week and we have their Minneapolis telephone number so that we can have dinner together when we're there next March).

We stopped at Dom Knigi (House of Books) and bought a book on Russian decorative art before coming back to the hotel. Having looked at that, we now know that we should go to the Historical Museum on Red Square. Maybe this week-end. One final thing we did was to go to an art "salon" near the hotel to see what they had – ceramics, glass, paintings and prints, clothing, colorful folk figurines, enamel boxes and pins, weaving and embroidery. There were many well done pieces there. Off to the Embassy clinic.

Past Gorky Park, over the Moskva River, past one of Moskow's seven skyscrapers done in Stalin Gothic – I thought yesterday was the last I would see of that bus ride to the Embassy. Now I have some medicine and some cream which, used sparingly, should help. I guess I am one of the chosen as an historian from the University of Pennsylvania with whom we talked this morning characterized the situation. He also had some interesting comments to make on this society. He feels most American Soviet-watchers, including the press, look too much at the politics of what goes on in the upper echelons and not enough at public opinion and the movement of and within society on the lower levels – and there is movement according to him. He feels that changes in the economy like those Gorbachev is pushing will be necessary for this economy to go anywhere, but that the bureaucracy is scared of these measures because, as paper pushers with no skills, they will be out of a job. He also explained why we see so many men in military uniforms – often carrying briefcases. The Pentagon puts its pencil pushers in three piece suits, while the Kremlin puts them in uniforms.

Friday, September 18

We had dinner with the Levitans, their daughter-in-law and Zelevinsky last night. It was a lavish meal with desserts that never stopped, served in front of a window high over the Moskva River with a marvelous view of Moscow spread out on the other side of the river. It's close to the Ukraina Hotel, another of those vast Russian hotels with hundreds – sometimes thousands – of rooms.

We took the trolley-bus back and spent the night in the third room (a two room suite this time) which we've occupied in this hotel. We left all our clothes except pyjamas behind in the old room so we would bring no unwelcome "guests" with us. It worked for the one night at least. We are keeping our fingers crossed for our last three nights in Moscow. Since we had left everything in the other room we returned to it this morning to continue the battle of the bugs. Dick didn't want to chance moving any bed bugs with us on our clothes to this new and, as yet, uncontaminated room. He pointed out to me last night that, considering how

29. the capital of Uzbekistan

badly I've reacted to these bites, I would be in serious trouble if I should have thirteen bites in one night, as he did. His point was an "easy sell"; all I had to do was look at the large blister that had formed on one bite and at the back of my right hand which was sore and red and swollen from knuckles to wrist. The management pointed out that occupying two rooms would not do, so Dick hauled out Exhibit A (me) and said we weren't leaving until the bug problem was solved – or at least our clothes and luggage weren't leaving.

I left for a cup of tea, leaving Dick waiting for a mathematician who evidently went to the right room in the other Academy Hotel (as we later learned), and when I came back the mattresses were standing on their sides and Dick was opening up suitcases and the wardrobe full of our clothes. Another member of the management was there along with a doctor who had cans of insecticide and was preparing to disinfect the room. Exhibit A was displayed and the doctor was impressed. She tried to communicate with us but she knew very little English and we know less Russian. The disadvantages of being people with a command of only one language are increasingly clear. Anyway, we scooped up the bare minimum of necessities and left for the new room while the doctor started to spray the room where we did not eat, but were eaten – to steal a line from Hamlet. Now I'm sitting here with my coat on because it's cold and we can't get our clothes until tomorrow. We will pack up the suitcases as completely as possible, store them in the farthest corner of this suite, and hope that, if the insecticide doesn't work, the bed bugs won't find their way to our beds until after we leave early Monday. Sigh. May this be the end of this whole episode!

With that settled – we hope – we went to a cafe across the street for lunch and then walked on down Lenin Prospekt to a church we had seen the first day in the Soviet Union. It was open and we went in. Here was definitely a working church, not a museum. The iconostasis (a wall of icons enclosed in gilt frames which seems to be standard in Russian Orthodox churches) was glowing under the floodlights of a photographer who was taking pictures of some of them. A big electric chandelier lit the main part of this small church, which has no pews. The worshipers evidently stand throughout the services. We sat for a while on a bench attached to one wall, just absorbing the beauty of the icons and listening to the crackling noises emitted by the thin tan candles which were placed in front of some of the icons. It was restful to sit there, but Dick had to leave for his meeting with Gelfand and Zelevinsky. I returned to our new room and read a book of Russian folk tales we had bought in Leningrad and then dozed for a while. This battle of the bugs takes a lot out of you!

Tuesday, September 22

We're sitting in the motel room in Arlington, Virginia, waiting to take the van ride back to National Airport in about 5 minutes. We woke up at 3:30 a.m. (11:30 a.m. Moscow time) so jet lag will make things a bit "off" for us for the next few days. It will be good to be back in Madison for a while, to see people, re-pack (and eliminate one or two suitcases), wash every piece of clothing we have with us (since we're fairly sure – but not 100% sure – that no bed bugs made the trip back with us) and sort through three weeks worth of mail.

The U.S.S.R. seems farther away now than just the miles between here and there. The last two days there were busy ones. Dick had several hours worth of talking with several mathematicians, while I took the metro to Red Square and "did" the Kremlin. One should never "do" anything in a spurt of tourist enthusiasm; my feet still aren't completely recovered. Glad I did it anyway. Red Square – yet again – was blocked off. Moscow was celebrating its 840th birthday with performances of all sorts all over the city. I couldn't make my way through the crowd to see much so I decided to make my way around the edges of the

crowd to get to the State History Museum, which is on one end of Red Square. I was looking for a red brick pile and when I found what I thought was the right one, I went in. Not every red brick pile is the one you want. This one turned out to be the Central Lenin Museum devoted solely to the life and work of I.V. Lenin. The obvious effort and quality put into these displays shows what the ruling elements consider important by contrast with the quality of displays in museums with a focus on Russian culture. It was a bit more than I could stomach, since I don't have the same attachment to Saint Lenin, so I left as soon as I was convinced I was in the wrong building. That's when I found that I wanted the red brick pile next to this one – and it was closed because of the celebrations taking place on Red Square. Fortunately the buildings within the Kremlin walls which are open to tourists were open on Saturday. That includes several cathedrals, a patriarchal palace and a bell tower – mostly 16th century buildings. They were rich with icons, frescoes, silver and gold church plate, and pearl and precious gem encrusted garments.

On Sunday we went to Novodavichi Convent³⁰ where we joined crowds of Russians walking through the cemetery reading the headstones and looking at the sculptures. Every once in a while a tour group would pass us and we'd follow along to see which tombs were especially interesting. That way we found Chaliapin's³¹ tomb and also the grave of Nikita Khrushchev³². One crowded tomb was covered with flowers enough to obscure the name. On it was a lifesize sculpture of a young woman who seemed to be dancing. It was a very good piece of sculpture, as some of the tomb sculptures are, and it would have been nice to see the name of the person buried there. The convent itself is one of Moscow's oldest and most famous but the two churches were closed, one because a service was in progress, so we didn't stay long.

Our final tourist stop in the Soviet Union was Nikitniki Cathedral, a small 16th century cathedral on a back street near Red Square – small, but a gem. We had been told that Intourist doesn't take tour groups there both because the street on which it's located is narrow and because it's next door to the building which houses the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Once back in our hotel we decided to try the restaurant there. To our surprise we were motioned in and to a table – the first time we did not have to argue our way in for a restaurant meal. Another couple was motioned to our table and most of the items on the menu weren't available, but the beef fillet which we were served was tender and very tasty. It was also nice to eat with stainless steel utensils. In the buffets only aluminum forks and spoons were available and we were never quite sure they would hold up under serious use.

The next morning we were picked up by a guide from the Academy at 6:15 a.m. At the airport we went through customs without the delays we faced three weeks earlier. We joined Anne and Bob Gomer from Chicago for tea – that good Russian tea – and then joined the line to board the airplane. Our visit was a valuable experience in many ways – good mathematically and in terms of an introduction to Russian culture (emphasis on Russian rather than Soviet) and to the hospitality of individual Russians. There's nothing to fault there! We would both be willing to go again, especially if we could avoid the Academy Hotel and its bed bugs. We hear a new Academy Hotel will be built and that the Finns are being hired to do it.

30. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novodevichy_Convent

31. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feodor_Chaliapin

32. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev