

Siberian Bridges Fall Newsletter

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The Children's Home greets us in June.

**JOIN
US!**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 3:30 - 5:30pm

Mayflower Church Fireside Room
106 E Diamond Lake Rd, Minneapolis 55419

A Look Back Over 2015

Entertainment by **The Encampment River Boys**
Russian zakusky for nibbling!

2-3pm Special Pre-Event docent tour
arranged for us at the Russian Museum of Art across the street.
(Museum entry fee applies, please RSVP)

We'll be fundraising for the general fund as well as:

- ✓ Early reader English books & courses to be shared by 34 village schools (\$500)
- ✓ Travel funds for first librarian exchange from the Pushkin Library (\$2000 needed, ~\$500 already raised in Russia)
- ✓ Holiday "candygram" for the Children's Home and other shipments (\$250)



For over 40 years this group has been playing Bluegrass music, having come together informally just to pick and sing. Often times the gatherings have been on the North Shore of Lake Superior on the Encampment River, hence the name of the group. The group consists of Jack Taylor, (guitar, dobro, steel pedal guitar); Tom Skramstad (mandolin, guitar); Wint Ritchie (banjo, guitar); Mike McCarthy (bass, banjo); and Chuck Ritchie (guitar).

October 20, 2015

Dear friends,

We have too much news to fit in the newsletter! It is a happy problem, of course, and to be expected when three people connected to Siberian Bridges made trips to Zabaikalye this year. A sample of what you'll be missing:

- [A fascinating report by Jennifer Drewyor](#), the first English teacher SB has helped send in a decade.
- [News about the village schools to whom we send early English books and now, two computers](#)
- [News about the Pushkin Library's American film series and its tiny, but growing "Soviet museum."](#) (click link and scroll down.)
- [Chuck's and my tour](#) of the ultra-modern multi-clinic in Chita founded and run by Dr Sergey Davydov, a great patron of the Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Children's Home
- [The interesting effect of the current tense US-Russia relations on my playing in a concert celebrating Chita's birthday, May 31.](#) Also the heartfelt 70th anniversary celebrations in May of the Allied victory in World War II.
- [News of the unprecedented spring wildfires](#) that came very close to Chita and devastated forests and homes across the region—climate change-related devastation we shared in the US this year, too.
- Pictures! There aren't enough pictures!

But call it a near-miss, because all this news—and more!--can be found at www.siberianbridges.org.

Since they are my initiatives, I want to draw your attention to the two tours we are mounting to Zabaikalye. We want you to fall in love with the region as we have!

Last year's pilot "Taste of Zabaikalye" tour was a resounding success. Next year's "Taste" explores the fascinating Krasny Chikoy region in the southwestern corner the region with a chance to visit the world's deepest, oldest lake, Lake Baikal, a UN World Heritage site.

The other is our first economy camping adventure scheduled for Summer 2017. The mild and bright summer days are perfect for camping, and the trip will not be difficult for any averagely fit person 9 years old and up. Restricted to eight campers, expect an intimate connection with the forests and waters of this untrammled part of the globe. The leader has extensive experience leading wilderness trips and is an expert on the region's geography and ecology.

Read inside about the changes at the Children's Home. They keep plugging away despite recent changes in name, organization and funding. The leadership and staff of the Home intelligently, compassionately and fiercely defend and prepare these disadvantaged children toward happy and meaningful lives in society. We salute this noble work and support it as we can.

We hope you are sparked by our news: to volunteer; to donate funds or in-kind skills or materials; and to think about our global family, even those members on the far side of the globe. We may fuss and fight, but from leadership to the most neglected of society, we are all in it together. And we can get along and find security and happiness when we give each other our attention with knowledge, neighborliness and respect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Dickinson".

Tom Dickinson, President

Fall 2015 UPDATE

- In May and June we had three separate but overlapping visits to Zabaikalye. [Tom Dickinson](#) arrived first in the midst of the region's worst spring fire season in memory—so bad that it appeared in US news. He played a joint recital with the wonderful Chita soprano Natalia Bekasova at the Music College. [Jennifer Drewyor](#), University of Minnesota (UMN) grad student in education arrived a few days later to head down to Aginskoye as guest teacher at the language and science summer school run by the local school system. SB connected her with that opportunity. She returned to Chita after the Camp ended for research toward her degree. Then [Chuck Ritchie](#) arrived—his 40th visit to Russia! The three of us came together for visits to Lake Arakhlei and the trek to the Children's Home in Petrovsk Zabaikalsky.



Natalia Bekasova, soprano, taking a bow May 27, 2015 at joint recital with Tom at the Music College.

- The Univ of Minnesota (UMN) and Zabaikalsky State Univ (ZabGU) are close to signing an initial agreement of cooperation that would include the possibility of exchanges, joint scholarship, access to materials and publishing. This follows on UMN Prof. Irene Duranczyk's first meetings in Chita last summer. SB helped bring the institutions together just as back in 1996 it brought the then Chita State Technical University (now part of ZabGU) and Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven together for a successful relationship.



New Pushkin Library Director Svetlana Laskevich receiving a book about Carnegie libraries. With Elena Pishcherskaya.

- In May Tom met with the new Director of the Pushkin Library, Svetlana Lashkevich, and the Head of the Foreign Languages Dept, [Alexei Sedunov](#) and discussed a possible visit by Alexei to the Twin Cities to meet and observe how to keep libraries relevant in these days of online research. With about \$500 secured, we are looking for only another \$1500 to make the trip a reality. [Jo Ann Musumeci](#), a retired librarian in Minneapolis, has volunteered to make the local connections.

- During his visit, Tom met with two of the many private language



7-8 year old English students receive certificates on the last day of class in a private afterschool in the "KSK" district near Chita.

schools appearing in Chita. One was for adults, the other for small children. There is interest in guest native speaking teachers for summer school, so we are preparing an application process for the schools to let us know what they need and can offer. We hope to find some teachers for them among UMN students and readers of this newsletter.

- **Tonya Kovaleva**, the delightful Children's Home graduate profiled in our last newsletter is in her junior year at university in Chita and doing well. While she is deciding whether to become a lawyer or an English translator, she and her young suitor, Artyr, are also thinking about marriage. She represents the best of what can happen for those from an orphanage background. We follow her progress with interest!
- We now have a database! **Robin Hoffman**, new Minnesotan and 2014 *Taste of Zabaikalye* tourist, has transformed our record-keeping by helping Judy Boudreau shift our data from spreadsheets to a database. A programmer for Child Support in the Minnesota Dept of Human Services, she continues to volunteer by completing the initial data entry. This switch to the database makes preparing mailings, understanding giving patterns, and fully appreciating our donors all much easier.



Bagulnik in bloom, May 2015. This endemic wild rhododendron is the symbol of Zabaikalye and a harbinger of coming summer.



Smoke from regional wildfires make the sun red in mid-afternoon. It was the worst spring wildfire season in memory.

CHILDREN'S HOME REPORT

In June Tom Dickinson and Chuck Ritchie were blessed to return to the Children's Home in Petrovsk- Zabaikalsky. Jennifer Drewyor, a UMN graduate student in education



Chuck, Jennifer and Tom greeted with bread and salt at the Children's Home.

joined us. We were met in traditional fashion with salt and bread, and for a day and a half we joined in all activities.

It was a busy schedule: an elaborate welcome ceremony included a precision marching contest between the families and even the guests; *zarnitsa* - games among groups of mixed ages including guests; a piano recital by Tom in the town; a wonderful talent-filled concert of the kids; evening meetings in family groups; a “backwards day” at school in which students were the teachers and adults were the (sometimes naughty!) kids; a student council

meeting in which the children evaluated "backwards day" and gave their recommendations for activities for the upcoming year. There were opportunities to interact with the children, renewing earlier acquaintances, and making new ones.

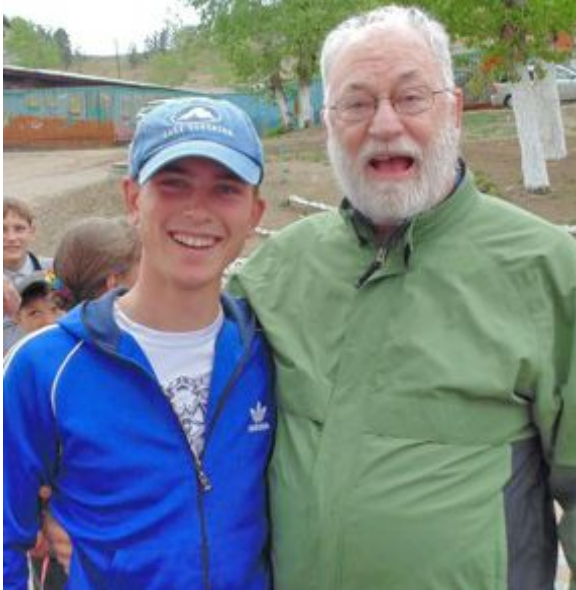
Underlying our visit, three big issues were at play. The Home now has a new name, “*Unity - A Center for Helping Children Left without Parental Guardianship,*” and new auspices of a different Ministry. These changes have allowed the

government to say it has significantly fewer such Homes and therefore, in government-speak, fewer orphans, since they are now in “help centers” not orphanages... *A rose by any other name...* Well in this case it might not still be a rose, unfortunately...



Children's Home Director Natalia Skliarova joins the zarnitsa competitions with Jennifer, staff and Home volunteers.

At the same time the Home faced a budget cut, which most pressingly threatened the opening of their summer camp. A timely contribution from Siberian Bridges that we brought with us was immediately put to use paying for the repair of their bus—essential for getting the children to camp—and paying for a water inspection required before even opening the camp. (Gratitude was lavishly expressed to Siberian Bridges for the unanticipated gift. The camera donations accompanying the check were also greatly appreciated.)



"Chuck" and "Sasha," a reunion! On his first visit in 2011, young Sasha took Chuck's name and gave Chuck his. "Chuck" is now a strapping young man helping at the Home with physical education.

This reclassification has much more dire implications because it also means the closing of the Home's school, thrusting the children into the local schools, a very different atmosphere without the significant support from the educational and psychological staffs who knew them and could care for their special needs. There is great concern about how the children will do in this new environment, and to what degree these special needs will be addressed or even considered. We will monitor the situation as closely as we can.

A very exciting piece of news is that Nadya (pictured) left to join the family of Elena and Victor Kulakovsky, long time friends and trustees of the Center (profiled in our [Fall 2013 newsletter](#)). They went through an intensive training course for potential foster parents, and were excited to bring Nadya home with them in June. A move to a larger apartment allows Nadya to have a room of her own for the first time. We gladly follow her progress and hope that there will be other children similarly blessed with foster parents.



Nadya with Elena and Victor Kulakovsky on the day she left the Home to be part of their family.



Singing the Children's Home anthem. Girls in aprons are graduating seniors.



Tom with three new friends and one old one: not sure of the names of the 1st two, but the 3rd is Vitaly and 4th is Vanya, Tom's friend and guide from last year.



In the Children's Home nursery

MEET ELENA PISHCHERSKAYA

Involved with Siberian Bridges since 2007, Elena Pishcherskaya (“Pih-SHAIR-ska-yeh”) is one of the founders of Siberian Bridges-Russia (*Sibirskye Mosti*). She is an essential and true friend of our organization, spearheading the effort to connect our two universities, helping with the logistics of every visit to Chita, deeply involved with the Children's Home, and list goes on and on.



The Pishchersky Family: Vitaly, Elena, Pasha (7) and Alexandr (born October 17)

She graduated high school in 2001 with a gold medal, which is not surprising since she

excelled in everything! Her strong interest in English led to undergraduate work at the Irkutsk State Linguistics University (ISLU). In typical Elena fashion, when two languages were required for the program, she chose to study *four* simultaneously—English, Spanish, French and Chinese—and graduated with distinction as Linguist and Teacher of English and French. In 2005 she earned an International Degree in Spanish. In 2011 she defended her doctoral thesis for Philological Sciences at ISLU. More recently, in 2013 she took over the leadership of the foreign languages department at Chita Institute for Economics and Law of the Irkutsk State University.

Throughout her career Elena has demonstrated perseverance and a unique capacity for dealing with complexity. Olga Fleshler worked under Elena at the Chita Institute, and also travelled with her to the Twin Cities last year. She remarked, “I am astounded at the abilities of this young woman. She is intelligent, logical, and so composed. She possesses such clarity in her thinking and goals. I would follow her anywhere.”

Elena's beautiful family consists of her husband Vitaly, son Pavel (7), and a brand new son, Alexandr, born October 17th! One could also add yet other family members...namely the children at the Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Children's Home. Elena shares our love and deep concern for these children, and has reached out to them in very significant ways, and she and her family are held in high esteem by the children and staff.

When asked what she values most she responded, “family, friends, and...driving my car!” And we have personal experience that she is a capable and fearless navigator of Siberia's often harrowing roads and traffic!

Elena is a remarkable woman—a loving mother and wife, an inspired and innovative teacher, a loyal and wonderful friend. We are fortunate to have fallen into her orbit.

Visit Zabaikalye!

Two opportunities to tour our favorite far side of the globe *arranged and led by Siberian Bridges*

Taste of Zabaikalye: Krasny Chikoy

July 1-13 2016 (July 1-15 with Lake Baikal add-on).

- Estimated all-inclusive cost from arrival at Domodedovo airport in Moscow to departure from the same): \$4500 (inquire about add-on cost)
- Minimum 10 tourists, double occupancy.
- Agent: Sibiriada Tours, Olga Kostina, Director.
- Features the Krasny Chikoi region on the western edge of the region. It is noted for the beauty of its forests, hills and rivers, the Old Believer communities, the indigenous Buryat culture, and the archeological digs uncovering the source of our own continent's indigenous ancestors who migrated across the Bering Land-Bridges more than 10,000 years ago.



Old Believer of Krasny Chikoy

Camping Adventure in Zabaikalye

July/August 2017, ~13 days

- Preliminary cost estimate is \$800 for the Zabaikalyan portion only. Does not include roundtrip flights US-Moscow and Moscow-Chita (roughly \$1700-\$2500 total). ***The economical way to get a taste!***
- Minimum 4, maximum 8 tourists.
- Agent: Svetlana Lazerevskaya, Director, Ivano-Arakhlei Regional Park with extensive experience leading wilderness trips in the region, and international orienteering champion.
- The trip will include 4 days exploring the Ivano-Arakhlei Regional Park near Chita, 4 days flat-water rafting down the Ingoda River and 4 days of cultural tourism in the capital city Chita (on arrival and before departure from the region). The nature part will be in tents and a cabin, with meals prepared over campfires; in Chita it'll be hotels, restaurants, museums, etc.
- Basic fitness, but no special athletic skills required.
- Ages 9 and above



Summer at the Ivano-Arakhlei Regional Park

TWO POEMS by Vyacheslav Vyunov *Translated by Chuck Ritchie*

Незаметно кончается лето... Summer ends unnoticed...

Розовые полоса заката
Обещают следующий день.
Тишиной дремотною объята
Озеро, наполненное всклень.
Просто так заброшу в воду камень,
И пойдут круги.
И в тишине
Слышно, как они перетекают
В золотые кольца на сосне.

The pink rays of sunset
Promise the start of a new day.
A somnolent silence engulfs
The lake, swollen to its banks.
I simply cast a stone into the water
And ripples emanate.
And in the silence
Is heard how they flow
Through the golden rings of the pine.

За Грибами Out for mushrooms

Острее чувствуешь с годам
И проще думаешь, притом
Мы за последними грмбами
Чуть свет с товарищем идём.
Мы ждём паром у перевоза.
И проступают дерева.
Полупрозрачная берёза
В тумане светится едва.
И грани нет определённой,
И не узнаешь никогда,
Где берег кончился наклонный,
Где начинается вода.
Одно в другое переходит,
Одно становится другим -
Вода, деревья, трап у сходен
И мы с товарищем моим.
И мы уже не понимаем,
Зачем мы здесь в рассветный
Мы растворяемся в тумане,
И он пронизывает нас.
И, чувствуя, как это важно,
Мы рядом держимся – вдвоём,
Мы тоже как бы часть пейзажа,
Как бы кусты или паром.
Так вот что тщательно скрывала
Природа,
И на чём стоит:
Из одного материала
Всё в этой жизни состоит!

With age we feel more keenly,
And we think more simply as well.
At the crack of dawn, my friend and I,
Set out to find the last morel.
We stand, waiting for the ferry.
The trees are barely seen.
The half-translucent birch
Hardly shimmers in the mist.
There is no well-defined border,
You never know just where
The sloping bank comes to an end,
Where the water starts to dare.
One into another merges,
One becomes the other -
The water, the trees, the loading plank,
My friend and I.
We have no understanding,
Why so early we are here.
We dissolve into the haze
And it chills us to the bone.
Feeling it important,
To the other we hold on,
We too a part of this landscape,
Like the bushes or the ferry.
So this is the secret
Nature so carefully hides,
And on it she firmly stands:
Everything in this life
Comes from the same source.



Poet Slava Vyunov is a retired forest ranger living in the village of Tasei on Lake Ivan in the Ivano-Arakhlei Regional Park with his wife Natasha.



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FROM PAPER TO ONLINE:

Switching to email newsletters and announcements results in significant savings. This is the email version of the newsletter, and as you can see, it contains more information as well as color imagery and more of it. If you are now receiving the mailed version, let us know if we can change delivery to you to the email version.

DONATION INFORMATION:

- To donate with a credit card, go to siberianbridges.org and click the [DONATE](#) link.
- Write checks to “Siberian Bridges” and mail to: Siberian Bridges, 3212 18th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55407.

**Siberian Bridges is a 501c3 non-profit registered in Minnesota.
Donations are 100% tax-deductible.**



Summer flowers, Ivano-Arakhlei Regional Park near Chita.



Slava and Natasha Vyunov – We'll visit them in the 2016 Taste of Zabaikalye Tour