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Dear Friends!

There is a supposed Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times," that you may have heard. Well, these are "interesting times," I think we all agree. Are they something that just happens to us, or can we influence them? This question becomes more urgent the more "interesting" our times become.

Perhaps the answer to this question will never be clear, but Siberian Bridges with its projects, which are as much originated and devised by our friends abroad as by us, acts on the premise that working together can defuse some of the "interesting" and replace it with the genuinely interesting—new friendships, new ideas, support for children who start out on a lower rung, support for language education and for student conferences, help us to have a look at "deepest, darkest Siberia" and its friendly inhabitants (Yo! Come on the tour next summer!). Our focus is a part of Russia, and Russia is developing its young, post-Soviet economy, but it is a very old country. Their story is so unlike our own.

This summer was the first in all the 28 years I've been going to Chita, that we spent much time talking about the state of the world and foreign affairs. Two things struck me. The first was how polite the conversations were. Whatever one felt, and we did not all agree, nothing was allowed to hinder friendship and the moment we were in. The second was that there is, and has been, a generally warm feeling toward my country despite the current tone and past ideological differences. The octogenarian historian in Chita I interviewed about the time the Soviet Army came to his city to help their allies (the US Army) in the Japanese part of WWII, said that despite our history and differences, he has always felt, and feels still, that our countries are destined to be on good terms. I hope he's right. In the meantime, we visit there and, in turn, host guests from there when we can, we mount useful projects, we meet by Viber and Skype and VOIP phone and email, and we share a common yearning for "contact and cooperation" as our mission statement puts it.

Thank you for your interest in us. There's a lot more at the website. Come on our 2018 tour and meet up yourself. It is a beautiful place with beautiful people. We have a world to pull together; you can join our efforts, our small steps, with our friends way the hell over there.

With hopes for good relations,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Thomas Dickinson".

Thomas Dickinson, SB President

## FALL 2017 UPDATE

- Siberian Bridges assisted in a very exciting new initiative in international contact and cooperation: the **Tri-Country Student Video Conference** between students in the US (University of Minnesota) Russia (Chita

Institute of Baikar State University) and China (Harbin Institute of Technology). It was held on International Students Day, November 17th, for three hours. Because the timezone differences, the US group participated on November 16th. Each institution presented a short video about itself and its place, and student presentations from Harbin and Chita were presented on the history and the pertinence today of International Students Day. Discussions followed these two parts. The most extended discussion was about volunteering. As hoped for by the organizers, there was enthusiasm to continue with such Internet conferences. One feature of the conference was the

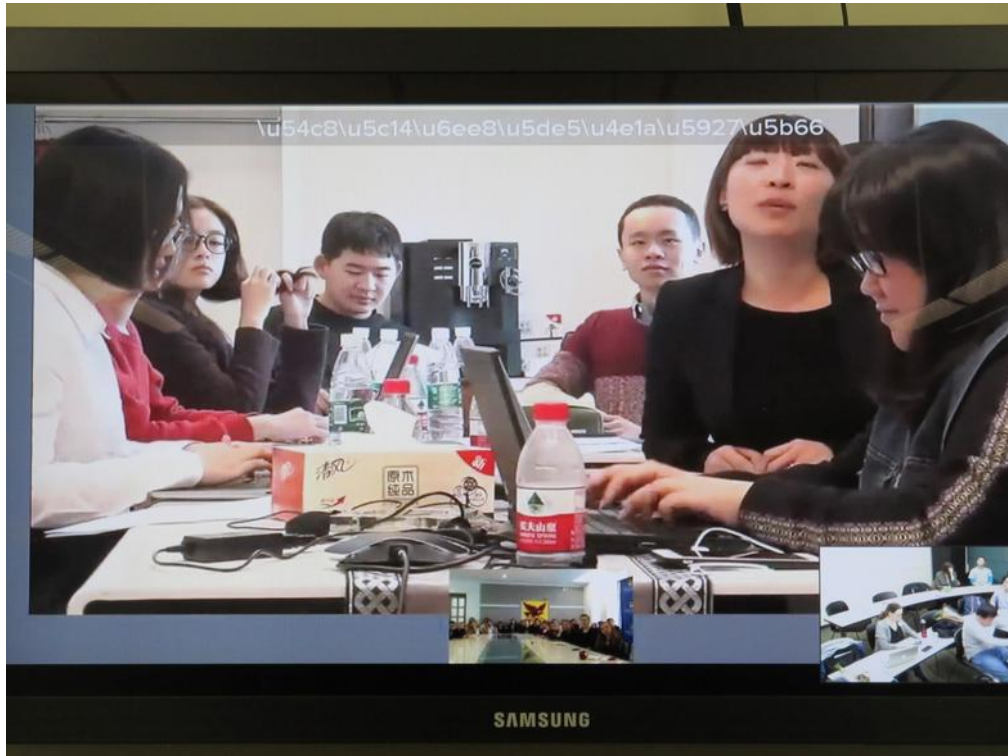


Video feed from Russia showing student presenters up front. Small image in lower center is the Chinese group, on lower right is the Minneapolis group.



In Minneapolis, UMN student participants with SB's Janet Stewart at back row left. Back L-R: Daniel Li, Polina Matveeva, George Vang. Front L-R: Liam Bunchung Ly, Mua Lee.

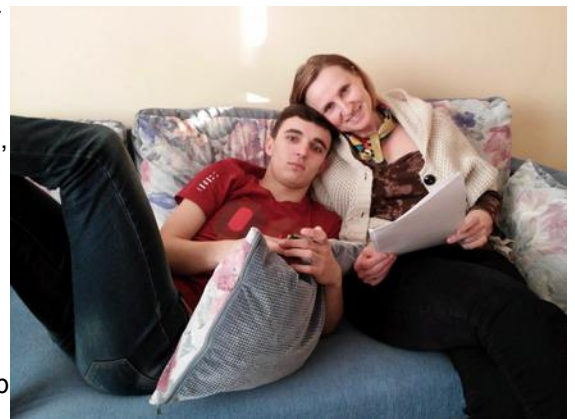




Chinese conference group. Hongyi Zhou, presenter of paper, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right. Zoe Cai, Chinese conference organizer to his right.

technique of translation, which allowed all participants to speak and listen in their own language. Special thanks to **SB ex-officio board member, Professor Irene Duranczyk** for organizing the UMN part, and to **Board member Kevin Brondum** for moderating.

- A new project has been initiated at the Children's Center "Unity" in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky. They are attempting to make a **joint town/center children's 8-10 piece rock band** that will include instrumental instruction. Planned after informal discussions last summer by **SB President Tom Dickinson and Center Director Natalia Skliarova** about the great success of the Center's singers and now a dancer (Nastya Yerofeevna, age 15) in the national Russian TV children's talent show, "You're Super," the idea of instrumental music came up. The only barrier is the cost, so Siberian Bridges is fund-raising to help make this band a reality. The grant proposal is not yet finalized, but is expected to be in the range of \$35,000-\$50,000 for purchase of instruments and cost of instruction across the initial several years. It represents the single largest fund-raising effort in Siberian Bridges' history. Any contribution we make will encourage Russians to give as well.
- Last summer Tom met with **Irina and Michael Shipley** and their "boys," the young men just out of, or just about to leave, the Children's Center in the town of Chernovsky, 30km outside Chita. This is the 2nd year SB is providing a small grant to support their work, which is providing a safe and welcome home, recreation, family, mentoring, advice and comfort for a changing group of real and social orphans from the Center who are just starting out in "the real world." In the summer, Tom joined them a few times, including to watch Artyom play in a local soccer league, after which they all went to Lake Kenon on the edge of the city for a swim. Young Lyosha got seriously interested in playing the Shipley's piano and taught himself several things including the theme to the Moonlight Sonata. They've set him up with twice weekly piano lessons. Previously we supported Vitya's art lessons. Though appreciated, this fell apart, due



Irina with Artyom



*Shipley family and boys from Chernovsky. From left: Vitya, Lyosha, Michael and Irina Shipley, Artyom, [not sure his name], Tom, Katya Shipley. In front, the Shipleys' nephew, Ilya.*

mostly to low self-esteem that Irina says is common among these boys. But Vitya trained for and is now a porter in the Russian Railway system, and is enjoying that accomplishment.

- In June, Tom took over Marie Nicholas's job at the summer English program of the "City of Children" Developmental Center (Marie was at a rustic camp, but this year it returned to being a day camp in town). 7 hours a day, 6 days a week for three weeks—a serious program by a serious and talented staff! He'll return to the job next year. They were aware of SB's work with the Children's Center in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky, especially this year when the young singers from the Center made the whole region proud with their successes on the "You're Super" TV show. They made craft gifts for the Children's Center which Tom took there after the teaching stint.



*On the Ingoda River near Chita: English students visit a park with archeological sites, 40,000 and 200,000 years old.*





Clay craft chicks by the English students for the children of the Children's Center in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky

- The two singers from the Children's Center, Vitaly (10) and Zoya (12) who made such a splash on the "You're Super" show went on over the summer and fall to more recognition. Vitaly met the President of Russia on an annual children's TV meeting with him and asked about the President about his childhood dreams. He also was featured on Russia's equivalent of the MTV Awards show. Both were invited to sing in Paris this fall in an international children's music festival. Due to visa issues they could not attend, but the invitation stands for the next festival. Meanwhile a young dancer from the Center, Nastya (15) has moved up in the 2nd "You're Super" contest, which focuses on dance.



Zoya Chizhkova with dancer Nastya Yerofeevna (15), both from the Children's Center, on the "You're Super! Dance" TV contest this fall.



Dasha (12) showing her track medals on Talent Day during English camp. Diana (8) looks on.

- **The Taste of Zabaikalye Tour is a go** for 2018, August 15–29! Join us! Read about it in this newsletter.



*Buryat children at a festival, an Old Believer*

- Finally, we say goodbye to **Paul Johnson**, our Secretary since 2010. As Judy Boudreau, our Treasurer, said to him, “Your thoughtfulness and continued participation have been very welcome. When, at meetings, I would see your eyes light up (and then your patience about getting a word in!) I always looked forward to hearing your input on crucial conversations.”

## MEET JANET STEWART

by Chuck Ritchie



Meet the latest addition to the Board of Siberian Bridges, Janet Stewart, a bright and engaging young woman who brings to our organization interest and experience in cross cultural work. She currently works as an English Language Support Consultant, tutoring and providing resources to international undergraduate students at the U of M. where she is doing graduate work toward earning a Master of Arts degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She has also worked as a Visa Services Specialist at the U of M, helping students navigate the labyrinth of visa application and study abroad. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Linguistics and Russian Language and Literature from the University of Wisconsin.

Her own interest in cross cultural work was piqued early in high school when she first experienced Russia in a literature course in which she read Crime and Punishment. She was also very interested in linguistics, but her only language experience had been Spanish; she wanted to

compare that to something new and different, so she opted for Russian. During her undergraduate work she studied Russian at Moscow International University in the summer of 2012, and then in 2013 she was an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Teacher/Intern in Ryazan, Russia. She spent the 2014-15 academic year in Almaty, Kazakhstan (a former republic of the Soviet Union) where she continued her study of Russian and taught English as an intern. More recently, in summer of 2016, she participated in a Siberian Bridges connected program in which she taught English in the Iskra Youth Center in Chita, Russia.

When asked, “Why Russia?” she responded that Russian history has fascinated her. Unlike American history, which she sees framed in the predictable trajectory of progress and improvement, Russia’s history is framed by other, more unpredictable forces that she finds intriguing and challenging. She feels that each experience in Russia has ignited in her an ever increasing passion to probe the depths of our cultural differences in order to achieve cross cultural understanding that will allow us to celebrate the uniqueness of each of our cultures.

We are excited to welcome Janet to Siberian Bridges!



# **TASTE OF ZABAIKALYE TOUR**

***AUGUST 15-29, 2018***

***JOIN US!***

- ✓ *Experience this beautiful land and people relatively untouched by urbanization and foreign influence.*
- ✓ *Meet the colorful “Old Believers,” similar to our Amish in the way they keep old traditions.*
- ✓ *Meet the region’s natives, and largest minority, the Buryats. They are Shamanist as well as Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition.*
- ✓ *Visit the renowned archeological dig near the Mongolian border where lie remains of the original people that crossed the Bering Landbridge and populated our American continent.*
- ✓ *Visit the region’s capital city of Chita where we’ll learn from a local historian, visit the Decembrists Museum, and have tea (the center of Russian hospitality) with a local poet and his wife in their rustic home.*
- ✓ *Enjoy Russian country cooking, try a traditional banya, the rustic steam bath accompanied by food and fellowship. And bask in the famously warm Siberian hospitality, and we’ll toast to friendship!*
- ✓ *The trip includes an excursion to Lake Baikal and a guided tour of the Kremlin in Moscow.*
- ✓ *For more information, contact us at [SiberianBridges@gmail.com](mailto:SiberianBridges@gmail.com).*
- ✓ *[Link to the full brochure](#)*





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**FROM PAPER TO ONLINE:** Switching to email newsletters and announcements results in significant savings on postage. And the email version of the newsletter contains more info and color imagery. Let us know if we can change delivery to you.

**DONATION INFORMATION:** Donations are 100% tax-deductible.

- **Credit card:** at [siberianbridges.org](http://siberianbridges.org), click "DONATE".
- **Checks:** write to "Siberian Bridges" and mail to our address.
- Siberian Bridges is a 501c3 non-profit registered in Minnesota.



International Student Video Conference, the group in Chita. Elena Pishcherskaya, organizer of the Russian effort, is standing.



Lyosha, one of Irina and Michael's "boys" practices the Shipley's piano



Grocery shopping in English at summer camp. Shop owner is beaming in the back.



Show in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky honoring winners of "You're Super!" Gymnastics by boys of the Children's Center.