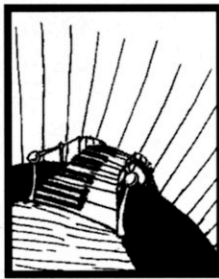


Musical Bridges, Inc.

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Spring 2000

Newsletter

*Access, opportunity and good neighbors
through cultural exchange
for the formerly closed Siberian city of
Chita and Chita Region*



Message from our Chairman, Tom Dickinson

Dear friends!

A quick update on our projects. Then I encourage you to read the two delightful e-mails from Chita which give you a eyewitness account of the work we are doing.

First, we welcome Annie McNeill-Garibay as our new Executive Director who, besides managing our on-going projects, will focus on much needed fund-raising. She comes to us with outstanding credentials in international education. Among her many activities, she most recently served as Executive Assistant to the President of the International Association of University Presidents and to the Rector [President] of the Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara (Mexico). Earlier, she was Associate Director of the National Council on Foreign Language and International Studies and Secretary-Treasurer for the International Council for Educational Development in New York. Annie resides in Raleigh, North Carolina and can be reached at exec.director@musicalbridges.org.

After nine months delay, our container of books and computers for a consortium of Chita higher education institutions was finally opened and distributed in early May with great fanfare and media coverage. Our teachers there report that the books are "a huge hit!" The many obstacles, especially with Russian Customs after arrival in Chita, were met. We salute the many people in Chita who saw this through, especially Tatiana A. Suturina, Head of the Humanities Department at Chita State Technical University, and her staff, Oleg Popov and his Epos, Ltd. trading firm, and Natasha Kolotilina, local merchant, whose last minute contribution helped save the day.

Jean and Charlie Dickinson spent a month this spring in Chita lecturing, respectively, on volunteering and business. Read about their trip on the next page.

We are in the final stages of teacher selection for 2000-2001, with one position still to be filled. Robert Romano has been asked to return to the Pedagogical University. Daniel Kirwan of El Paso, Texas will attempt to fill Richard Chapo's shoes at the Technical University, and we are still working on Dul'durga which was so pleased with this year's teacher they have requested two for next year.

On the homefront, big thanks to Karen Schleske of Minneapolis who was honored by her employer, Pillsbury Corporation, by a grant to Musical Bridges.

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Finally, we'd like to commend and thank Richard Chapo, Robert Romano and Grae Waters, our 1999-2000 teachers who have, by all accounts, wowed their students and hosts, and been effective ambassadors for all Americans of goodwill and understanding between us and our far-off Chita neighbors.



Annie McNeill-Garibay, Musical Bridges' new Executive Director.

Help us continue and expand this work. (It is met with grateful wonder and amazement in Chita!) Become a member! Donate generously! Contact Annie with your pledge and fund-raising ideas! Let us hear from you!

Norman J. Dickinson

THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS
Elisha & Elizabeth Atkins, Doris Cotton, Joe Dickinson, Franklin & Laura Garrish, David & Helen Gehrenbeck, Dixie Grossman, Tara Harter, Betsy & Kenneth Jacobson, Chris & Gloria Krahn, Annie McNeill-Garibay, Rex & Margaret O'Neal, Ruth B. Perkins, Nancy Pfund, Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Sweeton, Heidi Syropoulos, Marion Wagner
AND ALL THE REST OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS!

March 4, 2000
Greetings from Chita. After the long winter vacation, I was eager to get back to work. Both Rick and I have been battling boredom, as there is not much to do during the long, cold months of middle winter, so getting back to teaching has been a welcome change.

Three of our students from the Ped were selected as semi-finalists for a program to study in the United States for a year. Their interviews will be in Vladivostok and I have been preparing them for what they might expect from an interview with their American hosts. As a manager at my previous job responsible for hiring all my own staff, as well as having gone to (too!) many job interviews, I have a lot of good tips for them.

We have been conducting mock interviews, and I have been asking them the usual questions, like "What would you say is your greatest weakness?" which have been revelatory for them. "Why would they want to know my weakness?" they ask me. I think our preparations will really help them to stand out from the others.

The difference between their first attempts at impressing me, their mock interviewer, and now, after I've coached them, is like night and day. After every practice session, I ask them if they've had enough, but they all want to meet again the next day. They can't seem to get enough practice, and I'm hopeful that all the practice will pay off with at least one of them being selected from the huge pool of applicants. A local journalist who is applying for a similar program has been sitting in on the classes.

Then a student from one of my 5th year groups asked how American students normally go about getting a job after graduation. I suggested to them that we could get on the Internet and spy around there for something they might be qualified for (as college grads with fluency in English, Russian of course, and a third language). The entire group took me up on my offer. All of these things gave me a great idea.

Musical Bridges has done a wonderful thing in sending teachers here. The next step we could take is to provide the students (and the community at large) with interview and resumé training, and help cruising the Internet for job opportunities. All we'd need to start would be Internet access, a computer with a resumé program, and someone to conduct the training. The sessions convince me of the usefulness of such training, and the strong positive response received from them suggests we would have a lot of takers for such a program. I'm sure this could really be a success. The students were very enthusiastic and I had a wonderful time helping them.



Dima Ilyin (left) of Epos, Ltd., a Chita trading firm instrumental in bringing the MB container to Chita, with Robert Romano (middle) and Richard Chapo, our teachers there.

Musical Bridges, Inc. is the only organization devoted to promoting educational and cultural exchange in the remote Siberian capital city of Chita and Chita Region. Closed during the Soviet era, this region has been hobbled throughout its history by geographical, political and economic isolation.

Musical Bridges' focus on education includes sending English teachers, assisting in educational exchange and providing teaching materials. In the arts it promotes exchanges in the performing and visual arts. It also assists institutions and individuals to access resources and develop contacts.

By matching Chita-initiated projects, with American resources and following them through to completion, Musical Bridges builds bonds of successful cooperation through which understanding and friendship can grow. *"The outside world used to view Zabaikalye as a place destitute of civilization. We were an obscure region, never in the mainstream of the events of the 20th century. Today we have opened up to the world--owing to Musical Bridges...Thank you for your big heart, empathy and love for our land."*

A. V. Doshlov, President, on behalf of Chita Television and Radio Network Staff



Excerpted from the e-mail diary of JEAN AND CHARLES DICKINSON on their March-April 2000 trip to Chita. Charlie, Musical Bridges' Vice President and a retired senior executive, lectured on business, and Jean, our Secretary-Treasurer with long experience with volunteer organizations, spoke on volunteering.

March 29

Jean: After 48 hrs on the train from Beijing, we arrived in Chita at 3 a.m with Natasha Gotlib at the foot of the steps saying, "You are REALLY here!" This was repeated by Tanya Sukhanova when we saw her at the opening concert of the Budashkin Folk Festival.



Traditional Buryat welcome in Dul'durga for Jean and Charlie Dickinson: salt, bread and scarves at the entrance of the town. MB teacher, **Grae Waters** joins in.

We are staying katty-corner from the Gotlibs in a business hotel. We have a suite with large living room, bedroom, hall with armoire and bathroom at the end. Very good and well-equipped. They have really spoiled us.

Went to visit the Rector of the Tech. Univ. on the first day. Olga Fleshler greeted us with open arms and then some. This year's teachers are well liked, though there was glowing praise for all the teachers that have been sent over.

Anne, call Mrs. L. and tell her we are alive and well, and that it is a wondrous experience.

April 3

Charlie: I have lectured twice, with interpreter, and will again today. 2-hour sessions; several questions in each case. Even got asked afterwards to explain our home mortgage system, because they are beginning to write mortgages here. Svetlana Sivtsova took us to see a young guy with a copying business. He has several pieces of equipment including CAD for layouts. He said his policy is to do quick turnaround work of top quality—encouraging news. We ordered business cards from him and will get next day service. He struck me as an aggressive young businessman who could have an important role in pulling this city up.

Chita is in worse condition than when I saw it in 1991. Little if any upkeep on roads. The condition of the university buildings is poor and getting worse. It is repeatedly said there is no money. I was told a professor gets paid about \$70/mo., and at times doesn't get the full check, although there is an attempt to make it up. Still, despite all the complaining about conditions, there is an unbelievably high level of friendship. Several have said that things are still deteriorating and the inflation rate is at 15–20 percent, discouraging progress. Lots of unfinished buildings, but also a number of new apartment buildings mostly financed and built by the Chinese.

Jean: Went to a refresher course for English teachers yesterday.

It was really fun. First I told about MB and its very beginning, and then was asked about our family and our house. One lady is teaching some girls who are interested in fashion, so she drew some sketches and I named patch pockets, set-in and raglan sleeves, a high round neck, etc. One had composed a song for me and they all sang it. I think I'll be able to get a copy of it. We are treated like royalty here!

After the copy shop, we went to Olga's for dinner. Olga had four dolls made for me. They are wonderful!! Rick and Robert were there. Robert is very anxious to come back next year. "I love my job, I love my apartment, all my friends are here; it feels like home." A direct quote. Everyone likes him and Rick. Enough cannot be said about the good choices MB has made in its teachers. The cooperation between Rick and Robert has impressed everyone. Chita loves them and they like each other...and they are known immediately by their shaved heads!

April 4

Charlie: I delivered the lecture on the general business picture in the U.S. to four groups, some of them large. Tomorrow I start a series on regulation in business. Got an English-speaking group yesterday which makes it easier. Few questions, but interesting ones.

Oleg Gotlib took me to the lake region on Saturday. Spring is coming. The pussy willows were out, but the ice shows no signs of melting. Lots of evidence of fires, mostly grass, but some trees, too. There is very little snow cover and everything is bone dry. No attempt to fight the fires...no money.

Jean: We met with the Consortium yesterday at the Pushkin Library. I read them the MB letter about the Consortium and their institutions' responsibility for the container, and made it as strong as I could. Was told, Tom, that when you were here in 1998 the Consortium was slow going, because the institutions' administrations did not know how to deal with each other, but all that is gone now. Real progress!!

At the meeting, Tatiana Suturina, Humanities Dean at the Technical Univ., gave an impassioned presentation of the problems to be overcome for easing receipt of the next shipment (which they all seem to want). Those there nodded their heads and seemed very sympathetic and willing. It was a good meeting. Svetlana translated, and, as you said, she tells it straight.



Jean with students of the Chita Children's Art School

Yesterday we had dinner with Rick and Robert. It was nice to just have a simple meal without the table-load of food. The schedule is non-stop, which is good because we want to do all we can, but it can be a bit overwhelming.

We went to the synagogue with Oleg on Friday night (they want a contact in the U.S.) ...This is an amazing trip.

April 11

Charlie: Sat. morning and there is a light cover of snow. We've had some nice spring days, but cold windy ones, too. I will soon walk down to where Olga F. and I will

continued on back page

Jean and Charlie continued

catch a trolleybus to school. I'm going to Rick's class on the U.S. Constitution—a popular one.

Dinner at Tanya's last night. With two good English speakers there, the discussion was far ranging: They didn't get any news of Krushchev's UN banging-on-the-lectern-with-his-shoe act. And his "we'll bury you" speech carried no military implication, only that communism would be superior to capitalism.

The average life span for men in Chita is 57 years, 74 for women. The main cause of this low average for men is drinking, and there is no sign of that letting up. The only drinks I've had have been some good Georgian red wine.

Tanya's dinner was typical—plentiful and delicious: 5 salads to start, followed by meat and potatoes, then fruit salad and

sweets. No dinner is complete without chocolates made locally. Plenty of food available, but prices are prohibitive. Fresh produce comes in from China. Much of the local food is still grown on collective farms.

Jean: Today I go to the blue church (Orthodox), then a meeting on volunteering, then a gem exhibit and then to dinner at a Consortium member's house.

Enough. It snowed. Tom, you were right about the clothing. But my zip-in raincoat is warm.

April 15

Jean: Today we met with Konstantin Karasiov, Education Head in the Regional Administration. Rode there with a woman from the volunteering meeting yesterday, at which I, as usual, gave them a hard time—"Why don't you DO something? There is much going on here." Of course, there is no money, so I asked them to think of something they could do with little girls that would take NO money. One girl actually raised her hand and said "Teach them how to behave." I nearly fainted. But I digress.

We were greeted warmly by Karasiov and spent 45 minutes exchanging thoughts. His first comments were that we should have a joint committee with MB. He appointed his deputy to it, so he is committed. They'd like more teachers, and also student exchange...realizing, of course, that this is not Paradise... Very anxious for more contact and cooperation. Tom, I do hope you can get here in the fall. People ask.

Charlie: It is a beautiful sunny day, and we will go on a picnic with the leftovers from the party we gave last night at a restaurant for a very mixed group of about 25. Numerous courses, topped off with a specially decorated cake. The whole affair cost less than \$250 for too much good food, a private room and good service—some things work well in Russia!

Read a local report on mining recognizing they are not competitive in the world, e.g. productivity in gold is 1/60th(!) the world average. Yet whenever I talk about Chita's economic picture, the answer comes back about the great mineral wealth, not realizing the stuff isn't valuable still in the ground, and they aren't yet able to process the ores. However, I've been to a few private firms, and what I saw was encouraging: a telephone start-up, printing company, lumber company and tomorrow I'll visit an Internet company. So some small business is busting out of the shell.

April 16

Charlie: Today the container is to be sprung from Customs after 5 months. It has been declared "technical goods" which carries a 20% duty rate—not humanitarian aid, as it should have been. To get it out of hock the hat was passed and I expect the \$1000 is now in hand. The centerpiece was \$300 from the Kolotilins, your old neighbors, Tom. We saw their shops and they are doing quite well.

April 17

Jean: Today we say goodbye to everyone. We're leaving with as much as we came with; every time we turn around someone gives us another gift!

The veterans' hospital yesterday: patients from WW2, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and children of Stalin's gulag prisoners. Mud, mineral baths, electric shock, whirlpool (not during the electric shock!), herbal inhalation, swimming pool and banya. Narrow cots for beds and one double room had a private bath—the best I've seen. They want to know about hospital volunteers. They've never heard of them. There IS some volunteering in Chita, or they are trying to get some going, but it's a different mind-set here. If no one tells people what to do...they don't. Much to do when we get home.

Charlie: The container still isn't out at this 11th hour. Yesterday I talked to journalism students. On the way, I learned I would be discussing mass media in America... first time I'd heard about it! But with plenty of volume and arm waving, and an explanation of why AOL could acquire Time-Warner, it worked well.

Now, the papers from this lecture series include dissertations on changes in American business, regulation of American business and mass media in America, and are available for a \$5000 contribution to MB. For an additional \$22.99, they can be bound in a manner that will make disposal convenient...

Away from home and an expert on everything!

Visited a company where one of my students works. It runs computer classes, supplies an accounting program, and brings Internet content to about 20 users. They have difficulty getting Chita interested, but are making headway. I suggested looking at how we use the Internet for retail purchases, and used the Dell computer site as an example...then it took forever to open the site. Slow connections, no credit cards, and an uninterested public handicap them.



Charlie Dickinson with his students at Chita State Technical University.

But the founder is optimistic. Contrary to the line the students have been giving me that it is impossible to start a business because of high taxes, this guy has done it. He doesn't complain about the taxes; his toughest problem is getting the right people. A good example of someone with the will overcoming plenty and making it work. He looked to brainpower to build the economy rather than seeking the answer in minerals no one can afford to develop.

