

Scene of eastern Siberia Russia's Buddhists, the Buryats



Ceremony on the Zabaikalyan steppes

Letter from the Zasopka, Chitinsky Raion (Chita suburb)

Many thanks for your parcels. Picture books are wonderful, easy to read, and children are very glad to have such a present from our American friends. They are so surprised that sometimes they run up to me and ask: "Are these books really from abroad?" The students read them at the lessons and even during the breaks.

On the 16th of November there was a seminar of English teachers of Chitinsky raion. I told them again about your sponsor activities. The teachers are very much obliged to you for it. They develop in students the wish and interest to study English and your books help them do it.

Is there anything we can do for you?
Please, let us know.

Good luck to you.

God bless you.

Natalya Petrenko,
English Teacher, Zasopka School

UPDATE continued from inside...

Nature and Culture Tour June 2013—Join Tom Dickinson next June when he leads a 12 day tour, *A Taste of Zabaikalye*, to Chita and two fascinating locations, the Daursky Nature Reserve and Mt. Alkhanai National Park. Near the Mongolian border, the Daursky Reserve is famed for having 3 species of cranes nest there, and for its unusual flora and fauna. Mt Alkhanai is sacred to the Buryat minority and is a great place to begin to learn about them. In Chita we'll learn about 400 years of Russian history in this remote part of Siberia. And of course you'll enjoy the warmth of Siberian hospitality, See the enclosed brochure for more information. Space is limited so contact Tom soon for this one of a kind adventure!

Collaborating with Link Vostok—We approached Link Vostok, a Minneapolis-based arts exchange organization, about possible collaborations. They suggested bringing a dance troupe to Chita. The wheels have begun rolling, and enthusiasm is high on both sides. The hope is to send the acclaimed company Axis that partners dancers with and without disabilities.

Judy Boudreau continued from inside...

the teachers encourage equality by giving the children responsibilities that reinforce their self-esteem. Adults and children alike participated in programming, in games, in hosting their guests, and in serving and cleaning up after meals.

Irkutsk, Lake Baikal and Moscow—After visiting the camp, Chuck and I were escorted to the train station to catch a 1:00 A.M. train to Irkutsk where we visited with more friends of SB, and toured the city and Lake Baikal, an hour away. After a delightful stay in Irkutsk, we flew to Moscow and were met by Olesya, former student (with flawless English!) of Olga Fleshler. After a brief tour of Moscow and the famed Metro Olesya squeezed us into her tiny apartment for the night, and we headed back to Minnesota the next day, exhausted and exhilarated.

SB HISTORY NOTE: Tom Dickinson recounts his first trip in August 1989

My first visit to Chita was quite an adventure. It was part of a piano concert tour to China. In Harbin, China, I boarded the local for the 22 hour ride to the Sino-Soviet border that had been open less than a year. After disembarking in Manzhouli, the border town, I crossed a footbridge over the tracks, looked both ways down the dusty road...and realized I had no idea where to go! Within moments, however, a group of trade reps from Kazakhstan approached to help and were excited to learn I was not Russian, but American. They promptly took me under their wing.

Unable to solve the puzzle of how to find my Chita hosts until morning, I joined the Kazakhstans for a rustic dinner of Chinese hotpot stew in a smoke-filled private dining room and spent the night at the hotel with them, sharing a room with 10 beds. The next morning the interpreter from Chita appeared at my door as if by magic and took me to the train to cross the border.

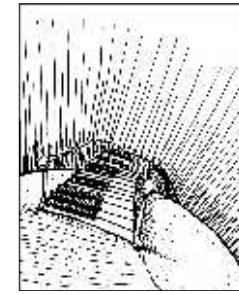
On arrival, I was immediately taken for an afternoon just outside the city at the dacha of a prominent local folk musician complete with picnic and Russian bath. Surprised--and worried--by the video camera taping every moment, especially when my hosts and I were stepping out (naked!) to cool off from the steambath, I was soon relieved to receive this video as a souvenir of my first visit to Soviet Russia!

Following appearances on local TV and interviews for the paper, my recital was held at Central Children's Music School. Adults and children filled all spaces and spilled out the door listening in utter stillness, while getting their first glimpse of an actual American. And I was glimpsing right back!

Siberian Bridges

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Siberian Bridges

UPDATE — December 2012

Fundraising

- Siberian Bridges hosted a two hour cruise of Lake Minnetonka on a blustery, but beautiful, October 6, 2012. Board members shared with guests the latest news regarding our initiatives in the Zabaikalsky region of Russia in this relaxed and intimate setting. Of interest were the upcoming cultural and nature tour to Zabaikalye led by SB President, Tom Dickinson, scheduled for early June of 2013, highlights from Judy Boudreau's and Chuck Ritchie's trip to Chita in May of 2012 and an update on the Children's Home in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky.
- We again participated in Minnesota's annual Give-to-the-Max Day on Nov. 15th hosted by razoo.com, and again are pleased by the response and interest generated.
- We are proud to announce receipt of a grant from the Family Memorial Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation given in honor of Chuck Ritchie, our chairperson. We'll be dedicating those funds to the Children's Home/School. Thank you Minneapolis Foundation, and thank you Chuck!

Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Children's Home/School

- We continue to work with our partner organization in Chita, Sibirskye Mosti ("Siberian Bridges" in Russian) in support of the Children's Home/School.

Continued inside...

UPDATE continued from front...

- **Bi-monthly parcels**—In September we shipped “matchbox” cars and stuffed animals for the children, toys that were gratefully received. In November our shipment was a fast response to a sudden and urgent request for pens; they did not have enough for the children and were in need. We shipped 750 pens along with 35 calendars depicting American life.
- **Computers**—We continue to collect used laptop computers to be refurbished by our partner PC United. These computers are loaded with a multitude of educational games and software, all in Russian, and at present there are seven such computers that we brought in May. These have been a significant addition to the Home. If you have a used laptop or know of someone who does, please contact Chuck Ritchie (612-804-4055). We would like to get them many more.
- **Digital cameras**—As with computers we are also collecting used digital cameras for the same purpose of getting them to the Home. There is great interest in photography and these would be of great use to the children. Again contact Chuck Ritchie (612-804-4055).
- **Graduates**—We are excited to report that all of the 5 graduates from the Home/School from this last year are continuing their education. This is hard-won success for the school in a system plagued by shortages and neglect, and a significant step for these young people, because it is the best way for them to have a chance at building a normal and productive life.

Books—We are proud of the award received by Chuck and Judy in Chita from the Ministry of Education acknowledging our contributions to the Pushkin Library. Natalya Petrenko, English teacher in the school in the Chita suburb of Zasopka, approached Chuck and Judy to see if we could send her children's literature. We sent three boxes. (See her note to us inside.)

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Meet Judy Boudreau Treasurer Siberian Bridges



On Lake Baikal

Judy, proud mother of Croy, 21, and Remi, 24, and wife of Bill, has been a hydrologist with the State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) since 1978. She has a BA in Geology and completed post-graduate work in Civil Engineering. Her interests include swimming, running and biking as well as music—mostly classical piano. It all started with the piano...

Judy and Siberian Bridges—“MOM, I want to take piano lessons so I can play keyboard in a band.” And so my connection with Siberian Bridges began. My son's high school choir director suggested Tom Dickinson as a piano teacher. This was the beginning of a continuing friendship of music, triathlon training and, ultimately, Siberian Bridges.

Even though I never studied Russian language or history, Tom's stories of the people of Zabaikalye were so intriguing that I said yes when he asked, “Would you like to take on the Secretary-Treasurer position that my Mom held for six years?” The opportunity led to appreciation of a culture completely new to me, as well as warm, new friendships. Nine years on, I have come to love the people of Zabaikalye. The opportunity to visit last May sealed my fate.

The Zabaikalye Adventure with Chuck Ritchie

I had never been overseas, much less 15 hours ahead of my time zone! Chuck and I flew together—32 hours from home to Chita. Thank goodness for a pleasant traveling companion who is fluent in Russian!

Chita—First up was the Pushkin Library where we were presented with an award from the Ministry of Education for our



With Pushkin Library staff

cooperation and long-time support of the Pushkin Library. While there, we joined a meeting of our partner NGO, Sibirskye Mosti (“SibMost”). The next day we swapped volunteering experiences with those of students at the University. Their dedication blew us away! We also had a thoughtful discussion with a large group of English majors. After a tour of the Museum of Local Lore, SibMost member, Elena Shadrina and her family treated us to a home-style Russian dinner.



With mining students

The following day I gave a presentation about my work at the DNR on Water Resource Sustainability at the mining college.

The Chita portion of the trip ended with a delicious and fun dinner hosted by the ad hoc group supporting the Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Children's Home. Tomorrow, the long drive to Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky!

The Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Children's Home—

I am filled with emotion and awe about our visit to the Children's Home. We were greeted with enthusiasm, regaled with music and dance talent, shown works of art



At the Home's summer camp with new friend, Kristina

by the children, and treated as dignitaries at the dinner table. The children were polite and attentive. How could this all be possible in an “orphanage”?? The answer is in the loving care that the children receive from the Director, the teachers and the staff. The children do the best with what they have and are treated with respect.

But the school is chronically burdened with many needs and scarce funds. We heard that it is hard to attract and hold onto teachers. SB has jumped in, providing awards for outstanding teachers to encourage them to stay, and scholarships to graduating students to encourage furthering their education. We heard that the kitchen is sorely in need of an upgrade. We would like to assist this project if we can. It was evident to me that our help thus far is needed and much appreciated.

The visit to the Home's Summer Camp (a one-hour roller-coaster ride over rutted roads) demonstrated how

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Contribution Form

By check:

Return this panel filled out with your check payable to “Siberian Bridges” to:
Siberian Bridges
3212 18th Ave S
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By credit card or Paypal:

Go online to www.siberianbridges.org and click on the “Donate” button. At the new page, scroll down and click on the “Paypal”, “GiveMN/Razoo”, or “Network For Good” link. Follow instructions at the new page.
(NOTE: you can use Paypal even if you are not signed up for it, and you can use a credit card there, too.)

Siberian Bridges is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All donations are 100% tax-deductible.

Contribution amount

Email for paperless receipt of SB materials



At the Children's Home summer camp