



With a mission "to cultivate contact and cooperation with the people of eastern Siberia that empowers the development of individuals, communities and civil society."

Spring 2015 Newsletter

Online and Home-printable Color Version

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NOTE ON BECOMING MORE CONNECTED: Communicating with Russia is difficult due to the Russian language's complexity and Cyrillic alphabet. But now, online tools make translating from Russian quite easy. Select any Russian text and copy it into <http://translate.google.com> (one among several free translation sites). The translation may be a bit awkward, but you should get the sense. If you use the Chrome web browser, it will translate whole webpages instantly.

Siberian Bridges



To friends of Siberian Bridges:

It is hard to believe it has been a year since I began making plans to get more involved in Siberian Bridges and travel to Chita to learn more about life and culture of that remote region. What a whirlwind of experiences and new insights during and since that "Taste of Zabaikalye"!

Since then, I have been forging relationships within the University of Minnesota (UMN) to develop the cooperative opportunities that arose during my visit with Zabaikalsky State University, Chita Institute of the Baikal State University and with English educators in the small city of Aginskoye.

This summer, a one of my advisees in the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning at the UMN will visit Zabaikalye. Jennifer Drewyor will be a guest teacher at the Summer Fun Language Camp in Aginskoye. For its three weeks, she will teach conversational English to middle and high school students. Following the camp, Jennifer will engage undergraduates in Chita to learn about their college experience and what has been most effective preparing them for higher education as part of her master's research. We hope Jennifer's visit paves the way for future cross cultural experiences for more UMN students.

Last October, I was honored with an invitation to join via videostream Zabaikalsky State University's academic conference on "Human Values in the 21st Century." My offering was entitled "Integrating Multicultural Instructional Design for Student Success". I look forward to this becoming an annual event and to incorporating our graduate students' work into the mix.

But the highlight of post-tour 2014 was celebrating Thanksgiving Dinner with Olga Fleshler and Elena Pishcherskaya, visiting from Siberian Bridges-RU, along with Siberian Bridges-US and friends. This followed a full day on the U of M campus touring departments and strategizing future cooperation.



Thanksgiving with Olga, Elena and friends

Siberian Bridges-US continues to create cultural bridges and identify resources to engage with Siberian Bridges-RU. With your help and engagement, relationships promoting peace and understanding will grow. A year ago, I didn't think there was a role in Siberian Bridges for me other than my check book. Today I know it presents many ways to encourage international relationships and promote peace. Join us! Enrich your life and the lives of others.

Sincerely,

Juene Dwanazyk

- In November **Olga Fleshler and Elena Pishcherskaya from our partner NGO in Chita, Sibirskye Mosti, visited us** after attending an international conference in San Antonio. Straight from the airport they joined our November fundraiser at the Linden Hills United Church of Christ. **Visit highlights centered on a tour of several parts of the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), led by Irene Duranczyk ([profiled in our 11/14 newsletter, online link](#)).**



Elena and Olga with Jean Quam, Dean of CEHD at the University of Minnesota

- **Our November fundraiser** started with selections from the concert Tom gave last June in Chita, and after a short presentation about SB, Elena spoke eloquently about the

value of our cooperative efforts. During refreshments, Olga had a reunion with Tom's brother Joe and his wife Karen Schleske, tourists to Chita and Lake Baikal way back in 1995.



Jennifer Drewyor

- **Jennifer Drewyor, a graduate student at CEHD, will teach English** this June in the regional Buryat center of Aginskoye. She'll be a guest teacher at the city's "Summer Fun [Language] Camp" for middle and high school students. We hope she is the first of a series of UMN students going to Zabaikalye for teaching, research and cultural awareness. As part of this effort, her advisor, Irene Duranczyk, just submitted a proposal for a short course in Chita led by local professors for a group of visiting U of M students in 2016.

- Tom Dickinson will go to Chita with Jennifer in May. Together they will visit the Children's Home in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky and he'll play another recital in the town's Arts Center. Besides visiting English classes and checking on the status of projects, he'll play again in Chita at the Music College where he taught in 1993 and 1995.



Tom with students and teachers of the Petrovsk Arts Center after last year's recital

- We are collecting very earliest reading books for the 34 village schools outside Chita ([click to](#)

see Nov 2014 newsletter. [online link](#)) and Tom will bring the Zasopka village's school a couple of reconditioned laptops. We continue to ask our readers and friends for used laptops (non-Apple) and digital cameras, along with such very early beginner books.



Our first shipment to the Zasopka School when it arrived

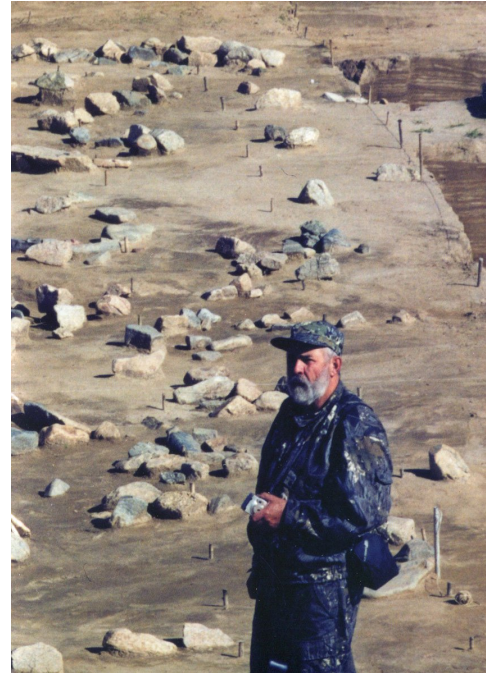


Old Believer greeting of salt and bread

Join trip leader Tom Dickinson for the next tour, this time focusing on the gorgeous **KRASNY CHIKOI** region.

★ Learn about the Old Believers exiled there by the tsar in the 17th century and still living in the old ways.

★ Visit the internationally renowned archeological dig in the Amur River Basin, considered the



Archeologist Dr Mikhail Konstantinov at his dig

source of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

★ Learn about the Buryat culture native to the region.

★ We'll also visit the capital city of Chita, enjoy a day at a dacha (with Russian *banya!*) and learn about the Decem-brists and other

points of historical significance of this remote, formerly closed, and altogether fascinating place.

★ All while basking in the justly famous Siberian hospitality.

★ An add-on of several days is offered to visit the world's oldest, deepest and largest (by volume) lake, Lake Baikal, a UN World Heritage site.



A day at a dacha

Estimated cost for 12 day tour is \$3700: starts in Moscow, includes RT flights to Zabaikalye from Moscow, all meals, accommodations (double occupancy), transportation, interpreters and guides. Should be healthy, but no special fitness requirements. 10 tourists minimum. Cost subject to change. Inquire about Lake Baikal add-on cost.



Old Believer festival finery



At the Home/School's website: (<http://pzabdetdom.ucoz.ru>) you will find a wide variety of the childrens' activities. Behind each there is a conscious effort to create a culture of openness, trust, self-worth, and respect for others. Some recent activities include:

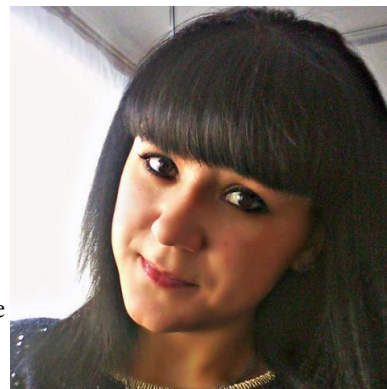
- ★ A trip to a regional park for 1st and 2nd graders called “A Walk in the Pine Forest” that included a competition to see who could collect the most pinecones and lay them out, spelling their name.
- ★ A presentation by all the Home's “families” under the title of “Healthy Lifestyle”. There were songs, ditties, dramatizations and skits.
- ★ Health Week in which they had several sport contests with children from a nearby village.
- ★ A special show-and-tell for which all the children presented their own portfolios with categories such as “My Accomplishments”, “My Friends”, “My Talents”, “My Impressions”, “My Interests”. The children were creative, sharing through photos (*presumably with cameras provided by SB—there is a need*), poems, articles they wrote, and oral presentations.
- ★ 58 children participated in a project called “Helping Our Winter Birds.” Their goal was to educate themselves and others about winter birds, by making posters and sharing information about the winter birds that congregate in their region. They made bird feeders, and they also collected a variety of seeds in the fall that they used to feed the birds throughout the winter months.



We continue to actively look for used laptop computers (no Apples/Macs, please), and digital cameras to send to the Home. If you can help, reach [Chuck Ritchie at siberianbridges@gmail.com](mailto:Chuck.Ritchie@siberianbridges@gmail.com)

MEET TONYA

Antonina Konovalova (Tonya) graduated from the Children's Home/School in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky two years ago and is just now finishing up her sophomore year at Zabaikalsky State University in Chita. We asked her to write about herself to give a glimpse into life at the Home and beyond. By continuing her education and setting a course to face the challenges of the future, she is a success story for the Home/School, which is justifiably proud of her. We are delighted to introduce you to this charming young lady!



The summer of 2001 was sunny and warm, but family matters were nothing like the weather. My mother and younger sister moved to our stepfather's place in another village and I and my younger brother were left alone. The neighbors knew about our family's situation, which had been deteriorating for the previous year and a half. We were in crisis without enough money to live on, and sometimes there wasn't even enough for food. So when mother left, neighbors called the proper authorities and told them we had been left behind. Social service people took us to a shelter in Chita. This is how we became wards of the state. We lived in the shelter only a year since children may not stay there on a permanent basis. We were then sent to the Children's Home/School in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky.

So from 2003 we were plunged into a completely new way of life, a new rhythm. At the Home/School it isn't just a matter of schooling, upbringing, and inculcating skills that are useful in life, they also involve the children in a great variety of activities, master classes, and the like. I was always very curious child and was interested in absolutely everything. Our day was laid out literally by the hour. Sometimes it seemed to me I had to be in two places at once. I sang, got involved in dancing, theater, poetry, sports, and other activities as well. I simply didn't have time to be bored or depressed. Thanks to all of these activities I now consider myself an amiable, communicative, responsible, and positive young lady.



On Lenin Square in Chita

At the Home/School the staff relate to all of the kids in the same way. They love and care for all of the children and to favor one child over others in the group would be less than honest. Every educator, every teacher, in fact every adult contributed their little piece to the development of my character.

When I was living in at the Home/School the most difficult thing, of course, was coming to grips with my memories and my depression regarding my family. However, as I said, I tried to keep busy, and that worked. As for the positive side of life there, it is difficult to single out one specific thing. I made friends with so many whose fortunes are similar to mine. I still stay in contact with some of them.

I often reminisce about my life at the Home/ School. Always when I think about those 9 years in that amazing place, a happy smile spreads across my face. A very clear recollection is the moment that I chose to continue my education after 9th grade. The administration called me in and suggested that I complete 10th and 11th grades, then enroll in a technical school. I took their advice and now am very grateful to all those who took such an interest in my future. Now I am at university, majoring in social-cultural service. I like the courses and learn something useful and interesting every day. I like the group I'm in; they are all good, sympathetic kids.

In the future I want to become first of all, a good wife and a caring mother, and then I want to get a good job and earn enough money to live prosperously and comfortably.

Translation: Chuck Ritchie

A WORD ABOUT THE DECEMBRISTS...

The Decembrists' failed uprising against the Tsar in 1825 has been provoking polar judgments and sentiments across the last 200 years in Russia. While for some, the Decembrists were villains attempting the overthrow of a legitimate monarch, for many others they were selfless pursuers of truth and liberty who worked against enormous odds and at the cost of their own lives and aristocratic position.

Despite the controversy though, even their opponents recognize the outstanding human qualities of these people: their integrity, their unwillingness to acquiesce



The battle in St Petersburg that quelled the Decembrist Uprising, Decembrist Museum, Chita

to the tragic lot of the common Russian people of that time, and the dignity and courage with which they endured exile in the remotest corners of Siberia (many in Zabaikalye), often providing service to the place of their imprisonment. Many of them were lucky to be followed by their wives who left everything behind, including children, to be near their husbands.

In fact, if the notion of the Russian spirit or soul does exist, it is best manifested by the Decembrists.

Tatiana Sukhanova, Sibirskye Mosti

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Siberian Bridges is a 501c3 non-profit. All donations are 100% tax-deductible.



REST IN PEACE

Our Chairperson Chuck Ritchie's beloved wife of 50 years, Sharon, died April 20, 2015 following a bout with pancreatic cancer. Sharon supported and often accompanied Chuck in his lifelong work to educate, inform about and make connections with Russia and Russians. Our thoughts and prayers go to Chuck and his family on their loss.