



3212 18th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55407
www.siberianbridges.org – siberianbridges@gmail.com

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS

UPDATE **page 2**

- SB and the pandemic
- Party with Olga and Elena at University of Minnesota
- The Shipley's project
- University collaborations
- Goodbye to our high school volunteers
- 3rd Taste of Zabaikalye Tour moved to 2021
- Join our call for very short "selfie" videos

NEWS FROM THE CHILDREN'S CENTER "UNITY" (Children's Home in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky), report by Chuck Ritchie **page 4**

RUSSIA-US MOVIE CLUB BY VIDEO CONFERENCE **page 7**

AND THE PEOPLE STAYED HOME, poem by Kitty O'Meara, translation by Olga Fleshler **page 9**

DONORS May 2019-April 2020 **page 10**

CONTACT AND DONATION INFORMATION **page 11**

UPDATE

TOM: Well, the worldwide pandemic has been felt by Siberian Bridges as well. Sadly, both **Isabella Saldana Haworth**, our volunteer, and I cancelled our summer trips to Chita, and the **3rd Taste of Zabaikalye Tour** is postponed to 2021. The grand **project to bring 11-17 year old English students to the Twin Cities** in the fall would have been cancelled had the City of Childhood Development Ctr in Chita organizing the tour not already decided to wait until they could develop enough English proficiency in the students whose parents are on board with this ambitious project. And our annual open house, which we just moved from December to the spring, also had to be cancelled. Projects and project planning continued in the **university cooperation** between the Chita, Shenyang, China and University of Minnesota. And please read about (and join!) our Russia-US movie club held by video conference that started up in this strange stay-at-home time.

JUDY: In December during their US trip, **Olga Fleshler** and **Elena Pishcherskaia** joined students gathered from several University of Minnesota Russian language classes (**Irene, Isabella and I**



UMN Russian students and guests with Elena, Olga and Judy seated in front.

among those students) along with other members of Siberian Bridges for a bit of a party as classes wound down. They answered questions and talked about life in Chita, and we all talked up Siberian Bridges. One of instructors was a visiting scholar from Russia, and a young guest student from Khabarovsk, even further east than Chita, was excited to hear about such an organization as SB whose purpose is simply to connect and build good relations. One of our Russian instructors, thanked Elena and Olga for joining us, saying, "I was pleased that so many of my students and colleagues were able to attend the event. Their enthusiastic comments bode well about future collaboration between students in Chita and the Zabaikalye Region and those in my home state of Minnesota."

MICHAEL SHIPLEY: We took in three of the boys we help, **Anton Yudin, Ilya Osinsky and Sergei Bondarenko (plus our nephew, Ilya)** to live with us for the duration of the quarantine because all three would have been locked down in their respective dormitories and unable to visit us. In short, we felt they would have had trouble developing in any way under those conditions, and for possibly many months, so we took them in. We're all really enjoying the time together. Anton is tutoring our nephew, Ilya, in math every day, doing his classwork online, studying English, and consuming as many English-language sitcoms as he can. Ilya O. and Sergei also study English every day and try to keep up with their classwork. We have "family time" almost every evening during which we talk, play cards, watch either TV or a movie,



The Shipley home in COVID-19 shutdown, clockwise from left: Sergey, nephew Ilya, Anton, Ilya O., Irina, Michael

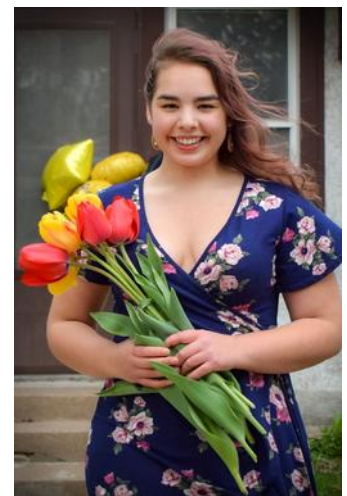
etc. *Then, later...* Our lockdown saga continues on an up note. Despite all the suffering in the world, we've been having a very good time together. Today we celebrated Irina's birthday, and the boys did their utmost to make it a good one for her.

IRENE: For the third year in a row, **Professor Elena Pischerskaia** and I coordinated a survey of the US Economic System between students in at the Chita Institute (CI) and the University of Minnesota (UMN) joined by community members through Siberian Bridges. In all 32 people participated, sharing perspectives and ideas on The American Dream, foreign trade, income inequality, social policies, Manifest Destiny, US government shutdowns, and the New Deal. There were eleven US participants: **Jacob Oertel, Rory King, Hannah Moody, Isabella Saldana Haworth, Janet Stewart, Anna Gomboeva, Jamaica Vaubel-Palmer, Elaine Klaassen, Kevin Brondum, Thomas Dickinson, and Diana Yefanova.** A very special thank you to all! COVID-19 intervened to halt final presentations, but the project itself was very successful forging new relationships between students in Chita and the US. On the heels of the project, discussion immediately arose that what is thought of as the American Dream may not be as unique to the US as appears at first blush. And as the fall Tri-Country Video Conference has always involved Russians, Chinese, and Americans, the idea was born to design a survey exploring the Russian, Chinese, and American Dreams. Students, faculty and staff at the Shenyang Institute of Technology (SIT), CI and UMN prepared a survey in our three languages on the similarities and differences in each country's hopes and dreams. The survey consisted of 36 items including asking how important to hopes and dreams are personal freedom, home ownership, being your personal best for your country, and many others. 180 people from the three countries completed the survey. When analysis is complete, we will report our findings to the general community of Siberian Bridges. I am grateful to **Chuhan Wang** of SIT and **Elena Pischerskaia.** We three coordinated these efforts at our institutions and in our communities. This data will inform the **4th annual Tri-Country Video Conference** coming this Fall. And so we continue to work in our far-flung communities and higher education institutions to advance understanding among nations that is so important to the health and welfare of our world.

TOM: We say goodbye to our two wonderful school volunteers. Both graduated in May. **Alexandra Koullick** will start at UC Berkeley in the fall. She plans to focus on economics, computer science and business. **Isabella Saldana Haworth** will major in Earth Sciences at the University of Minnesota from which she received a full scholarship. She Isabella received the annual award for academic excellence for her studies in Russian from the Slavic Languages department of UMN while still in high school.



Alexandra Koullick



*Isabella Saldana
Haworth*

The **3rd Taste of Zabaikalye Tour** is moved to early August 2021, a 15 day tour with optional extra time in Chita for socializing with our longtime friends. Please come!

Announcing a project that friends of Siberian Bridges can join! **This is a call for 30-60 second "selfie" videos** of us speaking in our normal American English as an aid to English students in Chita. Talk about yourself, your hobby, your pet, your family, anything. Keep it short, clear, simple. We'll edit them and make a transcription. Contact us with questions and about how to submit them. Here's a link to an example, one of the first ones we made of 8 year old Ahnika, Minneapolis resident (Tom's next door neighbor and piano student!) (https://youtu.be/KyOdj_txKJg)

News From the Children’s Center UNITY (Children’s Home in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky) *report by Chuck Ritchie*

Due to the coronavirus the children at the Center are not going to school, placing a huge burden on director Natalya Skliarova and her talented staff to come up with activities for the children. It is reported that while the children often moan and groan about school and how they are tired of it, there is already among them a greater appreciation for the daily routine of school - a nice touch of irony!

In their new routine at the Center there are a number of activities that have engaged the children. They learned how to make creative collages; they learned some cooking and baking skills; they



Children's May Day art

participated in an economics game in which they earn fake money that can be used to buy real items of their liking that are “for sale”. Anna Chizhkova, graduate and older sister of Zoya, the talented young singer, set up a photo studio that has been wildly popular. There have been numerous photo sessions, and a new endeavor to do “family” photo shoots with those children who have siblings at the Center.

They engaged in a hand washing relay contest to practice how to wash their hands properly. They have been sewing masks, literally hundreds of them for themselves and for sale.



Easter art



Easter art



May Day art with the artists

One of their customers is the owner of all the gas stations in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky (but lives in Italy). He was so touched by what the children are doing that he pledged financial support for the Center.



Hand washing contest



It is also that time of year when graduates prepare to leave the Home to go out into the real world. That involves putting together their “graduation bags” consisting of clothes (pajamas, jeans, jackets, footwear), linens and other basics for their new lives “out there”. At the time of departure there will be foodstuffs, and if possible, some money to send them on their way.

The most important aspect, however, is to determine where they will continue their studies or training for a successful entry into the workplace and society. This critical step comes at a time when the children are quite vulnerable as they leave childhood for adulthood and the security of the Center for the unknowns and responsibilities of independent living.

Continuing their education and training has proven to be the best path for success. Each graduate is tested by a psychologist who recommends this or that line of endeavor. A board of teachers



Zoya, age 7 in 2012 with Chuck and Judy in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky



Vanya Shcherbakov at graduation



Zoya, age 12 in 2017 with Tom

consults with the graduates to help them make the best decision regarding their next step. This year's graduating class consists of six girls and four boys. The girls include Zoya Chizhkova, the young singing phenomenon whom we met for the first time in 2010 when she was 6 years old and new to the Center. The boys include Tom's good friend, Vanya Shcherbakov, prizewinner this winter in a regional essay contest about the Decembrists. We wish all of these young graduates the very best as they venture forth!

One incidental way we've been involved during the pandemic is through a poem shared with me that I passed on to Olga Fleshler, who is a board member of the Children's Center. She translated it and then sent it on to Natalya Skliarova. Natalya was very appreciative and shared it and with the children. This pandemic moment on our earth and our similar concerns and responses to the virus are a common experience between us and those children in our hearts in that remote town on the other side of the globe, bringing us together a little bit more. The poem "And the People Stayed at Home" and its translation is found in this newsletter.

RUSSIA-US MOVIE CLUB BY VIDEO CONFERENCE

Chuck Ritchie reporting

Olga Fleshler and Tom Dickinson are inveterate movie buffs, and lurking in the back of their minds was a project to learn about each others' cultures through discussions of popular movies. In fact, such viewing of US films was started by Olga and Elena Pischerskaia in 2014 in Chita at the the Chita Institute of Baikal State University, and also for a time at the Regional Library. Nearly 20 films have been viewed and discussed, beginning with Casablanca (1942) and including Dr. Strangelove (1964), The Breakfast Club (1985), Sabrina (1954), The Green Mile (1999), and The Bucket List (2007) to name a few. Tom joined a couple of those discussions in Chita.

Little did we imagine that a worldwide pandemic would nudge the American side, also confined to our homes, to finally join in and begin viewing Russian films, for a real cross-cultural exchange of ideas! So far we have watched four movies, about one a week, and using Zoom, Minneapolitans and Chitincies joined in discussion.



Olga and Elena at Olga's 80th birthday party in February

Our first movie, Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (1980), won the foreign film Oscar in 1981. We watched it independently (there are good websites for streaming Russian films for free with subtitles). Then via Zoom, Olga and Elena, Elena's husband, Vitaly, in Chita, and Tom, Judy, Irene and her partner Tom, and I had a wide-ranging discussion about the movie, made considerably more interesting by our different cultural perspectives. The movie follows three young women who come to the capital city to seek their fortunes in the fifties, and then revisits them 20 years later. Our discussion touched on women in the workplace, male chauvinism, living conditions, attitudes about sexual relations, marriage, happiness and success.

Next, we watched The Last Picture Show (1971) and its sequel Texasville (1990), both from Larry McMurtry novels, somewhat paralleling the Russian film's theme by being about a set of friends in a small west Texas town in the fifties and revisiting them again some thirty years later. Our cross-cultural perspectives brought us to an interesting exchange on the essence of community and its role in our individual lives.

The next Russian film was Officers (1971) following two good friends, both officers, from the time of the Spanish Civil War up through WWII, or “The Great Patriotic War” as it is reverently regarded in Russia. The main point of the film is encapsulated in a striking line, “Есть такая профессия, защищать Родину!” (“There is such a profession; it is to defend the Motherland!”) We follow the two officers through phases in their lives, seeing how they sacrifice their personal comforts and aspirations in committing themselves to defending the Motherland. Vanya, one of the officers, has a son, Yegor, and a grandson, little Vanya, both of whom follow in his footsteps and become officers.

Our discussion was on the eve of День победы, The Day of Victory, (V-E Day in the US), May 9th. It was once again a lesson in perspective. The importance of this day to our Russian colleagues is difficult to overstate. You probably have heard it said that there is not one family in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union that did not lose a family member in the estimated 27 million that perished in that war. Even the children at the Center “Unity” which we help to support, made videos and posters, marched in a parade and participated in ceremonies honoring the fallen veterans, sang patriotic songs, and recited poetry commemorating the Great Patriotic War. By contrast here in the US we hardly mention the war, much less that day of victory. Our “Motherland” was nearly untouched by the physical ravages of the war, and our number of casualties is nearly two orders of magnitude less; we did not endure what they endured, and we relate differently to that event. Olga and Elena gave us wonderful personal insight into their world and helped us to understand better the visceral role that the Day of Victory plays in their lives and the lives of their countrymen. It was very moving.

Our latest viewing was Judgment at Nuremburg (1961) continuing the theme of WWII. Just as we began the discussion of this sobering and complex film, Olga said, “You need to know that I am very sad,” and it was because, even though it was achieved three generations ago, the difficult defeat of Fascism, the overwhelming bulk of which was accomplished by Soviet soldiers on Soviet soil, is still very present in the Russian psyche.

The next film is The Irony of Fate or Enjoy Your Bath! (1975) a favorite comedy that has become a New Year’s tradition to watch.

Even as life gets back to something like normal we plan to continue our Russian-American video conference movie club and invite others to join us. Contact us if you are interested in participating.

And the People Stayed Home (2020) poem by Kitty O'Meara (American), Russian translation by Olga Fleshler

(frequently mis-attributed to Kathleen O'Mara (Irish, 1839–1888) and “gone viral” since March 2020 when Ms. Meara published it on her blog.)

И люди остались дома. Читали книги,
Слушали и отдыхали,
Тренировали мускулы, рисовали, играли в игры,
Готовили вкусную еду,
Учились жить по-новому и тихо.
И слушали, слушали.

Кто-то размышлял, кто-то молился, кто-то танцевал.
Кто-то возвращался в свое прошлое.
И люди стали думать по-другому.
И люди исцелились.

И вот, когда люди отказались от невежественной,
Опасной, бездумной и бессердечной жизни,
Земля стала исцеляться.

И когда опасность миновала
И люди снова соединились,
Они оплакали свои потери и выбрали новую дорогу,
И обрели новые мечты,
И решили, как жить дальше и исцелить до конца землю -
Так же, как они исцелились сами.

And the people stayed home. And read books,
And listened, and rested,
And exercised, and made art, and played games,
And grew gardens full of fresh food,
And learned new ways of being, and were still.
And listened more deeply.

Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.
Some met their shadows.
And the people began to think differently.
And the people healed.

And, in the absence of people living in ignorant,
Dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways,
The earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed,
And the people joined together again,
They grieved their losses, and made new choices,
And dreamed new images,
And created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,
As they had been healed.

DONORS May 2019-April 2020

Many thanks!!

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SIBERIAN BRIDGES
3212 18th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55407
siberianbridges@gmail.com www.siberianbridges.org

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FROM PAPER TO ONLINE:

Switching to email newsletters and announcements results in significant savings. And the email version of the newsletter contains more information as well as color imagery. Let us know if we can change delivery to you.

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- **CREDIT CARD**, go to www.siberianbridges.org and click **DONATE**.
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